

Trans-scription as a social activity An ethnographic approach

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ABSTRACT ■ Of all the tasks performed by linguists, transcription is certainly one of the most closely scrutinized activities on the data construction chain. Paradoxically it is the least well understood. Despite their diversity, all the approaches to transcription have in common the fact of examining it from the point of view of its outcome: the *scription*. My point of departure is different: in order to deconstruct scription, I move upstream and investigate the activity that produces it, thus focusing on the *trans* process. The data on which this analysis rests are videotaped transcription activity performed collaboratively by a linguistic anthropologist and her two consultants. My analysis demonstrates how scription is constructed in a perpetual tension between authority and authorship.

KEY WORDS ■ authority, authorship, data construction, entextualization, ethnography transcription, identity

Preamble

This article is about *intrusion*, in this case, the self-imposition of an ethnographer (me) into the ‘sacred space’ (field session) of another ethnographer (Kate).¹ The intrusion lies in the project itself, viz., the observation and study of a peer and colleague at work with her consultants. The phrase ‘sacred space’ refers to the rather secretive and possessive attitudes of ethnographers toward their informants and fieldwork, as made evident by

expressions such as ‘my informants’ and ‘my fieldwork’. Indeed, as pointed out by Jackson (1990), anthropologists have typically been unwilling to share their field notes, insisting that they are protecting their informants’ privacy and anonymity. They have done this despite the fact that, as they recognize themselves, sharing information has the potential to benefit scholarship as well as sometimes their subjects.

The origins of this project lie in my first meeting with Kate and my long-lasting interest in epistemology and methodology. During the 2003–4 academic year, Kate, an American linguistic anthropologist, came to conduct fieldwork on language socialization in Paris, where I then lived. After several meetings during which we talked about our respective research projects, I became fascinated by her collaborative transcription work with her consultants. Thanks to several months of telephone conversations and weekly meetings, we developed mutual trust and friendship,² which led me to ask Kate for permission to videotape her at work. Having once checked with her consultants, she finally acquiesced.³ Since then we have worked collaboratively on some facets of this project (notably Riley and Vigouroux, 2005); however, I am solely responsible for the transcription and analysis of the data presented in this article.

But before turning to the heart of the matter, I want to stress that this article is not about judging a researcher’s field practice, nor about evaluating one *way of doing things* over another, thus putting my colleague and friend in the hot seat. Rather, it is intended as a reflection on the social and interactive dimensions of transcription as one of the steps in the construction and interpretation of data. Despite its single authorship, this article has been written under Kate’s acute eye and through ongoing exchanges (and ‘battles’) with her. This is why, as a preamble to this article – and not in a footnote as is traditionally the case – I would like to sincerely thank Kate for her open-mindedness and express my appreciation for her intellectual generosity and courage, as I am not sure whether I would have done the same.

1. Transcription: a theorized practice

Of all the tasks performed by linguists (including linguistic anthropologists), transcription is one of the most closely scrutinized activities on the *data construction chain* (Vigouroux, 2005). Paradoxically, it is the least well understood. There are indeed some scholars such as Blommaert (2000) who have called our attention to the role of transcription as *reflecting* and *shaping*, that is, both restituting what Barthes (1981) called the *grain de la voix* (the speaker’s singularity and physical and sensual presence)⁴ and transforming it into linguistic data (i.e. material that can be reproduced,

reiterated, manipulated, and analyzed).⁵ Transcription is thus a process that substitutes for the individuality of a speaker, a collective and undefined voice (Bazin and Bensa, 1979). As will be shown in the following sections, this raises the issues of authorship and authority over the speech transcribed.

Since Ochs's (1979) seminal article on the subject matter, linguists have been increasingly aware of the methodological and theoretical implications of the activity of transcription in shaping their materials (what would be constructed as data) and the outcomes of their analyses. Some scholars have called our attention to the underlying ideology in linguistic and non-linguistic transcriptions (e.g. police reports of African American defendants, in Bucholtz, 2000; and African asylum seekers' applications in Belgium, in Blommaert and Slembrouck, 2000 and in Maryns, 2005) and to how, under the pretext of giving an accurate and realistic reproduction of a speaker's speech, they construct a very derogatory and prejudicial image of the speaker.⁶ Conversation analysts have also largely contributed to the debate on and practice of transcription. Following Sacks's idea of 'order at all points' (1984), they have called our attention, for example, to the relevance of 'pronunciation particulars' as interactionally meaningful (see, for example, Jefferson, 1985, 1996).

Despite their diversity, all these approaches have in common the fact of looking at transcription from the point of view of its outcome: the *scription*. This product of the process of transcription becomes an object of scientific enquiry, worth discussing and questioning post-facto, thus an already fixed, if not definite, scriptural form. My point of departure here is different: in order to deconstruct *scription*, I move upstream and investigate the activity that produced it, thus focusing on the *trans* process.

Transcribing entails choices, for instance signaling some contextualization cues but not others and labeling the speaker.⁷ Transcribers rarely share their successive and multilayered choices with their readers, unless the process of transcription is itself approached as an object of study (see, for example, Urban, 1996). Transcription activity usually belongs to the 'research kitchen' (Lahire, 1996b: 108). Choices are made in the secrecy of one's study room in an ongoing dialogue between the researcher, his/her oral material, and his/her research project in mind.⁸

By contrast, in the collaborative activity under study here, choices were topicalized, in the sense that these choices became topics of discourse and negotiation between the participants (i.e. between Kate, the investigator, and her consultants), although not always in an equally significant way. It is this verbalization of scription choices that now enables us (the writer and readers of this essay) to discuss central issues pertaining to the process of transcription. They include the following, among others: *what* do investigators transcribe *when* they transcribe: a signifier and/or signified? *Whose*

words and whose discourse do they transcribe? The transcription process under discussion here sheds light on the complex intertwining between authority and authorship, in part because the three transcribers were also participants in the speech event (the family dinner) they transcribe. They are thus 'judge' and 'jury'. Those who are objects of constructed knowledge (Etienne and Anne) also partake in this data-construction activity. Each of the protagonists enters a construction in which their roles (as transcribers) are being shaped. At the same time, each brings with him/her roles that have been previously and externally constructed (husband and wife, father and mother, and native and non-native French speakers). The transcription activity is thus embedded in and creates a dynamic web of (social, gendered, and cultural) identities between the co-transcribers. Jointly engaged in the success of the same activity, each of the transcribers experiences it in a different way, sometimes provoking confrontational relationships. A detailed analysis of linguistic data will show how the transcription activity can be an 'anxiety-provoking' event for the principal protagonists (Crapanzano, 1977). I will now provide some necessary background for the analysis of this particular transcription activity.

2. Histories of collaborative work

In order to study language socialization in France, Kate conducted participant observations in a small, well-to-do, suburban neighborhood near Paris with several middle-class families. Periodically she videotaped family meals in which she took part as an invited member of the household. After producing alone a first layer of scription, she worked with one and sometimes two of the adult family members (usually the mother) to help her process the video-recorded speech events. Kate met regularly with her assistants at their homes, and set the work plan for each session, usually to go over the first layer of scription she had already produced. For example, she decided which part of the recording deserved more attention and conducted the session according to her own research interests. The collaborative transcription activity being discussed here was thus a second layer of written materials, what Urban (1996) calls 'en-textualization'. In this particular family, Etienne, the father, who was unemployed at the time of the research, served as Kate's primary assistant, while Anne, his wife, busy with their new-born baby, stopped by every now and then to help.

Kate's collaborative *way of transcribing* is in line with a long tradition in anthropology in which ethnographers work closely with their consultants in the field in order to 'decode' and couch the language (variety) in writing. However, for students of language socialization, like Kate, working

in the tradition of Ochs and Schieffelin (1979; Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986), the joint activity of transcription with adult family members is more than verifying the accuracy of the researcher's scription. It is an important part of the object of investigation, viz., understanding patterns of socialization and eliciting linguistic and socio-cultural information.⁹ Thus, as will be explained below, the transcription activity is for Kate part of a complex web of *data construction*. Her way of working with her consultants challenges the traditional clear-cut distinction between fieldwork and transcription activity, with the latter chronologically following the former. When transcribing, Kate is doing ethnographic fieldwork and vice versa. Adopting Clifford's (1990) distinction, we can say that Kate's activity is concurrently about *inscription* ('the making and remaking of texts'; p. 54), *description* ('the making of a more or less coherent representation of an observed cultural reality'; p. 51), and *transcription*.

My videotaping of the activity took place after several months of collaborative work between Kate and Etienne and, subsequently, Anne (after the child needed less and less sustained close attention). My role at this session consisted only of recording as an observer outside the frame of the camera. I never viewed the video that Kate made, which provided the material for the collaborative transcription. The only knowledge I have of it is the soundtrack I heard while videotaping the co-transcribers at work.

