

The Key Transcription System

The Easy Way to Enhance Transcription Quality

“It’s not *what* you said, it’s the *way* you said it”

The Key Transcription System is an easy-to-apply symbol set which will enhance the quality of your transcriptions. It aims to capture many of the more subtle aspects of spoken language, including tone, stress and pauses; all of which can affect the meaning and interpretation of an utterance. Including these features can enable you to provide a more detailed representation of recorded speech to those reading and interpreting your transcripts.

Consider the number of ways there are to say ‘no’

no (neutral)
 no/ (surprised/innocent)
 no::/ (nervous)
 /no:\ (becoming disagreeable/ uncooperative)
 NO\ (angry)

Consider the possible variation in meaning in extended utterances

(taken from a police interview with Jimmy Savile in 2009)

Bare transcription (without key)

Yeah it could have been, I don’t, I take it on a day-to-day basis, and so it could be, it could be the seventies yeah.

Possible interpretations

(1) *Speaker sounds somewhat unsure, slightly hesitant*

Yeah::: it could/ (.) have been::: (.) I don’t/ (.) I take it on a day to day basis (..) and so:: it could (.) be the seventies/ (.) yeah::\

(2) *Speaker sounds more certain throughout*

Yeah\ it could have been – I don’t/ I take it on a day to day basis (.) and so it could be:: it could be the seventies\ (.) yeah\

(Source: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/805325/savile-interview-full-transcript.pdf>)

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Feature	Symbol	Meaning	Examples
pauses	(.)	1 second pause	
	(..)	2 second pause	
	(...)	3 second pause	
	(Xs)	X = amount of seconds	
false starts, self-correction	- <i>spell out verbatim</i>	false starts, self-correction	vict- vi- crime it was ye- the day before yesterday
emphasis	<u>underline</u>	word or syllable stress	<u>crime</u> <u>victim</u>
pitch, intonation	/	rising pitch	crime/ /crime\
	\	falling pitch	crime\ /crime\
overlap	[]	simultaneous speech of two or more speakers	A: Was she the vict[im] B: [Yeah she] was
latching	=	no gap in transition between speakers’ utterances	A: Was she the victim= B: =yeah
volume	CAPITALS	loud speech	I solve CRIME
elongated sounds	:	slight elongation	victims:
	::	medium elongation	cri::me
	:::	extended elongation	cri:::me
extra information	< >	extra information	<quoting from X> <phone rings>
ambiguous interpretation	* *	multiple interpretations possible, please refer to recording	It was *yesterday*

For examples with accompanying audio files, please visit

www.keytranscriptionsystem.co.uk