

Suspended Intonation Unit

In a suspended intonation unit, the speaker momentarily pauses in the middle of an intonation unit—without either completing or abandoning/truncating the unit as such—while another speaker intervenes. The intonation unit is simply suspended for the moment, hanging there in mid-air, as it were. Finally, the first speaker completes the original intonation unit, more or less as they were projecting to produce it in the first place. In principle, if you could edit out or mask the intervening (second) speaker, the first speaker would sound like they had produced a normal intonation unit, with the expected intonational cues marking the usual beginning, middle, and end trajectory of an intonation unit.

Consider the following example:

(1) ((*Tape Deck* SBCSAE 016 1128.13-1130.20))
TAMMY; **Cause this is an audio &**
BRAD; .. That's right.
TAMMY; **& place.**

Here, the intonation unit that Tammy is in process of producing is *Cause this is an audio place*. But in the middle of Tammy's projected intonation unit, Brad jumps in to agree with what he takes to be the meaning of her projected utterance. Tammy's intonation unit, though not yet complete, is not truncated either, nor abandoned, but simply suspended momentarily. This is what is analyzed as intonation unit suspension, marked with an ampersand (&). It is important to note that the claim being made by this representation is that Tammy's *Cause this is an audio place* is a single intonation unit, even though it is written on two lines. In general, this is one of only two exceptions to the rule that an intonation unit is always written on a single line. (The other exception is when an intonation unit is very long and cannot be written on a single line for purely typographical reasons.)

Although it may be said that "in principle" the two parts of the suspended intonation unit would fit back together as if they had been produced without an intervention, the reality is somewhat more complex. The initial speaker who has suspended her intonation unit seems to monitor the production of the second, intervening speaker, and may display this orientation by waiting until they finish their intervention before resuming the suspended intonation unit.

The symbol which marks suspension of an intonation unit, the ampersand (&), is written in two places. The first indicates the point where the intonation unit is first suspended, and the second indicates the point where the utterance of the intonation unit is resumed by the same speaker. Note that the suspension analysis is NOT applicable when one speaker's sentence or clause is completed by another speaker. Such cross-speaker collaborative completions are different in a variety of ways, which we don't need to go into here. Suffice it to say that the intonation unit suspension analysis applies only when the two parts of the utterance are produced by the same speaker.

Consider the following somewhat more complicated example:

(2) ((*Raging Bureaucracy* SBCSAE 004 970.13-974.44))

KATHY; You only have twelve kids?

SHARON; (H) No.

.. **Seventee:n &**

KATHY; Oh,
 okay.

SHARON; **& [fourth-graders].**

KATHY; [(H) So then] what you do is,

The intonation unit that Sharon is in the middle of producing is *Seventeen fourth-graders*, with a sort of “pause” in the middle. (This is not really a pause, and hence is not written as a pause, because someone else is speaking during it.) It just happens that in the middle of Sharon's suspended intonation unit, Kathy talks, marking her early recognition of what she assumes to be Sharon's projected utterance. But Sharon's intonation unit has not been truncated or abandoned, nor has it been intonationally completed.

One could imagine another transcriptional approach: writing Sharon's *Seventeen fourth-graders* all on one line as a normal intonation unit, with Kathy's two intonation units *Oh, okay* overlapping with a “pause” by Sharon after the word *seventeen*. However, once you admit the notion that a speaker can overlap with nothing (i.e. overlap with a pause), this leads to all kinds of unexpected complications—a slippery slope, in both methodological and theoretical terms. For this reason, DT2 conventions strongly discourage writing an overlap with a pause, preferring instead the analysis in terms of suspended intonation units.

Though the concept of intonation unit suspension is of some theoretical importance for properly understanding the interactional implications of the way intonation units unfold in discourse time—especially in contexts where recipients intervene early to display their successful projection of what is coming next—it is nevertheless a rather rare phenomenon. Transcribers are likely to encounter it only rarely, if at all, so the notation should be used sparingly. (Crucially, it is not used when a speaker suspends a clause, but brings the relevant intonation unit in question to some sort of completion.)

Examples: Level 3 transcription

The following examples are presented in a Level 3 transcription, which crucially adds information about speaker attributions, intonation units, and suspension of intonation units, the latter marked by a & at the beginning of the suspension and another & at the end, when the suspended intonation unit is resumed.

(3) ((*A Tree's Life* SBCSAE 007 787.11-791.37))

MARY; there's a lot of &
ALICE; (DRINK)
MARY; & smoke coming out,

(4) ((*Conceptual Pesticides* SBCSAE 003 770.54-777.34))

ROY; his question was,
 what impact is this gonna have,
 on the &
MARILYN; .. Sort of fucks up the animists.
ROY; & cultural growth,

(5) ((*This Retirement Bit* SBCSAE 0011 690.05-697.93))

SAM; That was just &
DORIS; And that was in the winter.
SAM; & .. weakness.