

## **Reporting of transcription practices in ESRC funded research projects**

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This paper explores how transcription practices are reported, or not reported, in ESRC End of Award Reports. The two research questions that guide the exploration are:

1. How are transcription practices reported in End of Award reports submitted to the ESRC?
2. Based on this reporting, what we can learn about transcription practices across disciplines?

The starting point for the exploration includes: a) my own experience-based hunches about transcription practices, and b) issues discussed in the relevant literature on transcription. The paper begins by making this starting point clearer.

### **The Starting Point**

My own main experiences of transcription include: a) my doctoral research which involved transcription of bilingual classroom interaction data, and b) working as a research fellow responsible for transcribing dyadic interaction between two people engaged in 'conciliation talk' (cf. Cameron, 2009). Both experiences involved long, solitary days of transcription. It was during the second experience, working as a research fellow, when I developed my present interest in transcription as an area of inquiry in its own right. The first public expression of this interest was an in-depth examination of my own developing transcriber competence (cf. Stelma and Cameron, 2007). My subsequent teaching of research methods to postgraduate students at the University of Manchester has offered an additional impetus for looking more closely at transcription. The most important (to me) hunches that I have developed through my experiences is that transcription:

- is usually treated as a data processing rather than data analysis step, and as a data processing step transcription is rarely reported/reflected on in much detail.
- is often done by a junior member of a 'typical' research team; i.e. the member of the research team less likely to formulate and disseminate the eventual insights generated by the research.
- is a constantly developing skill.
- is an insight-generating part of the research process; that is, insight is gained into the minutiae of the data and its context.

Taken together, the above hunches paint a less than coherent picture. For example, if transcription is an insight-generating activity then the researchers doing the later analysis ought to have some involvement in transcription. This clashes with my hunch that transcription is usually done by a junior member of a research team.

In my exploration of the literature on transcription, I have often read statements lamenting the lack of published work focusing specifically on transcription. My take on this is that whereas there may be a perceived lack of literature, the actual situation is not quite as impoverished as one is sometimes led to believe. I will return to this point later. The following table summarises some of the issues covered in the literature. The summary is limited to a selection of literature overtly part of educational research, plus some literature positioned more generally in social science but whose audience may arguably include educational researchers.

Table 1: Issues raised in the published literature

Issue:	Specific focus:
'Best practice' in transcription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The preparation and management of interview transcripts (McLellan, MacQueen &amp; Neidig, 2003).</li> <li>• Making decisions about transcribing classroom interaction data (Swann, 2001).</li> </ul>
Quality/status of transcripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats to, and assessment of, the trustworthiness of transcripts (Poland, 1995).</li> <li>• Transcription as language use and how it is subject to variability (Bucholtz, 2009).</li> </ul>
Transcription and theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcription as enacting the theories held by transcribers (Lapadat &amp; Lindsay, 1999).</li> <li>• Transcription as a re-orienting of the data in anticipation of the analysis stage (Dortins, 2002).</li> <li>• How transcripts emerge in a tension between authority and authorship (Vigouroux, 2007).</li> <li>• Constraints and opportunities of transcription decisions, and the need for a reflective turn (Oliver, Serovich &amp; Mason, 2005).</li> </ul>
The transcriber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges emerging from transcription done by others than the researcher (Tilley, 2003; Tilley &amp; Powick, 2002).</li> <li>• The ethics of assigning difficult transcription work to transcribers (Gregory, Russell &amp; Phillips, 1997).</li> <li>• Personal journey of 'learning to love' transcription (Bird, 2005).</li> <li>• Methodological benefits of participants as transcriptionists (Grundy, Pollon &amp; McGinn, 2003).</li> </ul>
Use of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using voice-recognition software to facilitate transcription (Anderson, 1998; Park &amp; Zeanah, 2005)</li> </ul>

Needless to say, the actual picture of the relevant literature is both more complex and rich than the above table manages to communicate. What the table does provide is a 'snap-shot' of issues of interest in (largely qualitative) educational and closely related research traditions.

To me, having an applied linguistics background, a notable feature in the above listing is the lack of any significant discussion of transcription systems, including considerations such as what may be the unit of transcription/analysis, notation used to represent contextual features, and more. Research focused on classroom interaction and studies of various sorts of language development, are educational research areas which rely on transcripts, and which therefore might benefit from a more reflective engagement with transcription practices. However, these areas of educational

research do ‘interface’ with the ‘applied linguistics’ research community, where there are many and varied published resources on transcription (e.g. Ochs, 1979; Edwards & Lampert, 1993).