Another contextual element that bears on the present analysis is that we are dealing with an intercultural speech event between an English-speaking anthropologist, and her two French-speaking collaborators. There is a clear division of labor between English and French that goes along with the distinction between oral and written activity: French is the main language used collaboratively during the oral part of the transcription activity, while English is the principal metalanguage used by the anthropologist in the scription. Para-linguistic annotations (e.g. participants' postures, descriptions of gaze, etc.) appear only in English in the first layer of scription produced alone by Kate. Less systematically, Kate uses mostly English but sometimes French to write down reminder notes and/or add comments.

In this article, I will distinguish between four temporal stages corresponding to four different speech events in which the participants play different roles. They are presented chronologically: T1 = the dinner event with Kate, Etienne, Anne and their three children; T2 = times when Kate worked alone to produce the first layers of scription; T3 = collaborative transcription sessions engaged in by Kate, Etienne, and Anne, one of which was video-recorded by me; T4 = transcription of my video-recording with only minimal input from Kate.

The data on which my analysis rests is a seven-minute extract in which a conflict of interpretation emerges between the three co-transcribers. Before engaging in a detailed analysis of the material, let me first discuss

the functions of collaborative transcription and secondly analyze how social roles both shape and are shaped by this process.

2.1. Transcription as a social and multifunctional activity

The transcribers' collaborative activity during T3 had three different functions, all of which helped shape the participants' sets of identities: 1) *Verification, correction, and filling in*. We must recall here that the co-transcription activity (T3) was a second stage in the transcription process. By the time Kate met with her co-transcribers, she had already produced a first layer of scription (T2). During T3, she often asked Etienne and Anne to double-check the accuracy of her T2 scription, querying about the meanings of some words and gestures or whether particular sets of expressions differed semantically and how. This activity not only constructed Kate as a non-native speaker of French relying on the linguistic and cultural expertise of her co-transcribers but played a significant role in her understanding of language socialization. 2) *Elicitation*, which sheds light on transcription as part of Kate's work on language socialization, in which language is conceived of both as a vehicle to acquire culture and as an intrinsic part of the latter (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1984). The transcription process was thus a locus where words, linguistic forms (e.g. use of different types of interrogative clauses), and gestures recorded during the dinner were topicalized by Kate and the parents and thus became objects of meta-discourse and enquiry. 3) *Kate's socialization* via the dinner with the family (T1) as well as via the transcription sessions (T3), which in fact was a means for her to conduct fieldwork. She was thus also able to learn aspects of French society by participation in a range of particular social events.

2.2. Reorganizing space: shaping social roles

The joint activity of transcription took place in Etienne and Anne's dining room, where the recorded dinner had also taken place. For the transcription sessions this physical space was reorganized, with the dining table moved closer to the TV set, in order for Kate to plug in her video camera. The chairs were also repositioned to enable all three co-transcribers to see the TV screen, on which the recordings were being displayed. The spatial reorganization constructed the transcription activity as an unordinary activity taking place in a setting that had not been designed for it.

On the other hand, by the time of my recording (T4), the re-organization seemed to have already become a routine, with the roles of the participants already reassigned. When Kate and I arrived, she did not wait for confirmation before taking her camera out of her bag and Etienne was

already moving the table, taking care of the connections to the TV set, and bringing the TV remote control to her. Kate's reference to Etienne as *mon technicien*, 'my technician', confirmed this role reassignment.

An additional, more incidental spatial reorganization took place the day I videotaped the transcription session. The water bottle standing in the middle of the table was removed by Anne so that it would not obstruct my camera field of vision. Chairs were repositioned again in order to make room for my camera stand. This spontaneous reorganization of space shows how Anne and Etienne were self-aware of their role as 'researched' in the recording activity that was about to take place in their family environment. Etienne responded to my declining his invitation to sit around the table with them with the comment *un observateur invisible*, 'an invisible observer', which highlighted the fact that I would not be appearing in the video that I was about to record. The comment was in fact an implicit comparison with Kate's professional practice, as she included herself as a subject in her recordings of family dinners and made herself part of her own research. A perfect participant-observer, she can usually be seen socializing with the family in her videos.¹⁰

In any case, the dinner video-recording, as well as the transcription activity (in which Etienne and Anne have had to reflect on themselves as research subjects), seems to have directly shaped their temporary and incidental identities as professional informants with specific knowledge of the consequences of taking on roles such as research subject, professional informant, and trained assistant. They clearly accepted roles on either side of the research tool (the camera) – that is, as both subjects of scrutiny and as fellow investigators of their own actions; however, Etienne in particular preferred to underscore the more powerful stance of the expert native who had specifically been trained to assist with the research.

The transcribers' positions around the table helped shape their roles and identities during the co-transcription activity. As shown in Figure 1, Etienne

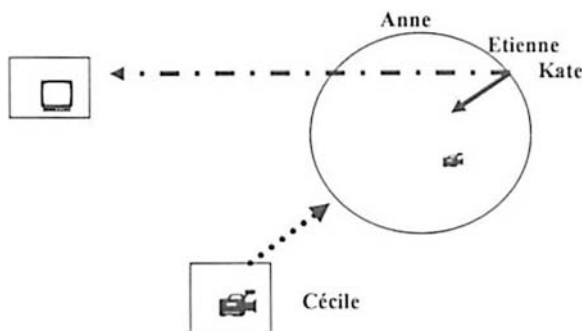


Figure 1 Setting of the co-transcription activity.

is seated between Kate and Anne. This spatial organization bears the trace of the ongoing transcription activity history (throughout T3) in which Etienne and Kate usually began by co-transcribing alone, while Anne took care of her baby in another room. She then joined them at various points during the session but was never fully involved in the transcription activity, always arriving in the middle of ongoing discussions about specific bits of recorded discourse and sometimes having to leave before a bit was fully transcribed in order to attend to the baby. Nonetheless, for the sequence of events recorded on the video whose segment is being discussed here she was always present and part of the team.

Anne and Etienne's role allocation during the transcription activity can be seen as due both to the history of the collaborative transcription and to the participants' specific locations around the table. Etienne's role as primary professional informant or trained assistant is frequently in evidence. For instance, he often read Kate's scription (which he could see but Anne could not) and suggested spelling corrections or asked for clarifications.

To make the above observations more evident, I will now turn to the analysis of a sequence during the transcription activity. A seven-minute extract has been chosen to illustrate the emergence of a conflict of interpretation between the three co-transcribers. The disagreement arose over the interpretation of a word uttered by Anne during the dinner (T1). Many things were at stake here: whether or not Anne actually said the word attributed to her in the scription, whether Kate's expertise was compromised by the disagreement, whether Anne and Etienne felt that their authority as native speakers was being challenged by the non-native investigator, and whether Etienne's privileged position as Kate's first collaborator marginalized Anne as a 'patch' (*pièce rapportée*).

3. Negotiating multiple interpretations: how the subject loses her voice

The conflict developed around the seven thematic sequences examined chronologically below. We will see how disagreement is sequentially constructed and performed by the three interactants, as well as how it is accomplished through intricate coordination/cooperation between the opposing parties (see Goodwin and Goodwin, 1990). The sequential analysis will also demonstrate how the conflict is embedded within several sub-activities (taking notes, watching the video, commenting on the video, etc.) taking place during the transcription.

3.1. Establishing the denotata¹¹

1. Kate plays video: *c'est qui le cuisinier*/ X *c'est moi*¹²
2. Etienne: ((E. turns to A.)) *c'est qui* [le/
3. Anne: [c'est qui le/
4. Kate: ((looks at her scription and smiles)) *cuisinier*
5. Anne: *le cuisinier*
6. Etienne: AH
7. Kate: *c'est c'est bon*/
8. Etienne: [oui
9. Anne: [oui oui _ oui oui oui oui [oui
10. Kate: [ok ok
1. Kate plays video: who is the cook/ X *c'est moi*
2. Etienne: ((E. turns to A.)) who's [the/
3. Anne: [who's the/
4. Kate: ((looks at her scription and smiles)) *cook*
5. Anne: *the cook*
6. Etienne: AH
7. Kate: *it's it's alright*/
8. Etienne: [yes
9. Anne: [yes yes _ yes yes yes yes [yes
10. Kate: [ok ok

After watching a short extract of the video, Etienne (line 2) turns to Anne, attempts to reproduce Kate's recorded utterance: '*c'est qui le*' ('who's the?'), and expresses his difficulty with interpreting Kate's question, especially its last word. Overlapping Etienne's turn, Anne (line 2) uses the same questioning strategy to ask for some clarification. After checking her scription (written by her alone during T2), Kate responds: *cuisinier* ('cook'). Two turns later she asks her two co-transcribers if her interpretation is correct (line 6, '*c'est c'est bon*'/ 'it's it's alright?'). This sequence opens an instance of the routine activity: 'talking about/interpreting the video' which occurs whenever, as in this case, one or more of the co-transcribers' manifests a lack of comprehension of what has been said on the video.

