

Talk and Interaction in Social Research Methods

Transcription Symbols

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Transcription Symbols

All the chapters in this book show and analyse examples of actual interaction, recorded in a variety of natural settings, whether in news interviews, survey interviews, courtrooms, police-suspect interactions, medical consultations, focus groups, or more ordinary, mundane conversations between family or friends. For the purposes of analysis and publication, these recordings – whether they are audio or video recordings – have to be transcribed. In transcribing what is said, we try to capture not only the words which are spoken, but more precisely *how* and *when* things are said. To do this, authors have used a transcription notation which is widespread not only within conversation analysis, but increasingly among those investigating language use and discourse in any depth and detail, from a range of analytic perspectives.

The most important of these transcription conventions are shown below. We have kept these to a minimum, to avoid unnecessary technical detail. A fuller account of these transcription conventions will be found in Max Atkinson and John Heritage (eds) *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis* (1984: ix-xvi).

The relative timing of utterances

Intervals either within or between turns, or periods of silence (pauses), are shown thus (0.7) (to the nearest tenth of a second)

A discernible pause which is too short to be timed mechanically is shown as a micropause, thus (.)

Overlaps between utterances are indicated by square brackets, the point of overlap onset being marked with a single left-hand bracket

Contiguous utterances, where there is no discernible interval between turns, are linked by an equals sign (=). This is also used to indicate a very rapid move from one unit in a turn to the next

[p. xi ↓]

Characteristics of speech delivery

Various aspects of speech delivery are captured by punctuation symbols (which, therefore, are not used to mark conventional grammatical units) and other forms of notation, as follows:

A period (full stop) indicates a falling intonation A comma indicates a continuing intonation

A question mark indicates a rising inflection (not necessarily a question)

An upside down question mark indicates a rising inflection that is between the intonation indicated by a comma and that of a question mark.

The stretching of a sound is indicated by colons, the number of which correspond to the length of the stretching

.h indicates inhalation, the length of which is indicated by the number of 'h's

h. indicates outbreath, the length of which is indicated by the number of 'h's

(hh) Audible aspirations are indicated in the speech in which they occur (including in laughter)

°° Degree signs indicate word(s) spoken very softly or quietly

A £ symbol is used to indicate a 'smile voice'.

Sound stress is shown by underlining, those words or parts of a word which are emphasized being underlined

Capital letters are used to indicate a word, or part of a word, that is spoken much louder than surrounding talk

Marked pitch raises are indicated by upward arrows, thus ↑, while marked falls in pitch are shown by downward arrows, as ↓

If what is said is unclear or uncertain, that is placed in parentheses. So either the transcriber can hear that something is said, but cannot make out any particular sounds or words (); or the transcriber shows his/her 'best hearing' of what is said, (So I said)[p. xii ↓]