Despite the above encouraging picture of the expanding body of literature on transcription, this literature may to some feel ‘hidden’ by its distribution across a wide range of academic journals, often crossing disciplinary boundaries. One may argue that transcription has no central and clearly developed status in the educational and/or social research literature, and as such more work needs to be done. In terms of the present paper, the above literature, the issues raised therein, and the developing status of transcription in the methodology literature, may be seen as additional dimensions of my own starting point, setting out to explore how transcription practices are reported in ESRC End of Award reports.

## **Methodology**

This study has explored ERSC End of Award (EoA) reports held in the ESRC Society Today web archive. Only full EoA reports were explored. Reports were identified by searching for the lexical item ‘transcription’ (including also possible derivatives such as transcribe, transcribing and so on). This sampling method has helped identify 686 reports submitted to the ESRC in the period from (approximately) 1998 to 2008 (earlier years were not available electronically). This data ‘collection’ was undertaken in November 2008.

The choice of ESRC EoA reports as data was deliberate as these reports provide:

- a manageable and standardized corpus of research writing (see appendix 1);
- a view on high quality research reflecting the emergent research priorities of UK higher education;
- a broad view on a set of related disciplines, rather than a narrow view on a single disciplinary area.

The data included reporting on research employing a variety of research methods, and involving transcription of a range of different types of data, including interviews, narrative, observation, think-aloud, focus groups, and various forms of context-based recorded interaction (e.g. classrooms).

The first few steps of the methodology about to be described, although initially trialed by myself, were undertaken by a research assistant to the project. She and I worked closely to agree on the step-by-step methodology, and through regular meetings agreed on adjustments in response to unforeseen difficulties emerging along the way.

Each of the 683 EoA reports were saved as pdf files (to retain the original formatting for reference) using the ESRC grant number as the file name. These files were then converted into text files (still retaining the ESRC grant number as the file name) and then imported into Nvivo. At this point, an additional search of the reports was conducted in Nvivo, again looking for the lexical item transcription and its derivatives, and all identified segments were coded as ‘relating to transcription’. Enough context (text preceding and following the mention of transcription) was included to enable understanding of what was communicated. The following are a few sample segments, both shorter and longer ones, giving an idea of how much context was included (see highlighted segment) and what context was excluded (non-highlighted text).

Semi-structured interviews, of average 30 minutes duration, were conducted with every teacher before and after the first and last video. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. These data were analysed using the method of constant comparison, aided by Nud\*ist, to produce a typology of interactive teaching and its associated conditions, contexts, and constraints (R000238200).

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All the transcriptions of recorded data planned for the project have been completed, not a single performance having been missed, and are available in text-file form. For each of the 48 subjects, this consists of three narrative and three interview tasks, each one in a separate file, coded so as to enable individual files or sets of files to be retrieved on the basis of task-type and time of performance (for example, Time 1 or Time 5) (R000221941).

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Each visit resulted in seven concurrent minidisk recordings and one concurrent video recording. This data was digitised to provide computer readable format (MP3 for audio, DivX for video). Each file's name consists of the three letter code for the school, followed by the colour code of the speaker, and then the date the recording took place. Thus, file KWMgreen06-03-02.mp3 corresponds to the recording of the pupil who was assigned colour green at school KWM on the third visit made on 06 March 2002.

An initial **transcription** of the individual audio recordings (for each speaker) was made by a trained **transcriber**. The initial **transcriptions** were cross-checked and amended by the research team. They were then segmented into utterances and aligned to the audio sample for that speaker. (The operational definition which we adopted in the project is that an utterance consists of the speech continuum from one silence to the next.) In order to add annotations to the data that were observed from the video, we used the software package Anvil (Kipp, 2001). The use of Anvil allowed us to view the video, listen to the merged audio file and follow each individual **transcription** at the same time. It also allowed the creation and insertion of coding labels describing pragmatic and educational features of the data (R000223563).

The above described methodology may not have captured all segments relevant to transcription (both in the search of the ESRC database and in the Nvivo search). However, I know of no commonly used synonyms used to talk about transcription. Rather, it is assumed that transcription is a fairly easily identifiable concept in research texts (as compared to e.g. the concept of 'analysis' which may be talked about using a wealth of closely related terms). See also later discussion of what additional information further in-depth exploration of individual reports revealed.

At this stage I, as principal investigator, took over the hands-on research work. Given the aim of looking across disciplines (e.g. comparing the reporting of transcription practices in educational research with the reporting in other disciplines) each report was assigned to a discipline. The codes used were from the ESRC Today website, where each ESRC project output is associated with a discipline. The following table shows the distribution of the 683 reports across the ESRC defined

disciplines.