3.2. Disagreement

10. Anne: *et j'ai dit c'est moi moi j'ai répondu c'est moi*
11. Kate: <toi tu as dit **non** c'est moi>\ ((K. looking at her notes))
12. Anne: *ah bon*/
13. *Kate plays the video*
14. Kate: **non** c'est moi _ c- **non**/ [tu n'as pas dit **non**/
15. Anne: [oui pourquoi j'aurais dit **non**
16. *c'est moi*/ ((A. looks at K.'s notes))

10. Anne: and I said it's me me I answered it's me
11. Kate: <you you said **no** it's me\> ((K. looking at her notes))
12. Anne: really/
13. *Kate plays the video*
14. Kate: **no** it's me _ i- **no!** [you didn't say **no!**
15. Anne: [yes why would I have said **no** it's me/
16. ((A. looks at K.'s notes))

Anne takes the floor and continues (with the marker '*et*', 'and', at the beginning of line 10) the interpretation activity initiated by Etienne by reporting her own recorded speech ('*et j'ai dit ... j'ai répondu*', 'I said ... I answered'). Kate reformulates Anne's version of the reported speech, giving her own interpretation *non* without too much assertiveness (reduplication of the term of address '*toi tu*' 'you you' and absence of oppositional marker in line 11). This lack of assertiveness may be interpreted as a way for Kate to not threaten Anne's face as she has taken the initiative of leading the transcription activity. An alternative explanation could be that Kate's response is embedded in the activity of 'reading notes' that shifts her attention to the actual interaction with Anne. Kate plays back the video after Anne has expressed doubt about her interpretation ('*ah bon!*', 'really!', line 12) and then sticks to her initial interpretation '*non*', while nonetheless trying to preserve Anne's face by asking for her approval ('*tu n'as pas dit non*', 'you didn't say no!', line 14). The latter disputes Kate's version by (re)claiming the authorship of her own words ('*oui pourquoi j'aurais dit non c'est moi!*', 'yes why would I have said no it's me!', lines 15–16). By doing this, she also sets a new frame of interpretation, shifting from Kate's attempt to reconstruct the signifier and trying instead to identify the probable signified, the presumption being that meaning will be revealed once intentionality is established via the *why* question.

3.3. In search of the signified

16. Kate: (§ 4 s) ((K. looks at video and then at notes)) en en fait
17. j- je croyais c'était euh _ Etienne _ ((K. looks at A. pointing
18. pen to E.)) [je ne sais pas comment tu as:
19. Anne: [AH ah peut-être oui
20. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [peut-être
21. [qu'elle a dit _ ouais parce
22. Anne: [y a y a eu des:
23. Etienne: que:_ comme elle dit LE cuisinier du coup t'as dit [NON=
24. Anne: [a-:
25. Etienne: =c'est moi

26. Anne: [AH:
 27. Etienne: [tu vois/
 28. Anne: ((A. looks at video)) et pis peut-être que tu regardais
 29. Etienne ((A. looks at K.)) et j'ai cru com[prendre: par geste que=
 30. Etienne: [pt'être que t'as compris
 31. c'est Toi le cuisinier
 32. Anne: =tu avais: euh que tu [avais pensé euh _ que [c'était=
 33. Kate: ((K. looks at video)) [hum hum [ouais hein=
 34. Anne: =Etienne et à
 35. Kate: =hein ouais c'est je c'est ça ce: que je me souviens ((K.
 36. points index finger at her ear)) c'est pas: quelque chose que
 37. j'ai compris [tout ça ((K. looks at video and smiles)) _ mais=
 38. Etienne: [ah d'accord
 39. Kate: =toi tu as compris
 40. Etienne: non mais ((E. points index finger at K's notes)) parce
 41. que comme tu dis le cuisinier ça peut orienter:[et:=
 42. Kate: [normalement c'est
 43. Etienne: =si peu que tu me regardes ((E. points index finger at
 44. video)) elle a peut-être cru que: _ que c'était moi ((E. looks
 45. at K's notes))
 46. Kate: parce que c'est la cuisinière si c'est+
 47. Etienne: +si c'est elle hein hein
 48. Anne: <oui> ((not convinced)) ((A. looks down))
 49. Kate: ou/_ c'est un mot qui change maintenant/
16. Kate: (§ 4 s) ((K. looks at video and then at notes)) in in fact
 17. I- I thought it was umm _ Etienne _ ((K. looks at A. pointing pen
 18. to E.)) [I don't know how you have:
 19. Anne: [AH ah may[be yes
 20. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [maybe
 21. [she said _ yeah because
 22. Anne: [there were there were some:
 23. Etienne: that:_ as she says ♂-cook so you said [NO=
 24. Anne: [a-
 25. Etienne: =it's me
 26. Anne: [AH:
 27. Etienne: [you see/
 28. Anne: ((A. looks at video)) and then maybe you were looking at
 29. Etienne _ ((A. looks at K.)) and I thought I under[stood from=
 30. Etienne: [maybe you
 31. understood YOU are the cook
 32. Anne: =you had: umm that [you had thought umm=
 33. Kate: ((K. looks at video)) [um um

34. Anne: =that [it was Etienne and at
 35. Kate: ((K. looks at video)) [yeah umm umm yeah this is I this is
 36. that I remember ((K. points index finger at her ear)) this is
 37. not: something I understood [all this ((K. looks at video and smiles))_but=
 38. Etienne: [ah alright
 39. Kate: =you you understood
 40. Etienne: no but ((E. points index finger at K.'s notes)) because
 41. as you say ♂-cook it can have an influence: [and:=
 42. Kate: [usually it's
 43. Etienne: =as much as you look at me ((E points index finger at
 44. video)) she maybe thought that: _ that it was me ((E. looks at
 45. K.'s notes))
 46. Kate: because it's ♀-cook if it's+
 47. Etienne: +if it's a she that's it
 48. Anne: <yes> ((not convinced)) ((A. looks down))
 49. Kate: or/ _ it's a word that changes now/

The three co-transcribers reconstruct the setting of the uttered word and together they explore possible interpretations, which is made more evident by the recurrence of the adverb '*peut-être*', 'maybe' (lines 19, 20, 28, 30, 44) in their discussion. Etienne, who has kept silent until this point, joins the exchange between Kate and Anne, trying to find a *post factum* explanation for Kate's interpretation. What is striking here is that none of the co-transcribers challenges Kate's interpretation '*non*'; instead they try to find explanations in support of her position. Is it a form of compliance with, or an acknowledgment of, Kate's implicit professional authority framed by the activity of transcription itself? After some hesitations (lines 33 and 35, '*ouais hein hein ouais*', 'yeah umm umm yeah'), Kate justifies her interpretation by referring to T1 (dinner) both physically (she looks at the video) and verbally. By shifting back to T1, she operates a footing, reframing her intervention from *being a non-French speaker* who may have misunderstood, to *being a participant* in the speech event, which entitles her to propose an interpretation as legitimate as the native speakers'. By relating her own recollection of the uttered word (line 35, '*c'est ça ce: que je me souviens*', 'this is that I remember') to Anne's understanding (line 37 and 39, '*mais toi tu as compris*', 'but you you understood'), Kate manages to save Anne's face while preserving hers. Anne remains silent for several turns and then speaks again to express a timid agreement with Etienne and Kate's collaborative interpretation (line 48, '<oui> ((not convinced))', '<yes> ((not convinced))').

3.4. Layers of misinterpretation

42. Anne: [oui: mais j'aurais pu très bien oui mais j- comment dire/
 43. ça aurait pu être euh _ comment dirais-je:/ euh _ euh:_ dit dans
 44. le sens euh: _ ((A. looks at video)) qui est le cuisinier euh_
 45. toi ou Etienne mais peut-être comme tu as regardé Etienne _ à ce
 46. moment là j'ai peut-être pensé que tu avais s- pensé QUE c'était
 47. lui et alors j'ai: (3s) [j'ai cru qu'il y=
 48. Etienne: ((E. points with index finger at K.'s notes)) [qu'est-ce=
 49. =avait une connivence entre vous deux
 50. Etienne: =t'as écrit là/
 51. Kate: chef ((K. points pen at her notes))
 52. Etienne: mais avant/ ((E. points with index finger at K.'s notes))
 53. Kate: male¹³
 54. Etienne: ah male¹⁴ chef ((E. laughs toward A.))
 55. Kate: ((laughs))
 56. Anne: ((A. looks at video)) attends mais on va peut-être [revoir
 57. Etienne: [<c'est
 58. moi le chef> ((E. looks at A smiling)) ((said in the voice of a
 59. child))
 60. Anne =et puis (A. smiles at E.))
 61. Kate: ((laughs)) chef ((K. points pen at her notes))+
 62. Etienne: +au sens euh anglais
 63. Anne: oui oui
 64. Kate: ouais ça c'est l'anglais de mais ça vient de: _ oui chef _
 65. boss _ oui
 66. Etienne: ((E. looks at A)) le chef mâle ça fait <ouh>
 67. ((sighing))
 68. Kate: ((laughs)) ((K. looks at E.))
 69. Anne: ((laughs))
 70. Kate: les chefs sont s- toujours mâles ((K. looks at notes))
 71. Anne: <oui> ((nodding in agreement))
42. Anne: [but: I could have very well yes but I- how to say it/ it
 43. could maybe have been umm _ how should I say:/ umm _ umm: _ said
 44. in the sense umm: _ ((A. looks at video)) who is the cook umm _
 45. you or Etienne but maybe as you were looking at Etienne _ at that
 46. moment I maybe thought that you were b- thinking THAT it was
 47. him and then I have: (3s) [I thought there=
 48. Etienne: ((E. points with index finger at K.'s notes)) [what have=
 49. Anne: =was an understanding between the two of you
 50. Etienne: =you written here/
 51. Kate: chef ((K. points pen at her notes))
 52. Etienne: but before/ ((E. points with index finger at K.'s notes))

