Reflections on transcribing for narrative analysis

Presentation for To Think is To Experiment 2014

Catherine Walker, PhD Candidate

Institute of Education, University of London

Transcription as interpretation and analysis

▸ Recent body of literature that argues that far from being a straightforward 'behind-the-scenes' task, transcription is a theory-laden, interpretive and emotional process, a 'powerful act of representation' (Oliver et al, 2005) which is part of the analysis itself.

▸ See final slide for references.

My PhD research

- *Children's everyday experiences, understandings and practices of the environment in two countries.*

- Multi-method research with fifteen 11-14 year old children in Southern England and Andhra Pradesh, South India, working with each family over a two week period.

- Concern with how children's everyday lives and the environments they inhabit impact upon one another.

- Linked to NOVELLA: Narratives of Varied Everyday Life and Linked Approaches, three year research node funded by the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) and hosted by Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education (www.novella.ac.uk)

Generating data

▶ All data generated with colleagues: Natasha Shukla and Madhavi Latha (India) and Janet Boddy, Helen Austerberry and Hanan Hauari (England).

▶ All research activities carried out in and around the family home or children's school and audio-recorded.

▶ Activities conducted in Telugu or Hindi in India were simultaneously interpreted by Madhavi Latha.

Constructing transcripts for analysis

"[...] transcription serves the purpose of taking speech, which is fleeting, aural, performative, and heavily contextualised within its situational and social context of use, and freezing it into a static, permanent and manipulable form [...] A written text can be operated on analytically. It can be quoted, stored, copied and inspected."

(Lapadat, 2000, p.204)

Co-construction of meanings across languages

Catherine: Ok, so did they – was it just <u>one time</u> when everyone in the family got fever or was that quite regular?

Madhavi: Previously there was all dirt, when there was no park and lot of mosquitoes prevailed and due to them every one at home fallen sick, was it frequent and high, or else it happened only once during that time?

Mamatha: Happened many times

Madhavi: It's quite regular (.) [For all the members =

Catherine: = <u>Mmm</u>, mmhmm, mmm.] And has that happened at all since the park has been cleared up?

Madhavi: Now they have built the park, and the park is cleaned, even now are they occurring?

Mamatha: Occurring

Madhavi: Why it's happening, even after building it, now the mosquitoes should be reduced, [why happening again=

Mamatha: = Little bit reduced,] but everyone uses it as toilet, that's why!

Madhavi: [Ah! =

Mamatha: = Little children], that's why it happens.

Madhavi: Happens again? Still the problem exists – that is, fever continuation is there, because even in the park, though the garbage everything was taken out and was made into the park, the children of that locality will go there and take up their uh, excretion all that there itself (C: Mmm) – urine, toilet, all this, in the surroundings of that park.

Catherine: Mmm

Madhavi: Due to that the mosquitoes prevelance is still [existing =

Catherine: =Ok]

Madhavi: So that's the reason why they still have the fever.

Transcription conventions

▸ **Translated talk**   Mark translated talk in bold

▸ Original language talk   Transcribe original language talk in plain type

▸ (.)   Just noticeable pause (i.e., less than approx. 3 seconds duration)

▸ (…)   Longer pause (i.e., more than approx. 3 seconds duration, but not timed)

▸ A : Talk [talk talk = Equal signs on adjacent lines denote the start of

▸ B: = talk talk] talk   overlapping talk. Square brackets [ ] should be used to show where the overlap starts and stops

▸ (*A laughs*)   participant laughs

▸ (*B laughs*)   researcher laughs

▸ (*both laugh*)   researcher and participant laugh

▸ *(telephone rings)* Any audible and recognisable background noise

▸ -   A cut-off in speech e.g.'It was dis- I don't know why that was.'

▸ Repeated letters: The speaker has stretched the preceding sound.

▸   For example 'It was diiiiisgusting!'

▸ <u>word</u>   Underline speech/sounds that are louder than usual or strongly emphasised.

▸ (talk talk talk (*softer*))   Mark with brackets speech/sounds that are softer than usual – e.g., whispered. Can do the same with faster and slower speech.

▸ *(inaudible)*   Inaudible Speech

▸ ('it was disgusting')   Put in brackets any guess at what might have been said if unclear.

My own role in the transcription process

▸ This has made me aware first hand of the interpretive work involved in transcription.

▸ To present decisions made in the transcription process as only those which are conscious, reflexive and proactive is to gloss over the multiple interpretive decisions made by individual transcribers, including myself, in constructing a transcript. As I have become aware through my own involvement, these are often taken unconsciously, un-reflexively and reactively.

Final comments: Transcription as a challenging, time consuming but valuable process

c.walker@ioe.ac.uk

@c_l_walker

http://www.novella.ac.uk/about/1056.html

Transcription: Some useful references

- Davidson, C. (2009). 'Transcription: Imperatives for qualitative research'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 8* (2).
- Duranti, A. (2006). 'Transcripts, like shadows on a wall'. *Mind, Culture and Activity 13* (4).
- Green, J., Franquiz, M. and Dixon, C. (1997). 'The myth of the objective transcript: Transcribing as a situated act'. *TESOL Quarterly.*
- Lapadat, J. C. (2000). 'Problematising transcription: Purpose, paradigm and quality'. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology 3* (3).
- Lapadat, J. C and Lindsay, A. C. (1999) 'Transcription in Research and Practice: From Standardization of Technique to Interpretive Positionings'. *Qualitative Inquiry 5 :* 64.
- Ochs, E. (1979). Transcription as theory. In E. Ochs and B. B Schiefflin (Eds.), *Developmental pragmatics* (pp. 43–72). New York: Academic.
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M. and Mason, T. L. (2005). 'Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research' . *Social Forces 84* (2).
- Tilley, S. A. (2003). ' "Challenging" Research Practices: Turning a Critical Lens on the Work of Transcription' *Qualitative Enquiry 9:* 750.