Table 2: Distribution of reports across disciplines

Discipline	Collected	Used
Education	78	70 used
Sociology	158	148 used
Area and Development Studies	4	
Area Studies	1	
Economic and Social History	31	
Economics	11	
Environmental Planning/Planning	11	
Human Geography	68	
Interdisciplinary Studies	26	
Linguistics	51	
Management and Business Studies	50	
Political Science and International Relations	33	
Psychology	67	
Science and Technology Studies	1	
Social Anthropology	24	
Social Policy	44	
Socio-Legal Studies	17	
Statistics, Computing and Methodology	8	
	683	

The remainder of this paper will primarily focus on the education reports, but will also make comparisons with the sociology reports. When explored the number of education and sociology reports that actually talked about transcription practices went down a bit (see above table). Excluded reports used the term ‘transcription’ to denote other meanings, such as e.g. transcribing handwritten text into electronic text. At the time of the BERA conference the reports fitting into other disciplines have not yet been explored.

The next step was to generate a summary profile of the reporting of transcription practices in each separate report, thus making ‘the report’ the unit of analysis in the research. These summary profiles included information on the report itself, codes to describe the reporting of transcription practices, as well as the extracts of transcription related text from the reports. A sample of such a summary profile can be found in Appendix 2.

The following is a list of the codes used to describe transcription practices in the Education reports. The list also includes a level of higher order coding, structured mainly by whether I felt the relevant reporting problematised transcription practices or not. Additional codes identified in the exploration of the Sociology reports will be introduced later.

Scope of transcription:

- Reporting that **all** recorded data was transcribed

- Reporting that a **selection** of recorded data was transcribed

How transcription relates to analysis:

- Reporting that transcripts were imported into software
- Implying that transcripts are objects to be analysed
- Implying that transcripts enable analysis
- Reporting that/how transcripts facilitated collaborative analytical activity

Reported practices that not necessarily problematised transcription practice:

- Reporting that transcripts were deposited in an archive
- Reporting that an 'external' transcriber was used
- Reporting that the recorded/transcribed data was translated
- Reporting that transcripts were anonymised
- Reporting that permission to transcribe data was obtained

Reported practices that minimally problematised transcription:

- Reporting about features of the system of transcription used
- Reporting about transcription as a time/labour/cost-intensive activity
- Reporting about contextual features being represented in transcription

Reported practices that more overtly problematised transcription:

- Reporting about member-checking of transcription
- Reporting about research team checking transcription
- Reporting about the development of a system of transcription
- Reporting about the development of technology to aid transcription
- Reporting about transcription as insight generating activity
- Reporting about developing transcriber competence

Other codes:

- Reporting about research participants doing transcription
- Reporting about technology facilitating transcription
- Reporting about the timing of transcription
- Reporting that junior researcher did transcription
- Reporting that transcripts were made available to research participants
- Reporting that informed consent to archive transcripts was obtained

My own researcher notes, made during/alongside doing the coding activity, revealed that I frequently linked observations I made in the data to my hunches and what had been said in the literature. This dialectic feed into an embryonic theorizing, laying the foundation, then, for the later more formal analysis of patterns observed in and across the reports. Two clear outcomes of this dialectic included: 1) a realization, about halfway through coding transcription-related extracts, that I needed to look at whole reports as the unit of analysis, and 2) that groups of reports differed in terms of whether they problematised transcription or not, thereby introducing the higher-order element of the coding (see the grouping of codes above).

A final step, to take seriously the report as the unit of analysis, a sub-sample of reports (20% of

the education reports and 10% of the Sociology reports) were skim read in their entirety to gauge the extent to which the summary profiles provided an adequate account of the reporting of transcription practices. This step identified additional information about who did what in the research (e.g. who transcribed the data), what kind of data was transcribed, relationships between sources of data and the research steps preceding and following transcription.

The discussion of findings in the following two sections of this paper is based on patterns evident in the 70 summary profiles of Education EoA reports as well as the 148 summary profiles of Sociology EoA reports.

### **Emerging Patterns in the Education EoA Reports**

Building on the developing notion that some EoA reports did problematise transcription, but others did not, groupings or clusters of reports started to emerge in the data set. However, these were not neat groupings that could be defined using traditional componential (dictionary) like definitions. That is, meaningful groups of reports did not necessarily share exactly the same features or codes. Rather, the codes were akin to features that were more or less central in groups of reports. Hence, the groupings resembled prototypes (following Eleanor Rosch).