53. Kate: male¹⁵
 54. Etienne: ah male¹⁶ chef ((E. laughs toward A.))
 55. Kate: ((laughs))
 56. Anne: ((A. looks at video)) wait but we'll maybe [watch again
 57. Etienne: [<I am the
 58. chief> ((E. looks at A smiling)) ((said in the voice of a
 59. child))
 60. Anne: and then ((A. smiles at E.))
 61. Kate: ((laughs)) chef ((K. points pen at her notes))+
 62. Etienne: +in the umm English sense of it
 63. Anne: yeah yeah
 64. Kate: yeah it's English from but it comes from: _ yes
 65. (chef/chief) _ boss _ yes
 66. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) the virile chief it's like <oh>
 67. ((sighing))
 68. Kate: ((laughs)) ((K. looks at E.))
 69. Anne: ((laughs))
 70. Kate: chiefs are o- always virile ((K. looks at notes))
 71. Anne: <yeah> ((nodding in agreement))

On line 48, Etienne shifts the focus of the activity, by pointing at Kate's notes and interrupting Anne's explanation. Kate acknowledges Etienne's new frame by responding to his question. Anne tries (line 56) to take the floor again by attempting to reframe the activity as it was before being interrupted by Etienne. She dissociates herself from Kate and Etienne by lifting her gaze to the TV screen and asking to watch the video again. Etienne ignores this attempt and interrupts her again. She acknowledges his remark by smiling at him.

The dynamic of this exchange was based on multilayered misinterpretations that had occurred during the different phases of the research. The first misinterpretation took place during the dinner when Kate used a formulaic expression '*c'est qui le cuisinier*', typical in American but not in French culture (Gumperz, 1982), to signal her appreciation of the meal. Her French respondents did not interpret it as a compliment but as an unusual but real question. This may explain why neither Etienne nor Anne can make sense of Kate's question during the transcription activity. When she asked the question, Kate also used the masculine form '*le cuisinier*', which is ambiguous in French between the generic and the gender-specific interpretations.

Thus, a question that seems to have been dismissed during the dinner, even if it may have appeared unusual, became an issue during the transcription activity, especially while the co-transcribers tried to determine the form and meaning of the beginning of Anne's response ['*X c'est moi*', '*X it's me*'].

The activity of interpretation among the three transcribers revolves around two points: 1) Anne's interpretation of Kate's question during the dinner (e.g. was it a genuine question or a polite and indirect way of criticizing the food?); 2) Kate's use of masculine form (did Anne understand '*le cuisinier*' as referring to Etienne and thus as an assumption about her inability to cook?).

During the co-transcription activity, Kate becomes aware of the problem engendered by her use of the masculine form and decides to note it on her scription by inscribing *chef* preceded by *male*. This is part of Kate's transcribing practice: she usually writes her co-transcribers' meta-discursive comments either in French or English (depending on the kind of comment). Etienne, who has worked with Kate since the beginning of the transcription activity, has developed the habit of reading Kate's scription and correcting her spelling mistakes.

However, this practice is the source of the second misunderstanding. When Etienne reads Kate's comments, he seems to be puzzled by, or can't read, a term written on the scription and asks Kate to read it (lines 48 and 50). Misunderstanding Etienne's request, Kate first reads the term [ʃ] and then, having been asked to read the previous word, reads [meil]. The words are 'false friends' (*faux amis* in French). While one can argue that Kate's pronunciation of the two words makes clear that [meil] is an English term (compared to the French *male* [ma:l]), there was nothing in her pronunciation of [ʃ] that could keep Etienne from interpreting [ʃ] in the French way as 'chief' rather than 'cook'. The context in which French allows *chef* to be interpreted as 'cook' was different from that in which Kate had produced '*cuisinier*' in T1. Thus, Kate and Etienne cooperate (lines 61–5) to re-establish the intended meaning of *chef* in this context. Furthermore, in a playful way, Etienne takes this opportunity to boost his male ego, lifting his chest and head up when addressing Anne in a childish voice (lines 57–8).

Etienne comes back to the topic by making a comment on the modifier *male* (line 66). This time, the misunderstanding between the co-transcribers remains, as evidenced in the transcript, because neither Etienne nor Kate seems to know the difference between [ma:l] and [meil]. Whereas *male* in English refers to the masculine gender (even for humans), *mâle* in French is usually used to characterize the gender of an animal (*mâle* versus *femelle*). When it is applied to a man, it has an implicit sexual connotation. Etienne's sigh (line 66) can be understood as an explicit reference to the implicit sexual connotation of the term. Kate's remark on line 70 ('*les chefs sont s- toujours mâles*': intended to mean that '*chiefs are o-always male*'), pronounced in a joking way as a feminist critique, appears in this context very tendentious and quite provocative, as it has for French-speakers the sense: '*chiefs are always virile*'. Only Anne responds to the

remark with a timid 'yeah' (line 71), nodding in agreement – she apparently is more preoccupied with the misreading of her T1 exclamation during dinner – while Etienne, who brought up the topic, smiles and looks down towards Kate's notes without making any further comment.

As is evident from the above discussion, the miscommunication between Kate and her consultants lies on several levels: semantic, pragmatic and cultural. Neither Etienne nor Kate seems aware of the fact that they each assign a different meaning to the word *male*.¹⁷ Kate subsequently admitted to me that she became aware of the sexual connotation of the French *mâle* only after I pointed this out to her, several times. It is worth noting that the interaction between the three co-transcribers is partly constructed by and around Kate's approximate competence in French. As she explained to me, she exploited this state of affairs to advantage. She turned her limited competence in French into a resource that, on the one hand, helped her construct her social position as a 'non-native French speaker endeavoring to understand another culture' and, on the other, enabled her to easily involve her consultants as co-transcribers. We have here an interesting example of how limited linguistic competence can become an asset for a fieldworker and what an active part it plays in the framing of the context.

Kate's approach, which I happen to admire, disputes Lowie's (1940) negative response to Mead (1939) about the need to command an indigenous language while doing fieldwork. While Mead argued that being able to understand the native language, rather than speaking it, was a sufficient requirement, Lowie, who subscribed to Boas's (1911) position to the contrary, argued that Mead's position reflected a double standard in traditional anthropological field research. While it was generally considered adequate for an anthropologist to investigate a non-European culture without developing sufficient speaking competence in the relevant language, the same low standard did not apply to the study of western cultures. That is, whereas one wouldn't expect a fieldworker working on Kiyansi culture (Democratic Republic of Congo) to 'virtuously' master Kiyansi (if s/he does, s/he would be admired for his/her exceptional linguistic accomplishment), one would accuse of lack of professionalism any fieldworker who has only an approximate command of French when working on French culture. Although Lowie's point has generally been accepted as valid, it invites students of language to rethink their way of working *on* and *with* language, factoring in the particular language ideology in which it is embedded.¹⁸ Turning what can be seen as a shortcoming to advantage, Kate's example shows how productive in the field an epistemological stance such as hers can be for negotiating one's position as a researcher and one's relationship with one's informants.

