Chapter **: Transcription Level 3 (Boundary)

Objective

The objective at this level is to learn how to incorporate more information into a transcription, especially with respect to boundary features. The practice brings new levels of detail to a transcription, increasing its delicacy from a Level 2 *(Basic)* transcription to a Level 3 *(Boundary)* transcription.

Core Categories

For this transcription level, the transcription categories in the "core" of new features are mostly those that mark some aspect of the boundary between one unit and the next. Although the marking of boundaries for words and intonation units was introduced from the beginning (already at Level 1), the present level of transcription provides a more specific characterization of the nature of the intonation unit boundary, along with an indication of some of the most important cues which mark or correlate with intonation unit boundaries.

Specifically, new transcription categories introduced at this level which are directly related to unit boundaries include *truncation* (including *intonation unit truncation* and *word truncation*). In addition, other new transcription categories at this level represent cues which are correlated with the existence of a boundary, or with the strength of a given boundary. These include *breath* (i.e. *inhalation* and *exhalation*), *pause duration*, *lag* or *prosodic lengthening*, *micropause* or *hold*, *latching*, and *linking*.

A key transcription category introduced at Level 3 is *speech overlap*, which occurs when there is simultaneous speech by two or more participants in a given interaction. Overlap concerns the temporal relationship of simultaneity between utterances produced by two or more participants. Speech overlap is an aspect which carries fundamental information about the organization of interaction between speakers. For this reason, the Boundary level of transcription should include at least a general indication of where the overlap between two speakers begins and ends. In fact, using readily available computer-assisted transcription tools, it is a fairly simple matter to ascertain exactly where simultaneous speech begins and ends. Whenever possible, it is worthwhile investing the time and effort to accurately represent this information.

To avoid confusion when multiple overlaps occur in close succession, overlap brackets that belong together are indexed using numbers adjacent to the brackets. In addition, left brackets are aligned vertically for iconic clarity.[3]

Finally, Level 3 adds some additional detail about the nature of one of the *end tones* introduced at Level 2, the *appeal* contour. An *appeal* contour may be heard as conveying information about closure as well, simultaneously signaling either *continuing* or *final* along with appeal. In other words, the intonational features of *closure* (*continuing/final*) and *appeal* may be combined, for higher delicacy transcriptions.

Conventions

The following conventions are those used for transcription categories in Level 3 ("Boundary") transcription. In addition, Level 3 naturally incorporates all transcription categories from lower levels (i.e. Level 1 and Level 2 categories).

Meaning	Symbol	Comments
Overlap		
overlap start & end (1st set)	[ ]	align left square brackets vertically
overlap start & end (2nd set)	[₂]	left square brackets indexed with subscript
Breath		
in-breath	(H)	audible inhalation
out-breath	(Hx)	audible exhalation
Truncation		
truncated intonation unit	—	aborting projected intonation unit (em dash)
truncated/cut-off word	wor–	aborting projected word (en dash)
Pause/Tempo		
pause, timed	(1.2)	number marks pause duration in seconds
lag/lengthening	:	prosodic slowing of current tempo (colon)
hold/micro-pause	..	less than 180 milliseconds; brief silence
Boundary Attenuation		
latching	=	no pause between speaker turns
linking (absence of break)	_	merging of words in rapid speech (underscore)
Boundary Intonation (complex)		
continuing appeal	?,	combines with closure feature
final appeal	?.	combines with closure feature (usu. unmarked)
discontinuous IU	&	used only when 2nd speaker intervenes

Pause Attribution

Whose pause? Whose turn?

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172b  PETE;      I stuck up for you today at that store.
173   HAROLD;    That's true.
174a             (0.3)
174b  JAMIE;     You did.
175              [You made me get] the u[₂:m,
176   PETE;      [Mhm],
177   PETE;                           [₂Tha][₃t's right].
178   #X;                                  [₃##].
179   JAMIE;     the green scarf.
180a             (0.9)
180b  JAMIE;     That's right.
181a             (0.9)
181b  JAMIE;     He was my fashion consultant today.
182   PETE;      Ri:ght.
183a             (0.6)
183b  PETE;      @@@
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184   MILES;     Hm.
185   PETE;      @(H)
186a             (3.3)
186b  HAROLD;    I wasn't?
187a             (0.3 )
187b  PETE;      That's right.
188   JAMIE;     Well you%– —
189              .. I don't know.
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Attribution Units

The phenomenon of pausing presents a challenge to transcribers, in large part because of complications it introduces regarding the issue of attribution. Attribution is a key dimension of discourse transcription. When words are spoken, we generally want to know who spoke them.

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((LSAC 1682-02))
2835;   **Who said that?**
2833;   I did.
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((LSAC 1398-01))
1833;   [Wait wait wait
        who who **who said this to who**?]
1830;   Chris did to Matthew.
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But when the discourse phenomenon is a pause – the *absence* of speaking by any participant – how are we to decide who the pause should be attributed to? While it would seem useful to be able to indicate who is pausing, at the same time it can be difficult to make a definitive attribution of a particular pause to a particular participant. There is a level of ambiguity in the attribution of pauses that does not arise in attributing, for example, speech. The ambiguity as to who "owns" the pause is a not just a problem for analysts: participants as well may be uncertain as to who is responsible for a particular pause. The question may arise whether pauses should be attributed at all.