#### Group A: No problematising of transcription practices

The most common prototype of education reports was a group of 45 education reports (64% of the total number of education reports) that did not problematise transcription in any way. In fact, 10 of these reports did nothing more than to say that data had been transcribed, and offering no other detail. Examples include:

*All discussions were audio-taped and transcribed (R000221592).*

*Interviews were between 10 and 50 minutes in length and were recorded and transcribed (R000237077).*

*The interviews which were carried out in the homes or in the mainstream school, were audio-taped and transcribed (R000222487).*

However, the majority of reports fitting into this group did say a bit more than this about transcription. Common codes in this group included:

- Reporting that **all** recorded data was transcribed (17; 12 in group A)

This was usually determined by the presence of the words 'all', 'full' or 'fully' when referring to transcription; for example:

*The audio-recordings of all the interviews we conducted were transcribed (R000237640).*

*Individual interviews and focus group data were tape recorded and fully transcribed (R000237900).*

- Reporting that transcripts were imported into software (15; 10 in group A)

This was sometimes overtly stated; other times it had to be inferred (but it was still fairly clear) from the discussion of transcripts and software in the same discourse context; for example:

*They [semi-structured interviews] were fully recorded, transcribed and loaded into NVivo (R000239232).*

*Audio-tapes of the interviews were transcribed in full. Transcripts were analysed using the computer package Nud\*ist Vivo, in which responses were coded relating to one or more key themes that were then subdivided (RES-000-27-0041).*

- Implying that transcripts are objects to be analysed (21; 16 in group A)

Interpreting the significance of this code (implying that transcripts are objects to be analysed) is perhaps particularly difficult without a better insight into the research that the texts reported upon. No systematic in-depth exploration of the relevant reports has been undertaken as yet.

*Analysis proceeded from the particular to the general through detailed and repeated readings of transcripts (R000237900).*

*As we write, analysis of the teacher and headteacher interview transcripts has been completed (R000237640).*

Consistent with the concept of prototypes, not all reports 'placed' in this group implied or reported all of the above, and some of the reports in this group had further things to report about transcription. However, these further things did not occur frequently enough to warrant mentioning these as 'common' codes. Again, the unifying feature of this group of reports was that they did not problematise transcription in any way.

One possible grouping of the education reports, then, is a set of reports which do not problematise transcription practices, which imply that comprehensive transcription of recorded data is desirable, which commonly load transcripts into software for analysis, and which imply that transcripts are the objects of the project analysis. The sample summary profile in appendix 1 is an example of a report that seems to fit this category. Further in-depth analyses of the actual reports would have to be undertaken to see if this is a credible interpretation of the data. This kind of in-depth exploration would have to be open to the possibility that the grouping identified here may be an artifact of the analytical steps employed in this research. However, if the grouping does stand up to a more in-depth scrutiny of the reports themselves, it may be worth finding out if there really was no problematisation of transcription practices in these research projects, why this may have been, and if a common underlying epistemology, or lack thereof, may be at work.

Group B: Minimal problematising of transcription practices

A second grouping among the education reports was 8 reports (11% of the total number) that offered a minimal level of problematising transcription practices. Codes associated with such minimal problematising included:

- Reporting about features of the system of transcription used (8; 5 in group B)

This included fairly minimal references to how the recorded data was transcribed (e.g. ‘verbatim’) or by reference to some published ‘standard’. For example:

*Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data was analysed using the NVIVO data analysis package. The application of NVIVO involves a process in which each verbatim transcript is systematically analysed in a number of stages (RES-000-22-1786).*

*The video recordings were transcribed and coded using an intensive system of discourse analysis adapted from the work of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) (see Annex 2) (R000239213).*

- Reporting about transcription as a time/labour/cost-intensive activity (4; 3 in group B)

In one case this was a very limited reference to transcription cost (see first example); in other cases it more detailed and linked to the overall resourcing of the project (see second example).

*Anticipated transcription costs for this phase also doubled (RES-139-25-0152).*

*Interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated. Transcription and translation were time consuming and expensive and the increase in numbers of interviewees was only possible because of savings made elsewhere in the project (RES-000-22-0911).*

- Reporting about contextual features being represented in transcription (4; 1 in group B)

This code occurred in four Education reports, but in three of these there was further more overt problematising of transcription practices.

*All of the interviews were video and audio recorded, and the transcripts were annotated with descriptions of non-verbal activity, including gestures, and with pupils’ written work (R000239375).*

Overall, group B is a fairly small grouping and the value of it for making future conclusions is perhaps less clear. However, using the distinction of whether reports problematised transcription practices or not, these eight reports were positioned somewhere inbetween the two much clearer and frequently (in the data) opposite possibilities. Also, this group of reports differed in that relatively few codes were needed to describe what they said about transcription, with no more than an average of two codes per report (median) and a dispersion of between 1 and 3 codes (range) across reports. One might argue that this scarcity of codes needed to describe the reporting of transcription practices in this grouping is an artifact of looking for reports satisfying very limited criteria, i.e. only those that minimally problematised transcription practices; nothing more and nothing less. However, a range of other codes could occur without affecting a report’s group B status, including:

- Reporting that all recorded data was transcribed (17; 0 in group B)
- Reporting that a selection of recorded data was transcribed (8; 1 in group B)
- Reporting that transcripts were imported into software (15; 1 in group B)
- Implying that transcripts are objects to be analysed (21; 3 in group B)
- Implying that transcripts enable analysis (10; 1 in group B)
- Reporting that/how transcripts facilitated collaborative analytical activity (4; 0 in group B)
- Reporting that transcripts were deposited in an archive (5; 0 in group B)
- Reporting that an 'external' transcriber was used (4; 0 in group B)
- Reporting that the recorded/transcribed data was translated (3; 1 in group B)
- Reporting that transcripts were anonymised (3; 0 in group B)
- Reporting that permission to transcribe data was obtained (2; 0 in group B)

In sum, further exploration would be needed to see whether identifying such an 'in-between' group is useful or not, and whether it is distinguishable in some more fundamental way or not.

#### Group C: More overt problematising of transcription practices

A final grouping identified among the education reports was 17 reports (24% of the total number) that more overtly problematised transcription practices. These included three sub-groupings defined by: 1) a concern about checking the transcription with the research participants (7 reports), 2) a concern about checking the transcriptions within the research team (5 reports), and 3) a concern about developing systems for transcription (technology or notation) (3 reports). A final two reports touched on the importance of developing transcriber competence and transcription as an insight generating activity.

- Reporting about member-checking of transcription (7 reports)

This was usually a reference to the practice of showing the transcripts to participants in order to get feedback on their quality/accuracy.

*Each interview was recorded, transcribed and a copy returned to the interviewee for factual checking and to identify any text that they would not wish to be directly quoted (RES-000-23-1192).*

*The protocol ensured anonymity, contained the option to terminate the interview at any point, entitlement to exclude from the transcript anything the interviewee did not wish to be seen by others, and an undertaking to provide a copy of the final report if requested. Interviewees were sent a copy of the interview transcript for factual correction. This arrangement was consistent with institutional guidelines (Appendix 2). Three interviewees returned their transcript with corrections, and in one case, additional comment was given (R000222858).*

In the seven reports concerned with checking transcription with participants, the number of codes applied was quite low, with only 1-4 codes used; median = 2. Moreover, the range of different codes, besides member-checking, was quite wide, meaning that there was little coherence in this sub-grouping besides reporting about member-checking, and more generally saying fairly little about transcription. Hence, it is a bit harder to see this group as a 'prototype'.

- Reporting about research team checking transcription (5 reports)

This ranged from a couple of quite simple/brief references to internal checks to more elaborate reporting including the reasons for why the checks were necessary. These five reports reported relatively more about transcription (2-6 codes used; median = 4).

*An initial transcription of the individual audio recordings (for each speaker) was made by a trained transcriber. The initial transcriptions were **cross-checked and amended by the research team** (R000223563).*

*All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Each transcript was then checked by the Research Fellow against the original tape-recording; a labour-intensive process but **one which was necessary to identify small but potentially significant errors in transcribing** (R000237857).*

*All interviews were recorded, transcribed and **checked by the interviewer**. Transcripts were made available to the participants; they were not required to read or check them (RES-139-25-0111).*

The above three examples were chosen to highlight how checks seemed to be necessary because of concerns about the quality of transcription done by external transcribers. In the first example this is overt, with a direct reference to a 'trained transcriber' and the following cross-checking by the research team. In the second example it is again fairly overt given the fact that it was necessary for the Research Fellow to identify the 'potential small but significant errors in transcribing'. In the final example the involvement of an external transcriber is not as overtly clear, but a more in-depth examination of the report indicates (but does not confirm unambiguously) that the 'interviewers' were research fellows. From this it may be assumed that the original transcription, which the interviewer research fellows 'checked' was produced with external help.

Of the final two cases of internal transcription checks, one involved translation as part of the transcription, and checks on the quality of the translation, and the other involved a more collaborative form of checking transcripts across the research team.

- Reporting about the development of a system of transcription (2 reports)
- Reporting about the development of technology to aid transcription (2 reports)

Of the 3 reports concerned with developing systems of transcription (one report was coded as concerned with developing both system of transcription and technology to aid transcription) were all dealing with multimodal data, and had relatively more to say about transcription practices (3, 5

and 5 codes used). All were concerned about representing the multimodal context in their transcriptions and all involved technology in some way. Rather than citing coded extracts, the following extracts are selected to illustrate the methodological focus of the reports.