3.5. From a linguistic conflict to a domestic settling of scores

{2:28s}

1. *K. starts the video: who is the cook/ _ X it's me*
2. Kate: euh: ((K. puts index finger on video, looks at notes))
3. {1:30s} enfin non je crois que tu dis non c'est moi mais parce
4. que il y a un problème _ peut-être y avait un problème de sel _ tu
5. tu vas me dire ((K. points her pen to A. and looks at video))
6. Etienne: ((laughs))
7. *K. starts the video: (...) who is the cook/ _ X it's me*
8. Anne: AH NON voilà c'est pas non c'est moi ((A. points index
9. finger up)) _ j'ai du dire OH c'est moi
10. Kate: oh c'est moi ((K. looks at notes ready to write))
11. Anne: oh c'est moi _ _ c'est plutôt ça/ ((A. looks at E.))
12. Etienne: [j'sais pas\ ((E. looks at video))
13. Anne: [oh c'est moi ((A. looks at video)) _ oh si attends
14. parce que _ là j'étais en train de regarder pour voir si euh
15. [vous vous regardiez euh: de façon à ce que je puisse penser que=
16. [K. runs the video
17. Anne: =en fait°_ tu pensais que c'était Etienne
18. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) encore tu demandais si _ qui _ si on
19. se demandait qui était le coupable ou alors qui avait fait cette
20. si bonne chose
21. Kate: ((K. nods in agreement)) ouais exact ((smiles))
22. Anne: ((laughs)) non oui _ et à mon avis j'ai dit oh c'est moi
23. tu vois <t'c'est euh bon c'est moi c-[tant qu'on m'a pas dit que=
24. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [t'étais pas toute fière=
25. Anne: =c'est bon> ((A. swings head imitating a shy child))
26. Etienne: =de ce que t'avais fait/
27. Anne: <voilà peut-être> ((laughing)) mais je crois que j'ai dit
28. oh et pas non\ (2s) si je pense que c'est plutôt ça ((A. looks
29. at video with index finger up))
30. *K. starts the video: X c'est moi*
31. Anne: [oh c'est moi
32. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [si si non non tu dis non c'est moi
33. mais _ t'es pas très t'es pas très satisfaite ((E. points index
34. finger to video))
35. Kate: oui [c'est ça tu n'es pas très satisfaite ((K. looks at=
36. Anne: [<oui voilà> ((nodding in agreement))
37. Kate: =video))
38. Etienne: tu dis non c'est moi mais: ((E. looks down))
39. Anne: <non mais pourquoi non>/ ((a bit irritated))

40. Etienne: [ben: je sais pas\ ((E. looks at video))
41. Anne: [oh c'est moi ((A. looks at E.))
42. Etienne: oh peut-être ((E. smiles at C.))
- {2:28s}
1. *K. starts the video: who is the cook/ _ X it's me*
 2. Kate: umm: ((K. puts index finger on video, looks at notes))
 3. {1:30s} well no I think that you say no it's me but because
 4. there's a problem _ maybe there was a problem with salt _ you
 5. you'll tell me ((K. points her pen to A. and looks at video))
 6. Etienne: ((laughs))
 7. *K. starts the video: (...) who is the cook/ _ X it's me*
 8. Anne: AH NO that's it it's not no it's me ((A. points index finger
 9. up)) _ I must have said OH it's me
 10. Kate: oh it's me ((K. looks at notes ready to write))
 11. Anne: oh it's me _ _ it's more that/ ((A looks at E.))
 12. Etienne: [I don't know\ ((E. looks at video))
 13. Anne: [oh it's me ((A. looks at video)) _ oh yes wait
 14. because _ there I was looking in order to see if umm
 15. [you were looking at each other umm: in a way that I could think=
 16. [K. runs the video
 17. Anne: =that in fact° _ you were thinking it was Etienne
 18. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) even you were asking whether _ who _
 19. whether we were wondering whether you were the culprit or if
 20. after all who had made such a good thing
 21. Kate: ((K. nods in agreement)) yeah right ((smiles))
 22. Anne: ((laughs)) no yes _ and in my opinion I said oh it's me
 23. you see <it's umm okay it's me it-[as long as nobody has told me=
 24. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [you weren't completely proud=
 25. Anne: =it's good> ((A. swings head imitating a shy child))
 26. Etienne: =of what you'd made/
 27. Anne: <well maybe> ((laughing)) but I think that I said oh and
 28. not no\ (2s) yes I think it's more about that ((A. looks at
 29. video with index finger up))
 30. *K. starts the video: X it's me*
 31. Anne: [oh it's me
 32. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [yes yes no no you say no it's me but
 33. _ you are not you are not very satisfied ((E. points index finger
 34. to video))
 35. Kate: yes [exactly you are not very satisfied ((K. looks at=
 36. Anne: [<yes alright> ((nodding in agreement))
 37. Kate: =video))
 38. Etienne: you say no it's me but: ((E. looks down))

39. Anne: <no but why no>/ ((a bit irritated))
 40. Etienne: [well: I don't know\ ((E. looks at video))
 41. Anne: [oh it's me ((A. looks at E.))
 42. Etienne: oh maybe ((E. smiles at C.))

This sequence follows a break of 2 minutes 28 seconds. Kate engages Anne again (she points her pen towards her) in debating about the problematic word (X). Kate gives further arguments to support her initial interpretation (lines 3–5) and plays the video again to confirm it. Anne shifts positions and comes up with a new proposal (her pitch on the opening of her turn is high, line 8: 'AH NON'). She shifts from the impersonal form ('*c'est*', 'it is') to the first person singular (line 9, '*j'ai*', 'I have'). This clearly marks Anne's claim of authorship over her words and thus her right to give the interpretation she thinks to be the correct one. The modal verbs construction *ai du*, 'must have' (line 9), in addition to the reiteration of her proposal in her next turn (line 11), suggests that she is not entirely convinced by this latest interpretation.

She reiterates her proposal seeking for Etienne's support. Without antagonizing her, he cautiously doesn't back her up ('*j'sais pas*', 'I don't know', line 12). Anne sticks to her interpretation and makes several attempts to strengthen her position until she makes a clear statement (line 41, '*oh c'est moi*', 'oh it's me').

In this sequence, Kate stays in the background. She takes the floor in two different ways: by taking a turn (four times) and by playing back the video. Twice, she activates the video after Anne's turn or while she's talking. Etienne becomes more assertive (line 32). Relying on the video, he reaffirms his previous understanding, while Anne reaffirms her interpretation (line 31, '*oh c'est moi*', 'oh it's me'). Kate steps in, backing up Etienne's statement (reduplication of adverbs: '*ouais exact*', 'yes exactly', line 21). In her next turn, overlapping Etienne's, Anne goes along with Etienne and Kate's interpretation about her dissatisfaction with her cooking. Etienne, who interprets Anne's agreement as a change of positions, reassesses his own position once again, using a reported speech form: '*tu dis non c'est moi*', 'you say no it's me' (line 38). Anne responds to Etienne with irritation, reframing the speech event into a personal conflict with Etienne. Her voice rises (line 39). Combined with the change in her body posture and with her stare at Etienne, this signals that she is ready for confrontation. Etienne tries ('*ben:*', 'well:') to diffuse the conflict by backing down (line 40, '*je sais pas*', 'I don't know'). In her next turn (line 41), Anne reaffirms her stance and tries to convince the others by raising her voice. The rising tension at this time of the activity of transcription could be interpreted as a failure of identity alignment between Anne and Etienne. As clearly stated by Goode-nough (1969), when interacting, participants deal with more than one

'identity-relationship' at the time. Between Anne and Etienne, for example, there are at least three identity-relations (wife-husband; co-transcribers; mother-father), whereas there are only two between Anne and Kate (consultant-anthropologist and co-transcribers). It is interesting to note that, although her interpretation is challenged by both Kate and Etienne, Anne seems to feel her authorship and authority 'questioned' only by Etienne. She 'dis-aligns' from being Etienne's co-transcriber to being his wife and therefore reframes the speech activity into a domestic conflict.

After making a partial concession to Anne with '*oh peut-être*', 'oh maybe' (line 42), Etienne looks at me and smiles. This is the only time during the transcription activity that one of the co-transcribers acknowledges my presence as an observer. Etienne's attitude can be interpreted in at least three not mutually exclusive ways: 1) Etienne seeks an escape out of the tension built up during his exchange with Anne; 2) he tries to find a third party to sort out the potential rivalry between Anne and Kate as he chose the latter's side; and 3) he wants to save face by acknowledging my presence as a witness to the event.

3.6. Reassessing Anne's voice

43. *K starts the video: who is the cook/ X it's me*
44. Kate: BON ((K. looks at A.)) _ bon [c'est moi _bon c'est moi=
45. Etienne: [ah bon c'est moi _ oui oui=
46. Kate: =(K. looks at A.)) il y a vraiment une nasale
47. Etienne: =ah ça fait _ ça fait ((E. looks at A.))
48. Anne: ((laughs toward E.))
49. Kate: ((laughs)) bon c'est moi mais mais c'est vraiment avec une
50. [nasale ((K. points index finger to her nose))
51. Etienne: [<XXXX> ((laughing))
52. Anne: [((laughs))
53. Kate: bon c'est moi je crois c'est bon\
54. Anne: <c'est peut-être ça> ((laughing)) ((nodding head)) <bon
55. allez on va pas insister c'est moi> ((in a playful mood)) ((A.
56. looks at video))
57. Kate: ((burst of laughter)) ((K. puts index finger on video))
58. (3s) euh: o:ui\ _ _ bon c'est moi mais c'est pas bon ((laughs))
59. ((K. looks at her notes))
60. Anne: [((laughs))
61. Etienne: [bon moi j'sais pas (4s) c'est elle qui l'a dit hein
62. *K. plays the video: c'est qui le cuisinier _ X c'est moi*
63. Kate: (§ 5s) bon ben/
64. Anne: ((A. closes eyes)) <ouais je sais pas>\ _ _ après tout je
65. sais pas _ ça peut être non bon ou oh non mais encore c'est pas

