

Transcription Convention Updates

Introduction

The following are updated versions of symbol conventions used in the discourse transcription approach of the “Santa Barbara School,” sometimes referred to as the “Discourse Transcription” (DT) conventions (Du Bois et al., 1993). The new conventions supercede those described in earlier publications, and are recommended for use in their place. Some of these changes have already been implemented in the published edition of the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (Du Bois, 2000, Du Bois, 2003), while others will be implemented in future editions. All conventions which are not mentioned here remain as previously described in the cited publications.

Some of these revised conventions represent efforts to make the transcriptions simpler to the eye. For example, devoting a special symbol ‘#’ to the high-frequency notations for unintelligibles and uncertain hearings allows indecipherable words to be directly prefixed using a single-character notation, which eliminates the need for angle bracket notations in many cases. Similarly for laughing while speaking.

Other revised conventions are for greater consistency and effectiveness when using the computer as a research tool. For example, discourse features of manner of speaking, which have long or variable scope (potentially extending over several words), are indicated using angle brackets as before, but now in a style more closely corresponding to the conventions of XML (eXtensible Markup Language).

Comments

Some observations on specific features follow.

Overlap

Note that in the new DT2 convention for marking overlapping speech, there is no space between the brackets (or the bracket index number) and the words they enclose. Only the left overlap bracket needs to be indexed numerically, unless there is a chance for confusion, in which case both brackets should be numbered.

Sentence Start

The category of “sentence start” has a somewhat marginal standing as a transcription category, since it does not always correspond to an easily identifiable and constant audible phenomenon. At the least, however, it may be considered an aid to the reader. It helps make clear where a new utterance has been begun by a speaker (often corresponding to a new start, or a re-start, of a sentence). The category of sentence start is not to be used for imposing a normative notion of the sentence, borrowed from written language conventions, onto the conversational transcript. There is no need for an initial capitalization to co-occur with a preceding period, for example. There will be many false starts, hesitation words, etc. which are capitalized according to this transcription practice, in contrast to a normative sentence-based writing style, which would simply edit such features out of the transcript.

Extra-Long Intonation Units

Most intonation units fit easily on a single line of the paper. However, for extra-long IUs that contain more words than can fit on one line (due to limitations of page width, large font size, etc.), it may be felt that something should be done about the word-wrapping. In DT1, there was a special convention, but in DT2, the current practice is simply to do nothing. That is, insert no special symbol, nor any indenting, tabbing, or spacing. The result, in a standard word-processing program, will be that the words at the end of the extra-long line will automatically wrap around to the beginning of a second line on the screen. Admittedly, the result is not as iconic or visually attractive as when one line on the page is wide enough to fit the whole (short) IU within it. But when an IU is simply too long to fit within the width of a single line, automatic wrapping turns out to be an acceptable solution. When the long IU is displayed in printed form or on a computer screen, the difference between an extra-long IU and a normal one-line IU becomes fairly easy to see, because when the program automatically wraps the long IU's final words onto the second line, the wrapped words will appear at the left margin, where normally only speaker labels appear. The advantage of this convention of doing nothing special is that it allows the transcriber to change margins, font size, and other aspects of display without creating formatting problems, confusion, or extra work. Moreover, it helps ensure that the transcription data remain consistent when they are accessed using different kinds of software, such as databases, concordance, or media-alignment programs. (For some kinds of paper-published presentations, where such wrapping of words may be stylistically unsuitable or proscribed, an alternate solution is needed. The first choice is to use a smaller font, or landscape mode, or both, in order to eliminate the word-wrapping. As a dispreferred alternative, in some cases transcribers may choose to break the extra-long line into two lines using a hard carriage return, and then use the "unit continued" symbol (&) to show that the two lines belong together in one intonation unit. This fix may be called for if interlinear glosses must be included. But it is still preferable for the database form of the transcription to be maintained without such line breaks.)

Quotation vs. Vox

For utterances which were formerly marked with the notation <Q Q>, one should in each instance listen to the recording in order to determine if vox (voice of another) is truly justified. If so one should use the VOX notation, otherwise use nothing.

Discourse Transcription 2: Convention Updates

Meaning	Old notation: DT1	New notation: DT2
1. Unintelligible (syllables)	X	#
2. Uncertain hearing (words)	<X you're kidding X>	#you're #kidding
3. Pseudograph (fake name, address etc.)	Jill	~Jill
4. Real name, address, etc.	#Jill	Jill
5. Long-scope features (various)	<A two words A>	<A> two words
6. Laughter during speech (1-5 words)	<@ two words @>	@two @words
7. Laughter during speech (6+ words)	<@ six words @>	<@> six words </@>
8. Overlap, 3rd instance	[3 word word word 3]	[₃ word word word]
9. Overlap, 2nd instance	[[word word word]]	[₂ word word word]
10. Vox: voice of another	<Q words Q>	<VOX> words </VOX>
11. Word truncation/cut-off with no glottal	wor-	wor- (en dash)
12. Word truncation/cut-off with glottal	wor%	wor%- (en dash)
13. Intonation unit truncation	--	— (em dash)
14. Morpheme boundary	-	- (hyphen)
15. Extra-long IU	indent	(word wrap)
16. Pause, timed	...(1.2)	(1.2)
17. Pause, short (< 150 milliseconds)
18. Pause, untimed (> 150 milliseconds)
19. Pause location (if at IU boundary)	[line-initial]	[on separate line]
20. Latching	(0)	=
21. Speaker label	J:	JILL;
22. Reset	<u>Capital letter</u>	†
23. Sentence start		<u>Capital letter</u>
24. Repair/editable	<word>	×word

OPTIONAL COMPUTER-ORIENTED OF SPECIALIZED CONVENTIONS:

Meaning	Old notation	New notation
25. Timestamp (start time)	00:01:06:21	<T=66.21>
26. Timestamp (start and end time)	00:01:06:21 00:01:07:39	<T=66.21_67.39>
27. Duration (of region, e.g. long laughter)	@(9.3)	@_<DUR=9.3>

References

- Du Bois, John W., Schuetze-Coburn, Stephan, Cumming, Susanna, and Paolino, Danae. 1993. Outline of discourse transcription. In *Talking data: Transcription and coding in discourse research*, eds. Jane A. Edwards and Martin D. Lampert, 45-89. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Du Bois, John W. ed. 2000. *Santa Barbara corpus of spoken American English, Part 1*. Philadelphia: Linguistic Data Consortium.
- Du Bois, John W. ed. 2003. *Santa Barbara corpus of spoken American English, Part 2*. Philadelphia: Linguistic Data Consortium. [rev. 28-Jul-2006]