*This project reconceptualises teaching and learning as multimodal processes, and extends a social semiotic perspective of language to account for other forms of communication in order to develop research tools, and to comment on the contribution of actional and visual forms of communication to the teaching and learning of secondary school science (R000236931).*

*A micro analysis of the role of bodily modalities is shown in the multimodal transcriptions which inform the study's interpretations of the children's graphic activity. Exemplar transcriptions are included in Appendix 2. The whole study is supported by this description, and references to bodily modalities are to be found throughout the Results sections (RES-000-22-0599).*

*... the overall aim of the project was to create the facilities to build integrated multimedia representations of teaching and learning situated within authentic classrooms across all sectors of education (RES-474-25-0008).*

Given their methodological focus, it is perhaps not surprising that these reports had a lot to say about transcription practices. As such they are quite unique in this corpus of research writing as a whole, and in this grouping (group C).

- Reporting about transcription as insight generating activity (2 reports)

Given that this code corresponds to one of my hunches when starting out (see above) it was somewhat disappointing to see only two instances of this code in the entire data set. One relevant extracts is:

*The interviewers transcribed their own tapes because in so doing they became thoroughly acquainted with the data. The transcribing was done as quickly as possible and the transcripts sent to the teachers and researchers (R000223044).*

This extract is fairly unambiguous, at least in terms of how transparent the meaning of my code is present. It is a bit puzzling, however, by how becoming 'thoroughly acquainted with the data', which presumably requires ample time, contrasts with 'the transcribing was done as quickly as possible'. Having had a closer look at the report, nothing else was said about the value of the interviewers transcribing their own tapes.

The other report associated with this code was more ambitious and what it had to say, but also less specific in what it meant.

*This [attending to different modes of representation and communication] demands a re-thinking of what to include within the analytical domain: the notion of 'data' has to be expanded - which in*

turn requires a broadening of data collection, transcription and processes of analysis (R000238463).

This extract implies that transcription is within the ‘analytical domain’. Later in this report, in a section headed ‘Transcription’ (indicating that the transcription procedures will be discussed), there was no more than the following limited text:

*A multimodal approach raises fundamental questions around transcription. One of the two main questions of the project was 'What is English in this classroom?' This made it essential theoretically and methodologically to attend to all the means of making meaning, and impossible to rule any one of them out beforehand. Hence our transcription needed to attend to all modes that were present.*

*For us there are two distinct perspectives on transcription: for the purposes of analysis the needs of theory have priority; for the purposes of presentation the needs of the audience come first.* (R000238463).

The authors are clearly aware of the challenges involved in representing multimodal classroom data. However, unlike the earlier cited reports that provided a great deal of detail about their multimodal transcription practices, this report leaves unanswered questions.

- Reporting about developing transcriber competence (1)

*This was the first research project that Jane XXX [surname omitted] had been involved in, and both transcription and analysis required quite close supervision (R000221941).*

This report contained no further references to what was involved in this ‘close supervision’. Once more, with only a single and slightly impoverished reference to this last code, again corresponding to one of my hunches at the start of the study, I was left somewhat disappointed.

In sum, a wide range of transcription practices are reported in the corpus of ESRC EoA reports explored in this study. However, most reports do not actually problematise transcription, and instead seem to see transcription as an unproblematic data processing step. This seems to confirm one of my own hunches at the start of the research (see above). More in-depth exploration is needed to establish whether this pattern in the data is underpinned by a common epistemology. It is, of course, possible that transcription was problematised in these research projects, but that this aspect of the research did not fit into the tight word-count limit of the ESRC EoA report (about 5000 words; see appendix 1). Some reports do address the challenges of transcription more directly. But again, depth of engagement is (for whatever the reason may be) lacking.

### **Comparison with the Sociology reports**

An exploration of the sociology EoA reports revealed that a similar proportion of these reports failed

to problematise transcription. The following table compares the Education and Sociology reports using the three groupings developed with the Education data, i.e reports with no problematising of transcription practices, reports with minimal problematising of transcription practices, and reports with more overt problematising of transcription practices.

Table 3: A simple comparison of Education and Sociology reports

Discipline	Group A (no problematising)	Group B (minimal)	Group C (overt)
Education	45 (64%)	8 (11%)	17 (24%)
Sociology	105 (71%)	30 (20%)	13 (9%)

Looking at these numbers, it appears that relatively more of the Education reports fall into group C, i.e. problematise transcription practices. However, it is not entirely straightforward to compare the two sets of reports in the above manner. The exploration of the sociology reports resulted in the identification of additional codes/reported practices which then had to be ‘classified’ as constituting no, minimal or more overt problematising of transcription. A selection of these ‘new’ codes is discussed in the following text. There were also some codes used in describing the Education data which were not necessary when describing the Sociology data. Finally, there were significantly more Sociology reports (148 as compared to 70 Education reports) making it likely that the sample of Sociology reports may be closer to capturing the full variability present in the respective disciplines.