66. sûr que ça soit oh
 67. Kate: OK! ((K. is writing))
43. *K. starts the video: who is the cook/ X it's me*
 44. Kate: [BÕ] ((K. looks at A.)) _ _ [bõ][it's me _ [bõ] it's me=
 45. Etienne: [ah [bõ] it's me _ yes yes=
 46. Kate: =((K. looks at A.)) there's really a nasal
 47. Etienne: =ah it's like _ it's like ((E. looks at A.))
 48. Anne: ((laughs toward E.))
 49. Kate: ((laughs)) [bõ] it's me but it's really with a
 50. [nasale ((K. points index finger to her nose))
 51. Etienne: [<XXXX> ((laughing))
 52. Anne: [((laughs))
 53. Kate: [bõ] it's me I think it's [bõ]\
 54. Anne: <it's maybe that> ((laughing)) ((nodding head)) <[bõ] we
 55. won't insist it's me> ((in a playful mood))((A. looks
 56. at video))
 57. Kate: ((burst of laughter)) ((K. puts index finger on video))
 58. (3s) umm: y:es\ _ _ [bõ](French=OK)it's me but it's not good
 59. (French=OK) ((laughs)) ((K. looks at her notes))
 60. Anne: [((laughs))
 61. Etienne: [_{ok} I don't know (4s) she is the one who said it umm
 62. *K. plays the video: who is the cook/ _ X me*
 63. Kate: (§ 5s) [bõ]/ [bẽ]/
 64. Anne: ((A. closes eyes)) <yeah I don't know> \ _ _ after all I
 65. don't know\ _ it can be [nõ] [bõ] or [o] no but it's not even
 66. clear that it's oh
 67. Kate: OK\ ((K. is writing))

Kate, who remained silent during Anne and Etienne's last argument, plays back the video again and comes up with a new proposal that shifts the focus of attention and releases the tension of the previous minutes, illustrated by the three co-transcribers' playful utterances (lines 48–57). By proposing a new interpretation [bõ] (line 41), Kate saves Anne's face and breaks the antagonism between the latter and Etienne. This strategy helps prevent a potential breakdown in the co-transcription activity. Kate's new proposal differs only slightly from her initial one 'non' [nõ]. To support her proposal, she invokes her expert identity by using the technical term 'nasale' (line 43). By performing this new identity, Kate sets a new frame where she gets out of the dualistic and competing position with Anne (in relation to Etienne) while still implicitly challenging the latter's ownership/expertise over her own words. However, Etienne restores this authority with (line 58, 'c'est elle qui l'a dit', 'she is the one who said it'), and so Anne feels now legitimate enough to express her doubts about the interpretation of her

words (line 64–5: ‘*ouais je sais pas* _ _ *après tout je sais pas*’, ‘yeah I don’t know _ _ after all I don’t know’).

3.7. Reaching a compromise

68. Etienne: pour moi c’est pas oh c’est: _ [il y a ((E. looks at A.))
 69. Anne: [non _ non c’est plutôt=
 70. Kate: [il y a une
 71. nasale ((K. points index finger to her nose)) il y a une nasale
 72. Anne: =non ou bon c’est ouais
 73. Etienne: c’est entre les deux _ bon ou non\ ((E. looks at
 74. K’notes))
 75. Anne: bon [ou non
 76. Etienne: [bnon ((smiles)) ((E. looks at A.))
 77. Anne: ((A. smiles at E.))
68. Etienne: for me it’s not oh it’s: _ [there’s ((E. looks at A.))
 69. Anne: [no _ no it’s rather=
 70. Kate: there’s a nasal
 71. ((K. points index finger to her nose)) there’s a nasal
 72. Anne: =[nō] or [bō] it’s yeah
 73. Etienne: it’s between the two _ [bō] or [nō]\ ((E. looks at
 74. K’notes))
 75. Anne: [bō] [or [nō]
 76. Etienne: [[bnō] ((smiles)) ((E. looks at A.))
 77. Anne: ((A. smiles at E.))

In this last sequence, Anne gives up her own interpretation for good and only retains the two propositions made by Kate (line 68 and 72: ‘*c’est plutôt non ou bon*’, ‘it’s rather [nō] or [bō]’). For the first time since the beginning of the issue around Anne’s words, Etienne supports her position (line 73). Anne and Etienne seem to have reached an understanding by keeping open their options (lines 72 and 73 [bō] or [nō]). Etienne seals the final agreement by combining the two proposed interpretations and creating the hybrid, line 76: [bnō]. This linguistic compromise seems to reflect Etienne’s in-between position, between Kate’s and Anne’s. It is worth noting that the only way for him to escape the antagonism in which he feels caught is to resort to a new linguistic resource.

As illustrated in her scription, Kate never took into account Anne’s second proposal: ‘*oh*’. Holding the pen gives her the supreme authority to ‘have the final word’. Therefore Kate’s activity of taking notes can be considered as a closing activity.

Note also how the complex dialogical and negotiated process of interpretation between the three co-transcribers is reduced, on the scription,

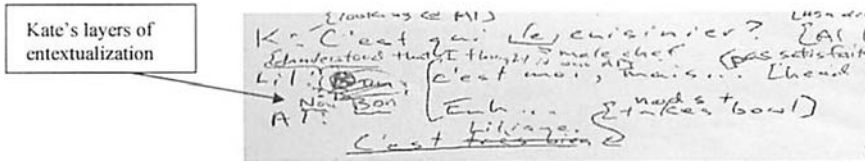


Figure 2 Kate's layers (T2 and T3) of scription.

to the simple annotation *Non Bon*. It is on the basis of this (en)textualization that Kate will ground her subsequent analysis of her linguistic data. This scription thus becomes the authoritative voice that silences the others.

4. What and whose words do we transcribe when we transcribe?

The sequential study of the conflict between the three co-transcribers generates a number of critical questions about the transcription activity. What the transcribers experienced in this sequence is something that all of us have experienced when confronted with unclear passages of our audio and/or video materials. We have experienced *possibilities of alternative interpretations*. What criteria of relevance do we use as transcribers to decide which interpretation to choose or favor?

4.1. Experiencing the interpretation possibilities

In the collaborative activity under study, choices are topicalized (in the sense explained above) and negotiated. Two strategies are utilized in this transcription process: the *reconstructivist strategy* and the *inference strategy*.

When transcribing a speech event in which the transcriber participated, s/he tends to reconstruct meaning – without necessarily being fully aware that s/he is doing so – on the basis of the interaction she witnessed. This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

30. Etienne: [pt'être que t'as compris]
 31. C'est Toi le cuisinier=
 32. Anne: =tu avais: euh que tu[avais pensé euh _que [c'était=
 33. Kate: ((K. looks at video)) [hum hum [ouais hein=
 34. Anne: =Etienne et à
 35. Kate: =hein ouais c'est je c'est ça ce: que je me souviens ((K.
 36. points index finger at her ear)) c'est pas: quelque chose que
 37. j'ai compris [tout ça ((K. looks at video and smiles)) _ mais=
 38. Etienne: [ah d'accord
 39. Kate: =toi tu as compris

30. Etienne: [maybe you
 31. understood YOU are the cook=
 32. Anne: =you had: umm that [you had thought umm=
 33. Kate: ((K. looks at video)) [um um
 34. Anne: =that [it was Etienne and at
 35. Kate: ((K. looks at video)) [yeah umm umm yeah it's I it's that
 36. I remember ((K. points with index finger at her ear)) it's not:
 37. something I understood [all this ((K. looks at video and smiles))=
 38. Etienne: [ah alright
 39. Kate: = _ but you you understood

In this sequence Kate opposes two cognitive activities: remembering (during T2 and T3 what happened during T1) and understanding (during T1 and T2 v. T3). Favoring the remembering activity can be understood as a claim for an interpretation based on the rights that accrue from 'being there'. But, in this case, the three co-transcribers were all present during the T1 event. Invoking her memory instead of her understanding may be a strategy used by Kate to save Anne's face, as illustrated by the last part of her turn introduced by the marker '*mais*', 'but': (line X '*mais toi tu as compris*', 'but you you understood'). Here, '*toi*', 'you', is multi-referential and polyphonic: 1) it may refer to Anne as the recipient of Kate's question (*who is the cook?*) during the dinner (T1). The sound track of the dinner video doesn't show any evidence of a break in communication when Kate was asking her question ('*qui est le cuisinier*') to Anne; 2) Kate may be addressing Anne as a native French speaker (in contrast with her own status as a learner of French) and thus is referring to the understanding process taking place during the transcription activity (T3) as opposed to what Kate was capable of during the dinner (T1) or while transcribing on her own (T2). Anne doesn't comment on this. In this particular sequence we see that Kate's claim of authority based on *experience* rather than *interpretation* (Clifford, 1983) is embedded in a complex nexus of linguistic and psychological factors.

