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Conversation Analysis

“Conversation analysis” is an approach to the study of social interaction that focuses on practices of speaking that recur across a range of contexts and settings. The early studies in this tradition were based on the analysis of English conversation. More recently, however, conversation analysts have begun to study talk in a broader range of communities around the world. Through detailed analyses of recorded conversations, this book examines differences and similarities across a wide range of languages including Finnish, Japanese, Tzeltal Mayan, Russian and Mandarin. Bringing together interrelated methodological and analytic contributions, it explores topics such as the role of gaze in question-and-answer sequences, the organization of repair, and the design of responses to assessments. The emerging comparative perspective demonstrates how the structure of talk is inflected by the local circumstances within which it operates.

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Transcription conventions (from Schegloff 2000)

I. Temporal and sequential relationships

Overlapping or simultaneous talk is indicated in a variety of ways.

[Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers, indicates a point of overlap onset, whether at the start of an utterance or later.

] Separate right square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers indicates a point at which two overlapping utterances both end, where one ends while the other continues, or simultaneous moments in overlaps which continue.

= Equal signs ordinarily come in pairs – one at the end of a line, and another at the start of the next line or one shortly thereafter. They are used to indicate two things:

(1) If the two lines connected by the equal signs are by the same speaker, then there was a single, continuous utterance with no break or pause, which was broken up in order to accommodate the placement of overlapping talk.

(2) If the lines connected by two equal signs are by different speakers, then the second followed the first with no discernable silence between them, or was “latched” to it.

A single equal sign indicates no break in an ongoing piece of talk, where one might otherwise expect it, e.g., after a completed sentence.

(0.5) Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second; what is given here in the left margin indicates 0.5 seconds of silence. Silences may be marked either within an utterance or between utterances.

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Transcription conventions

- (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a “micropause,” hearable but not readily measurable without instrumentation; ordinarily less than 0.2 of a second.

II. Aspects of speech delivery, including aspects of intonation

The punctuation marks are not used grammatically, but to indicate intonation. The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence. Similarly, a question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question, and a comma indicates “continuing” intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary. The inverted question mark is used to indicate a rise stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark.

- :: Colons are used to indicate the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons, the longer the stretching. On the other hand, graphically stretching a word on the page by inserting blank spaces between the letters does not necessarily indicate how it was pronounced; it is used to allow alignment with overlapping talk.

- A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption, often done with a glottal or dental stop.

word Underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis, either by increased loudness or higher pitch. The more underlining, the greater the emphasis.

word Therefore, underlining sometimes is placed under the first letter or two of a word, rather than under the letters which are actually raised in pitch or volume.

WOrd Especially loud talk may be indicated by upper case; again, the louder, the more letters in upper case. And in extreme cases, upper case may be underlined.

- ° The degree sign indicates that the talk following it was markedly quiet or soft.

- °word° When there are two degree signs, the talk between them is markedly softer than the talk around it.

Combinations of underlining and colons are used to indicate intonation contours:

- _: If the letter(s) preceding a colon is/are underlined, then there is an “inflected” falling intonation contour on the vowel (you can hear the pitch turn downward).

- : If a colon is itself underlined, then there is an inflected rising intonation contour on the vowel (i.e., you can hear the pitch turn upward)

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Transcription conventions

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↑	The up and down arrows mark sharper rises or falls in pitch than would be indicated by combinations of colons and underlining, or they may mark a whole shift, or resetting, of the pitch register at which the talk is being produced.
↓	
> <	The combination of “more than” and “less than” symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed.
< >	
<	Used in the reverse order, they can indicate that a stretch of talk is markedly slowed or drawn out. The “less than” symbol by itself indicates that the immediately following talk is “jump-started,” i.e. sounds like it starts with a rush.
hhh	Hearable aspiration is shown where it occurs in the talk by the letter h – the more h’s, the more aspiration. The aspiration may represent breathing, laughter, etc. if it occurs inside the boundaries of a word, it may be enclosed in parentheses in order to set it apart from the sounds of the word. If the aspiration is an inhalation, it is shown with a dot before it.
(hh)	
.hh	

III. Other markings

(())	Double parentheses are used to mark transcriber’s descriptions of events, rather than representations of them: ((cough)), ((sniff)), ((telephone rings)), ((footsteps)), ((whispered)), ((pause)), and the like.
(word)	When all or part of an utterance is in parentheses, or the speaker identification is, this indicates uncertainty on the transcriber’s part, but represents a likely possibility.
(lit/bit)	Where alternate hearings are possible these are enclosed in parentheses and separated by a back slash.
()	Empty parentheses indicate that something is being said, but no hearing (or, in some cases, speaker identification) can be achieved.

IV. Multi-linear transcription conventions

Many of the transcriptions in this book are of talk in languages other than English and include one or two lines of glossing. In three-line transcripts the first line is a broad phonetic representation of the talk in the original language. The second line is a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss using a combination of word-for-word translation and abbreviations such as ASP to indicate particles and other functional items that do not admit of a direct translation into English. Authors who use these abbreviations in the transcripts they present include a key explaining them at the conclusion of the chapter. The third line presents an idiomatic English gloss – an attempt to get as close as possible to the contextual sense or meaning of the utterance. The following example from the chapter by Wu illustrates:

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Transcription conventions

01 L: *wo dou hai mei jian guo ta.*

I all still N see ASP he

‘I haven’t met him yet.’

In two line transcriptions the morpheme-by-morpheme gloss is not included. The following example is from the chapter by Sidnell:

01 C: *him mada biilongz tuu Hamilton.*

his mother is from Hamilton.