The two codes already identified in the Education reports as describing how transcription relates to analysis were also present with a similar frequency in the coded Sociology reports. However, there were additional unique codes used to describe this aspect of the Sociology reports, and this may indicate that discussion of how transcription or transcripts relate to analysis is richer in the Sociology reports as compared to the Education reports. The following extracts exemplify some of this richness.

- Reporting that/how transcription is a transformation (4 reports)

*We also performed a team analysis of some of the data sets, reading both the transcript and listening to original recording of the interview. This enabled us to check for representativeness in the transcription, and also to perform an analysis of what ‘gets lost in transcription’ (Clarke 2007) (RES-148-25-0003).*

*Our work underlines that transcription, whilst important, is a translation from one modal form to another; hence, depositors need to be aware of its particular affordances and reductions (e.g. of orthography, typography, punctuation, literariness; Atkinson, 1992), rather than seeing it as an essential precursor to meaningful analysis (see OG) (RES-346-25-3010).*

- Reporting about the relative value of transcripts as data (5 reports)

*The 'discursive turn' in ethnographic research has arguably led to a neglect of these more traditional ethnographic methods and hence to a reification of transcribed talk - a privileging of 'text' at the expense of 'context' (Hak, 1999) (R000222892).*

*Their [UK farmers] obvious choice therefore [when competing with other international agricultural producers] was to concentrate on quality. Yet from the data (documentary and transcripts of interviews) it was difficult to discern a clear sense of what was meant by quality (R000222946).*

*The systematic reading of the family transcripts and re-listening to the interviews proved to be vitally important in allowing us to make connections across generations and across time. The significance of this process should be not be [sic] underestimated. We were less convinced of the value of the descriptive case profiles that we produced for our priority group of cases. These profiles were thematically focused and were for our own internal consumption (ethically speaking they could not be used in any other way). They were not ethnographically detailed enough to qualify as 'histories'. They added relatively little to our analytical tool box and we found ourselves returning to our transcripts rather than using these profiles when checking contexts for our interpretations (RES-000-22-0765).*

Some of the above observations may also constitute an overt problematisation of transcription practices. If the Sociology reports were re-coded to recognize this possibility, the number of Sociology reports fitting into Group C (see table 3) would increase from 13 to 20.

There were also a few unique/new codes in the Sociology reports considered to describe practices that minimally problematised transcription. Two of these are:

- Reporting how transcription was facilitated by transcription-oriented observation (3 reports)

*The observer recorded the order of speech to aid the transcription of these data ... (H333250034).*

*... go round room asking people to introduce themselves by first name (to help transcriber identify the different voices in the room) (RES-143-25-0011).*

*During the workshops the transcriber tracked the order of speech. In the first session, this process was aided by the use of large place names clearly displayed in front of each participant. The tracking proved to be very useful ... (RES-333-25-0016).*

In addition to the above mentioned possibility, i.e. that discussion of 'transcription as transformation' may constitute an overt problematising of transcription, there was one (other) new/unique code used to describe the Sociology reports that was considered an overt problematisation of

transcription.

- Reporting that transcriber's 'outsider' status caused problems with transcription (2 reports)

*Transcribing the interviews proved to be a time-consuming process, as secretarial staff encountered great difficulty in deciphering some participants' accents and unfamiliar terminology about Islam and the Asian culture. The research team, therefore, spent a substantial amount of time checking the transcripts (R000223530).*

*... transcription of the highly technical language used by subjects in the interviews (all the more so since they felt they could relax and employ their own language when speaking to someone who had trained and worked in their field), proved to be an impossible, slow and laborious task for transcribers. Although transcription of the interviews would have had numerous advantages, in practice professionally [sic] made transcripts proved completely unusable [sic] (R000222635).*

In fact, this code provides additional detail to the earlier observation, made in the analysis of the Education data, that checks of transcription may sometimes be necessary when using 'external' transcribers.

There were also some codes that were unique or more frequent in the Education reports. 'Member-checking' as part of the transcription process was rarely reported in the Sociology reports (reported in seven Education reports but only in two Sociology reports). The fact that the Sociology data set consists of more reports strengthens this finding. There was also no cases of developing systems of transcription (technology or notation), e.g. to deal with multimodal data, in the Sociology data set.; three Education reports were concerned with this kind of development.

## **Final Remarks**

It is clearly premature to make any firm conclusions about the intricacies of how transcription practices are reported in ESRC EoA reports, in either the Education or Sociology disciplines, or what may be the full range of differences and similarities between the two sets of reports explored in this paper. This is work in progress, and outcomes, so far, are tentative.

It seems reasonably safe to say, at this juncture, that the rich problematising of transcription in the literature is not reflected in most of the ESRC EoA reports explored so far in this research. At the same time, a small number of reports in both Education and Sociology, do seem to engage with the complexities of transcription, and the themes from the literature are recognizable in these reports.