Another strategy commonly used for favoring one interpretation over another is what I call the *inference strategy* as illustrated by the example below:

20. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [peut-être
 21. [qu'elle a dit _ ouais parce
 22. Anne: [y a y a eu des:
 23. Etienne: que: _ comme elle dit LE cuisinier du coup t'as dit [NON=
 24. Anne: [a-:
 25. Etienne: =c'est moi

20. Etienne: ((E. looks at A.)) [maybe
 21. [she said _ yeah because
 22. Anne: [there were there were some:
 23. Etienne: that: _ as she says ♂-cook so you said [NO=
 24. Anne: [a-
 25. Etienne: =it's me

Etienne's reasoning is very clear here. Assuming Kate's interpretation of the morpheme to be correct, he uses his French communicative competence (e.g. '*le cuisinier*', '♂-cook' use carries a different significance than '*la cuisinière*', '♀-cook' in this context of use) to reconstruct a rationale for Anne's response. The choice of interpretation rests on inferences drawn from the linguistic context (co-text) in which the word is embedded. This doesn't just call into question the accuracy of our transcriptions (in our professional practice, we should maybe favor multi-transcriptions) but more fundamentally it questions our actual practice: *what* is it that we are transcribing *when* we transcribe: the signified and/or signifiers? Our spontaneous and immediate response would certainly be: both (at least for those who are concerned with meaning and not just sound). But to what extent are these two sides of the same coin, if we subscribe to Saussure's original metaphor, clearly distinguished in our actual transcription practice?

4.2. Speech event time versus transcription time

Conflicts of interpretation that emerge during the process of transcription can be understood as a result of the temporal disjuncture between the speech event time (T1, the family dinner in the present case) and the transcription time (T3). This is because language is experienced differently in the here-and-now of an interaction than in the there-and-then of the transcription activity.

When we as transcribers listen to our tape or video recordings, there is a temporal coincidence between the listening and watching activity, on the one hand, and the recorded speech event, on the other. This temporal coincidence is made possible only because the speech event, which took place prior to the watching and listening activities, is captured on tape. Borrowing from the Swiss cineaste Jean Luc Godard's comments about TV news, I describe the transcription process as a 'live broadcasting of a pre-recorded event' (*direct-différé*). Recordings give transcribers the opportunity to experience almost *in praesentia* a speech event in which they haven't necessarily participated. However, live language practice proceeds in a simultaneous way, without the benefit of delayed processing. The interactants produce meaning with, and/or give meaning to, verbal and gestural signals

concurrently in the course of the interaction. Factors such as contextual cues and the speaker's gaze and body posture help shape the interlocutor's ongoing interpretation activity. However, one should not downplay the role of the 'talk-out-interaction' (Blommaert, 2001) to explain what is taking place in the here-and-now of a communicative event, as evidenced by the pre-inscribed identities (husband and wife) that partly give rise to the conflict between Etienne and Anne. As will become evident in the next section, interpretation conflicts in the transcription activity may also be interpreted as conflicts of temporalities.

We will now turn to images from the video, which will permit a more detailed analysis of how authorship and authority are disputed in the course of the co-transcription activity. I will start with the preface of the interpretation conflict over Anne's words (see 2.1).

4.3. Whose words? Whose transcription?

10. Anne: *et j'ai dit c'est moi moi j'ai répondu c'est moi*

11. Kate: <toi tu as dit **non** c'est moi>\ ((K. looking at her notes))

10. Anne: and I said it's me me I answered it's me

11. Kate: <you you said **no** it's me> ((K. looking at her notes))

Below is a verbal and gestural cut-out of these two turns:



Figure 3 and I said it's me.

After the three transcribers have watched and listened to the video together again, Anne takes the floor, initiating verbally the transcription process: '*et j'ai dit c'est moi*', 'and I said it's me'. From a Goffmanian perspective (1981), Anne is the animator (i.e. the 'sounding box'), the author (the person who has selected the encoded words), and the principal (the person whose beliefs are being announced). In fact it is because she is

the author that she feels entitled to engage, at this point, in the transcription process. However, she does it within a frame set up by Kate. As illustrated by the snapshot above, in which Kate has her finger on the play button, Kate is in charge of the video, and in this role she sets the pace of the transcription activity. For instance, she decides on the basis of the layer of transcription she has done during T2 which sections of the video deserve more attention than others, and she operates the button that directs the participants' meta-discursive activity to particular gestures or words.

As illustrated by the use of the emphatic pronoun '*moi*', '*me*', followed by



Figure 4 me answered it's me.

the atonic clitic '*je*', '*I*', Anne underscores again her authority over her words. However, by leaning her head toward Kate's notes, Anne is conforming to Kate's new frame; she is accepting Kate's decision as to what passage must be transcribed at this particular time and perhaps also attempting to check whether Kate has it correct now (i.e. shares some of Etienne's 'expert' status).



Figure 5 you you said no it's me.

Kate gently refutes Anne's interpretation by proposing hers: '*non*'. If one focuses on speech only, especially on the verb '*ai dit*', 'said', for reporting speech, one might conclude that Kate is merely animating the words Anne produced at T1. However, if one also takes into account Kate's posture, one may conclude that an authority shift occurs when she utters these words. As already illustrated by the previous snapshot, Kate is looking at her notes when Anne suggests her first interpretation. Kate does not lift her head to look at Anne when proposing her own, pointing instead at her scription with her pen and reading from this. Her posture indicates that she is in a different temporality from Anne's: by talking from her notes, Kate is in the T2 temporality that took place prior to the *hic et nunc* of the collaborative transcription activity (T3). Thus, she is animating her own version of Anne's words from the layer of scription at T2. In a way, she is claiming authority for this version of the words, and making of herself the principal attesting to her strong belief in these words. When Kate presses the button to play back the video again, she is substituting the temporalities of her own scription (T2) and the present collaborative transcription activity (T3) with the recorded speech event temporality of the family dinner (T1). The video is used at this moment as an 'arbitrator' between Kate and Anne's divergent versions. Kate's choice to play the video can also be interpreted as a way to restore Anne's authorship over the words she (Kate) thinks she (Anne) uttered at the dinner. However, it suggests that a subtle distinction be made between Anne's authorship within the context of the dinner and Anne's authority as a co-transcriber in the transcription activity.

13. *Kate plays the video*

14. Kate: **non** c'est moi _ c- **non**/ [tu n'as pas dit **non**/

15. Anne: [oui pourquoi j'aurais dit **non**

16. c'est moi/ ((A. looks at K.'s notes))

13. *Kate plays the video*

14. Kate: **no** it's me _ i- **no**/ [you didn't say **no**/

15. Anne: [yes why would I say **no** it's me/ ((A.

16. looks at K.'s notes))



Figure 6 no it's me.

In this image, it is not clear whether Kate is only the animator or also the authority on '*non c'est moi*', 'no it's me', given that after stopping the video, she first looks at her scription and then addresses Anne by pointing to her notes with her pen. In the second part of her utterance (i- [nō]/), Kate tries to manage Anne's authorship by using auto-repair devices and a question format to soften her point and give Anne the opportunity to respond. In her answer, Anne makes a claim of authorship by using deictic '*I*' and by substituting the transcription activity temporality (T3) with that of the dinner activity (T1), using conditional '*would*'. Additionally, Anne and Etienne both set this new frame physically by orienting their gazes and torsos toward the screen TV.

My analysis shows how voices and temporalities are interlocked in the course of the transcription activity. As noted above, the transcription process evolves from and around three temporalities. Part of the conflict of interpretation is a conflict of temporalities. During the co-transcription, there is a perpetual tension between Anne's authorship and Kate's authority, as Kate initiated the transcription activity, is the expert on this professional activity, and pays for her collaborators' expertise. By having her interpretation challenged by Kate, Anne feels dispossessed of her own words. The transcription activity brings about two major changes: 1) it changes Anne's role and status from that of speaker within a speech event to that of a co-transcriber of her own words; 2) this role change also entails a transformation in the status of the speech being transcribed: the casual discourse typical of an informal speech event is transformed into an 'on-the-record' speech, that which can be entextualized and reiterated, that is, 'forgeable'. It is precisely because Anne's speech becomes a public object that Etienne and Kate are equally entitled to interpret and judge it, thus challenging Anne's authority over her own words.