One step toward a resolution of this quandary is to recognize the importance of defining appropriate "attribution units" for discourse transcription. An attribution unit is a salient stretch of the ongoing stream of discourse phenomena (including speech, pauses, gestures, gaze and other kinds of events) which is suitable for attribution to some participant, or group of participants. In general, the clearest and least problematic case of an attribution unit is one involving speech. Because each speaker's voice is distinctive, we generally have no trouble in identifying who is speaking. So the words spoken within one intonation unit constitute a natural and obvious attribution unit.

For pauses, on the other hand, the picture is less clear. There are no cues comparable to voice quality that can help us in assigning a pause to a particular individual. Thus it is most prudent to recognize pauses (or at least boundary pauses) as separate attribution units in their own right, distinct from the speech they occur next to. This allows one to take special measures to deal with the ambiguity of attribution of boundary pauses, without compromising the clarity of the attribution of neighboring speech. If boundary pauses and speech are combined together in a single attribution unit, the transcriber's hands are tied, and it becomes impossible to represent a difference in attribution, or even a difference in the certainty of the attribution.

Classifying pauses for attribution

In order to facilitate the meaningful attribution of pauses, it is necessary to recognize that there are different kinds of pauses. One of the most important dimensions along which kinds of pauses may be distinguished is based on the contextual conditions which govern their potential attribution to a participant.

When should a pause be recognized as an attribution unit in its own right? In general, whenever it occurs at a well-defined boundary. For present purposes, the relevant boundary is the intonation unit. Because of the importance of pause attribution, the first distinction to make among pauses is that between an internal and a boundary pause (with boundary pauses subject to further differentiation).

Internal Pause. A pause which occurs in the middle of a speaker's intonation unit is considered an internal (or hesitation) pause. An internal pause should be written "where it happens", that is, as part of the same attribution unit as the surrounding words within the same intonation unit (that is, as located in the linear stream of words spoken by the speaker).

Boundary Pause. A pause which occurs between two intonation units (that is between words which can be attributed on prosodic grounds to separate intonation units) is considered a boundary pause.

Boundary pauses can be further divided into two categories, the medial pause and the transitional pause.

Medial/Continuation Pause. A pause which occurs between two intonation units, both of which are uttered by the same speaker, is considered a medial (or continuation) pause.

Transitional/Turn/Change Pause. A pause which occurs between two intonation units, each of which is spoken by a different speaker, is considered a transitional (or turn, or change) pause.

Functional Interpretation: Whose pause?

Responsibility for a given pause is determined primarily by what overarching activity continues in progress through the pause, that is, what activity is understood as beginning prior to the pause and continuing after it.

In analyzing a particular conversation between Marcia and Donny, Schegloff observes:

> "Although everyone is silent (which silence as a state requires), someone in particular—Marcia —is "relevantly not talking." Donny has produced a possibly complete turn, one that implicates some responsive action next—by Marcia. Absence of talk is then, in the first instance, attributable to Marcia. So although the effect of her silence is that no action seems to get done, what she is specifically and relevantly "not doing" is registering some uptake of what has been told, and/or some assessment of it—for it is these that Donny's announcement has made conditionally relevant."
> Schegloff (1995:197)
> Schegloff, Emanuel A. 1995. Discourse as an interactional achievement III: The omnirelevance of action. Research on language and social interaction 28:185-211.

Pause Types and Pause Transcription

Principles

Table 1. Pause Types and Pause Transcription: Placement Rules

Pause Type	Locus	Comments	Transcription
boundary pause	at the boundary between two intonation units	• the most common type of pause in spontaneous speech • serves as a cue for intonation unit boundaries • to iconically represent the fact that the pause represents a discourse moment that is relatively "open" for appropriation by any participant, boundary pause is written on a line by itself	on a line by itself, between two intonation units
turn-boundary pause	at the boundary between two turns	• basically the same as a boundary pause, but the boundary it defines is (also) between two turns (or at least between the words of the prior speaker and next speaker) • carries greater ambiguity as to "whose pause" it is: prior, next, or some other speaker	on a line by itself, between two turns
medial pause	between the words of a single intonation unit	• occurs in the midst of an in-progress intonation unit, often as part of a word search • the in-progress intonation unit may also represent an in-progress turn-constructional unit • assumes that the overall intonational cues suggest the absence of an intonation unit boundary, despite the pause	on the same line with surrounding speech, as part of the same intonation unit
marginal pause	between in-breath and the body of the intonation unit	• occurs following an in-breath, considered to be a strong cue for claiming the start of an intonation unit and/or the start of a turn • occurs at the left margin of the intonation unit, before the first word • positioned like a boundary pause, but not open for appropriation by other participants	on the same line as the surrounding vocalizations (e.g. breath and speech), as part of the same intonation unit
hold/micropause	between words, as very short pause or break in rhythm	• normally considered to be a rhythmic aspect of speech involving (a) a momentary lapse or interruption of ongoing speech, or (b) a momentary delay of uptake in a new turn • typically functions as a feature, often more or less predictable, of the speech it immediately precedes	immediately before the following speech, as part of the same intonation unit
breath-filled pause	when only sound is audible breath	• would be treated as a pause except for audible in-breath • may function for participants partly like a pause, partly like a turn, turn bid, or turn start	typically on same line as following speech by same speaker
filled pause	when only sound is a hesitation word	• hesitation words (e.g. *uh, um*, etc.) are often produced with stylized/chant steady pitch • controversial whether should be termed pauses	spelled according to conventions for marginal words

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