The general lack of any problematisation of transcription in the majority of EoA reports may indicate a genuine lack of such problematising among education and sociology researchers. Alternatively, it may have to do with the word-count limitations of the ESRC EoA report format, and how the writers prioritise when writing up these reports.

Further exploration of the ESRC EoA reports, would have to include: a) a more in-depth

exploration of selected individual reports and b) an exploration of additional disciplines (e.g. Linguistics and Psychology).

In the spirit of ongoing exploration, it is useful (to me at least) to summarise my revised hunches, as they now look after having explored the reporting of transcription practices in the current data set, and incorporating also issues raised in the literature. The following table lists these revised hunches, including the genesis of these hunches listed on the right; my experience (Exp), the literature (Lit) and the exploration of the ESRC EoA reports (Data). Note that the hunches are phrased as embryonic suggestions for practice, reflecting my own increased confidence and willingness to move towards what may be the eventual contribution of my research agenda. The following list may also be seen as the starting point for the next phase of my research into transcription practices; seeing, then, this BERA paper as both an ‘end’ and a ‘beginning’.

Table 4: Revised hunches (or embryonic suggestions)

Revised Hunches:	Source:
There may need to be some overt assessment of what recorded data needs full transcription, partial transcription, some other accompanying record, or no transcription at all.	Lit + Data*
Observational techniques that facilitate later transcription of recorded data may benefit the ease of transcription and eventual quality of transcripts.	Data
A system of transcription may need to satisfy both analytical and presentational needs of a project.	Data
Voice-recognition software may facilitate the transcription process.	Lit
Transcription may need to be treated as an ethical concern in its own right.	Lit + Data
If a junior researcher does transcription then the research team may need to ensure that they develop appropriate transcriber competence.	Exp + Lit + Data
If an ‘external’ transcriber is used then it may be necessary to check the quality of the transcription.	Data
There may be a need to consider how transcription transforms data, and how things may be ‘lost’ in transcription.	Data
If it is established that transcription is indeed an insight generating activity (as gauged by the research aims), then the person(s) doing the transcription may need to have a prominent role in the subsequent analysis/interpretation stage.	Exp (+ Data)
It may be necessary to reflect on the relationship between transcripts and analysis/interpretation, including the relative value of transcripts.	Exp + Data
In collaborative projects transcripts may serve to facilitate collaborative sense-making.	Data

## Appendix 1: Guidelines for writing ESRC research report (as of 2009)

Copied directly from the ESRC End of Award Report Form currently in use.

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### 1.6 Research Report

A full report on the research should accompany the completed report form. The length of this should not exceed 5,000 words (references are not included in the word count). The report should be a succinct, self-contained document, giving a straightforward and critical appraisal of the research in, as far as possible, non-technical language. **The following standard headings should be used:**

- **Background**

Including, for example, relevant previous or parallel research. Theoretical positions and hypotheses where relevant.

- **Objectives**

Aims and objectives of the research and any changes to these. You should state clearly how each objective has been addressed and whether the objective has been met or not, referring to other parts of the report as required. Where an objective has not been addressed or has not been met successfully, you should state the reasons for this. This will ensure that genuine difficulties faced in the course of the research are recognised and taken into account by the evaluators.

- **Methods**

Specific reference to methods used, including survey design, special equipment, new methods and analysis of results.

- **Results**

A report of the results of the project and analyses to date.

- **Activities**

To include related activities such as conferences, networks etc.

- **Outputs**

Publications, other dissemination, datasets (with confirmation of deposit at the ESDS where applicable), software etc. These should not duplicate the Society Today return but may be used to highlight particularly important outputs.

- **Impacts**

Are there instances of the research results being used or applied outside of the project, including commercial exploitation, either actual or proposed? Please detail any links with, or interest shown by, users of the research.

- **Future Research Priorities**

Are there lines of research arising from this project which might profitably be pursued (not necessarily with ESRC funding)?

## Appendix 2: Sample Summary Profile

**R000237211**

**Research focus:** To revise historical understanding of the educational significance of the process of wartime evacuation.

**Data transcribed:** Individual interviews with teachers.

**Comments:** Group A.

**Features:**

- o Reporting that transcripts were imported into software
- o Implying that transcripts are objects to be analysed
- o Reporting that all recorded data was transcribed

**Extracts:**

*Computer assisted analysis of interview transcripts is on-going, intially [sic] utilising QSR NUD.IST software and latterly NVivo.*

*This yielded a total of 300 audio cassettes containing over 400 hours of data. Each interview was fully transcribed.*

*Computer assisted analysis of our interview transcripts is on-going using QSR NUD.IST software.*

*Close reading of interview transcripts has frequently revealed the high degree of complexity and even contradictoriness that characterise the construction of individual accounts of narrative identity.*

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