Claims to authority and displays of identity are far from being stable among the three co-transcribers. They vary one in relation to the other, in the specific claims to authority accompanying specific displays of identity, throughout the transcription process, as illustrated by the last sequence below:

- 74. Kate: qu'est-ce que tu X ((K. looks at her notes)) ok et: _ en tout
- 75. cas tu n'es pas content
- 76. Etienne: voilà
- 77. Kate: tu n'es pas satisfait
- 78. Etienne: satisfaite ((E. bends over K.'s notes))
- 79. Kate: satis- hum non satis- pas satis- ((K. looks at her notes))
- 80. Etienne: non [tu n'es pas satisfaite ((E. looks at A.))
- 81. Anne: [pas _ satisfaite
- 82. Kate: pas satisfaite (6s) avec la soupe\ ((smiles)) {14:59}

74. Kate: *what do you X* ((K. looks at her notes)) okay and: *_ anyway you*
 75. *are not happy*{♂}
 76. Etienne: *that's it*
 77. Kate: *you are not satisfied*{♂}
 78. Etienne: *satisfied*{♀} ((E. bends over K.'s notes))
 79. Kate: *satis- umm no satis- no satis-* ((K. looks at her notes))
 80. Etienne: *no [you are not satisfied*{♀} ((E. looks at A.))
 81. Anne: *[not _ satisfied*{♀}
 82. Kate: *not satisfied*{♀} (6s) *with the soup*\ ((smiles)) {14:59}

After finally reaching a compromise on how to interpret Anne's words, Kate takes the floor again by making a final comment: lines 74–5 '*en tous cas tu n'es pas content*', 'anyway you are not happy {♂}'. Etienne backs up the substance of Kate's remark, but not without correcting her grammar (line 78) and looking at her notes to double-check her spelling of '*satis-faite*'. He thus displays his 'teacher' identity and at the same time ascribes to Kate the identity of non-native speaker of French. By doing so, the authority stance shifts from Kate as an expert linguist to Kate as a 'non-expert' speaker of French. Anne's overlap turn with Etienne's (line 81) signals that they are now 'in accord' with each other: a new 'alliance' has been formed between them on the basis of their shared linguistic and/or cultural identity. By correcting herself (line 82, '*pas satisfaite*', 'not satisfied {♀}'), Kate acknowledges her ascribed identity. Her adding '*avec la soupe*', 'with the soup', after a long pause (6s) followed by a smile, can be interpreted as a way of fully ratifying Anne's status as a cook in T1 and also as the closing up of the confrontational interaction in which Anne was a central protagonist. Thus, the negotiation and actualization of power and identity go hand in hand as speech is entextualized within the speaking present and into the scripted past.

5. By way of conclusion

As stated by Clifford (1983), textualization is often understood as a prerequisite for interpretation. In the present transcription activity, we see that interpretation is intrinsically part of the elaboration of the textual material. It is constructed discursively among the three co-transcribers in a perpetual tension between *experience* ('I know, I was there'), *authorship* (Anne over her own words), and *authority* (Kate's as an ethnographer). The distinction made between *transcription* (the process of transcribing) and *scription* (the product of this activity) invites us to reconsider the usual distinction between fieldwork and transcription. While transcribing, Kate is doing ethnographic fieldwork and vice versa. This distinction also sheds light on

the complex web of social, psychological, and linguistic factors that bear on the production of the textual material (*scription*).

For the past 30 years, extensive work has been produced on ethnography as a form of textualization. See, for instance, Marcus and Cushman (1982) for a good review of ethnographic writing experiences. Several textual experiences of co-authorship between the researcher and his/her informants have been made, as illustrated by the relationship between Ralph Bulmer and Ian Saem Majnep (Majnep, 1991; Marcus, 1991) or by the collaborative work between Bahr, Gregorio, Lopez and Alvarez (1974). At the heart of this research is the questioning of the construction of ethnographic knowledge and the relationship between natives, whose culture the ethnographer describes, and the anthropologist, an outsider to the culture but an expert on the textual format into which s/he wants to shape his/her materials (before they are interpreted as data).

Within the transcription activity described in these pages, two layers of 'native expertise' are embedded and two ethnographic authorities are competing. In the collaborative transcription activity, Anne and Etienne are the *natives* and it is on this basis that they were chosen as informants by Kate for her work on socialization in France and later as co-transcribers. During the transcription activity, Kate relies on them to interpret the speech and body language on the video, within the frame she has set up. In my analysis of the co-transcription activity, conducting a research on Kate's work, I am the native speaker. My authority as an ethnographer is thus reinforced by my being French and working on French linguistic data. Another subtle aspect of my authority stance lies in the fact that I never comment on my own scription. It is presented as a given, never as a construct. Yet, it constitutes the fourth temporal stage; I am mentioning page six but I never analyze it, although it plays an important role in shaping the description of the activity between Kate and her consultants.

Students of language are well aware of the theoretical implications of any work of transcription. This is clearly demonstrated by the growing literature on the question. Still, one can hardly resist highlighting discrepancies between theoretical knowledge and actual practice. Transcription has too often been treated as 'applied' work requiring non-expert skills, contrary to analysis and writing, which have alone been considered as intellectual work. They have thus typically been reserved for the professional linguist or ethnographer, who tends to stay away from the transcription (see Mondada, 2000). I hope to have shown that transcription as an essential part of linguists' and ethnographers' activity deserves far more attention as methodological practice than it has received to date.

As Bloomfield allegedly advised his students (Hymes, 1981, cited in Bucholtz, 2000: 1462), one need not open one's kitchen to the reader, but 'it is in keeping with the canons of science to let the kitchen sometimes be

seen'. Having had access to Kate's kitchen, we got on to a crucial and often concealed dimension of our professional practice: our mistakes or (ethnographic) misunderstandings, as Fabian (1991) calls them, during the process of data construction. This study shows that those misunderstandings play an important role in the work dynamic between Kate and her consultants. They not only help shape their (sometimes antagonistic) relationship but also take part in the construction of Kate's own object of investigation. Mistakes seem to be an important resource for the researcher's construction of knowledge (see Fabian, 1991, 1995), from which there is a great deal to be learned.

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Notes

- 1 I have employed traditional methods for protecting the privacy of my 'subjects', such as using pseudonyms and blurring faces in the video still shots. However, Kate has asked that I not attempt to obscure her identity in this article. First of all, it would be nearly impossible, given the small size of the professional community to which we belong and the fact that we have already jointly presented some of the preliminary findings from this research (Riley and Vigouroux, 2005) at a AAA meeting. We also plan to continue collaborating on related research and publications. Second, she has assured me that she is willing to deal with whatever threat to her face this article might pose.
- 2 Our strong friendship has enabled us to resist confrontational relationships and wounded pride that the nature of such a project often provokes.
- 3 Kate tells me that her doctoral advisor, Vincent Crapanzano, long ago recommended that she undertake this next reflexive step in her research methodology; thus, she was very pleased with my request. However, it took her nearly 10 months before she felt she had achieved the level of comfort with her consultants needed before introducing me and my camera into 'her' fieldwork setting.

- 4 Barthes (1981: 11) highlights a fundamental contradiction in any act of transcription: losing the speaker's body while at the same time trying to reconstitute it, and even extend it, that is, give it a second life through the process of transcription.
- 5 Transcription can be considered as the first step of analysis because of the multiple choices it implies, while making linguistic analysis possible. One must indeed pass through writing in order to study oral language (see Blanche-Benveniste, 1997).
- 6 Consider, for instance, the stormy debate between Lahire (1996b) and Beaud (1996), two French sociologists, who each argues, respectively, in favor and against the usage of orthographic accommodations to reproduce North African immigrants' approximations of 'hexagonal' French.
- 7 Regarding the labeling of speakers, see Mondada's (1999) discussion of the theoretical issues arising from the conventional practice and my response to her in Vigouroux (2003).
- 8 As pointed out to me by Luca Greco (personal communication, 2006), in conversation analysis, scriptions are not confined to the sole transcriber but often subjected to other researchers' subjective appreciation (see, for example, Jefferson, 1983, and Kitzinger, 1998). Sacks (1992) already conceived of transcription and data analysis as inter-subjective activities.
- 9 This is particularly obvious in the way Schieffelin (1979) describes her collaborative transcription work with her informants.
- 10 Kate has also told me that she discussed the notion of 'the observer's paradox' with Anne and Etienne. As both have studied science, she for her career as a science teacher and he as an engineer, the notion was not at all foreign.
- 11 Transcription conventions:

[: point of overlap onset
pt'être que t'as compris	: sections of overlaps
=	: continuation of the turn
+	: latching
oui:	: prolongation of the immediately preceding sound
—	: short pause
/ \	: rising/falling intonation
X	: inaudible syllable
(())	: transcriber's annotation
THAT	: loud word
< >	: delimitation of the phenomenon annotated within (())
(3s)	: elapsed time in silence by seconds
§	: gap between two turns
c-	: auto-interruption
qu'est-ce que tu X	: lower pronunciation

- 12 Each play of the video by Kate is considered as a turn. That is why the line referring to it is numbered. As will be explained in the following sections, Kate resorts to the video in various meaningful ways for the transcription activity in process. While all three co-transcribers finally agree on the denotata, *cuisinier*, no one ever entirely agrees on non/bon/oh and so this will remain as an X in the transcript.
- 13 Read [meil].
- 14 *idem*.
- 15 *idem*.
- 16 *idem*.
- 17 When I discussed this issue of 'male chef' with Kate, she said that she thought Etienne's competence in English after spending a year in the US was sufficient to understand the ambiguities of chef in the two languages but not of male. While her competence in French was clearly superior to his in English, she too lacked an understanding of the subtle semantic difference between English 'male' and French '*mâle*'.
- 18 See Gal and Irvine (1995) for an excellent discussion of linguistic ideology as it shapes research on language.
- 19 For further discussion on this aspect of the question see Riley and Vigouroux (forthcoming).

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