

Transcription Guidelines

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Contents

Clean verbatim guidelines.....	1
Interviews with an interpreter	2
Formatting and structure	2
Spelling and grammar	4
Smoothing.....	6
Noises and non-verbal communication	7
Digression and incomprehensible material	8
Quotations	8
Confidentiality and review	8
Character use	9
Note-taking guidelines.....	10

Clean verbatim guidelines

I adapted these guidelines for my own transcripts. They were taken and elaborated upon from the following sources (in order of importance):

- Wiesli, Thea Xenia, Ulf Liebe, Thomas Hammer, and Roger Bär., 2021. “Sustainable Quality of Life: A Conceptualization That Integrates the Views of Inhabitants of Swiss Rural Regions.” *Sustainability*, 13(16): 9187. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169187> [see transcription guide in Supplementary Information 3]
- Dresing, T., Pehl, T., Schmieder, C., 2015. “Manual (on) Transcription. Transcription Conventions, Software Guides and Practical Hints for Qualitative Researchers.” 3rd English Edition. Marburg. Available [here](#).
- Humble, A., 2009. “Guide to Transcribing.” Available [here](#).
- Online posts about clean/intelligent transcription: [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

The guidelines are meant for clean (also called intelligent) verbatim transcription as opposed to true verbatim transcription, and will be used for interviews with target households. It is not paraphrasing and stays true to the voice and intended meaning of the participants. It is, however, not adequate for psychological or linguistic or discourse analysis.

Interviews with an interpreter

In most of my interviews, I had interpreters/research assistants doing oral translation of all the questions from English/French into a local language and then of the answers back into English/French. This changes the dynamic of the interview and adds complexity to the exchange and transcription, especially since the research assistants were encouraged to take on an active role. This necessitates some special rules and I have indicated in the guidelines and will help to simplify as much as possible. Unless otherwise noted, the standard rules apply as well to interviews with an interpreter.

Only the English/French parts of the conversation will be transcribed (i.e. in most cases what was spoken by the interpreters or myself). Anything said in another language will be lost, as well as the dynamic (pauses, length of speeches, sometimes the translation is not word-by-word but longer or shorter than the original as the RA renders it legible to me, etc). This is thus a clean (not true) verbatim transcription of the spoken English/French parts of the interview. What is said is considered more important than how it was said as most of this is lost in translation anyways and I do a thematic analysis and not a quantitative content or discourse/communication analysis. There is thus some discretion at the transcriber's disposal about what fillers and interruptions and the like are deemed relevant and which ones not.

Formatting and structure

- Transcribe everything with MAXQDA 2018, using Arial font size 11.
- At the top, insert interview code (country/year/village/count_hhtype/landownership), category, transcription style and transcriber identity in the following, anonymised way:
 - **Code:** R1812_11
 - **Category:** Target household
 - **Style:** Clean verbatim or note-taking
 - **Transcriber:** Interviewer or transcription assistant
- At the end of the transcript, add **END OF RECORDING** in bold uppercase letters on the last line of the transcript.
- Export each transcript as “rtf”, selecting “as table with paragraph numbers”. Name the file according to the code name, e.g. R1812_11.rtf
- Use I for the interviewer, RA for the research assistant/interpreter, and P for the participant/respondent. If there are several participants, use P1, P2, etc. If different people ask questions, put I2 and possibly explain their role in brackets. The main interviewer should remain I.
- Each speaker contribution receives their own paragraph. There is an empty line between the speakers. Interviews with interpreters:
 - P (or P1, P2 if there are multiple participants) marks the answer of the corresponding participant even though the spoken English/French is said by the RA. Keep the grammatical person as spoken by the RA (mostly the third person, e.g. “she said...”). I instructed the RAs to use the third person in order to mark their presence and distinguish their own contributions. However, sometimes, especially in early interviews, the use the first person. Whichever person used by the RA should be transcribed.
 - If the narration is by the same person and only interrupted for translation in between, you can put it into one paragraph. Breaks/interruptions in order to allow for translation don't have to be marked.

- If there are several participants speaking at the same time or after one another and the response as translated by the RA is not overwhelmingly attributable to a single participant, mark “P1&2” at the start (even if one participant says more than the other – this level of detail will not be indicated). This is often the case when they agree, repeat or reinforce or complement each other’s point and the RA does not distinguish between the two, e.g. both say that their youngest child is 12 years old.
- If there are more than two respondents and their statements are not clearly assignable, put P* (meaning it is one or several of P1, P2, P3, etc.).
- Add “RA” for all the statements made by the interpreter as himself/herself that are not attributable to the participants (usually in the first person), e.g. when clarifying with the interviewer such as “do you want me to ask again?” or “what do you mean?”. This can be during a part where only the RA speaks without interruptions but you might have to split it up into several paragraphs, e.g. first a few sentences as P, then a side comment in the role as RA and then back continuing what P has said.
- The same goes when the RA responds to the researcher without translating the question and answer back to the participant but just clarifies himself/herself based on what the participant said before: we attribute it to the RA to indicate that the participant was not asked again, and that it might also be affected by the RA’s interpretation (even though they were always encouraged to ask again if the answer wasn’t already directly contained in the participant’s response).
- The transcriber decides whom the statement is attributed to by choosing either P or RA. When it is clear that the answer of the participant was very short, followed by a significant explanation by the RA, it is worth indicating this even though it might not be fully clear what part was said by the participant (maybe in a statement before and didn’t get translated) and what part is the RA’s own knowledge and interpretation.
- When the researcher says something that goes under in the conversation, without being translated or responded to by the RA, you can leave it away unless it seems relevant, in which case you then add [not translated]. This is because adding the statement might give the false impression that the statement was translated and that the participant or RA reacted to it when in reality they ignored it.
- If the interviewer’s contribution is directed at one person, either P or RA, and it is clear from the context who it is, you don’t have to add anything. However, if the interviewer, within one contribution, directs a few sentences to P and then to RA or vice versa, split them up into different paragraphs and add [to RA] for the part that is directed at the RA to make it clear.
- Speech overlaps are marked by //. At the start of an interjection, // follows. The simultaneous speech is within // and the person’s interjection is in a separate line, also marked by //. Word or sentence abort is marked by /. Interviews with interpreters:
 - Speech overlaps and sentence aborts are not noted. Further, sometimes the RA gets cut off by the participant in asking the question when they already anticipate it. You don’t have to indicate that as we don’t know at which point the cut-off happened. If the answer wasn’t clear, RA and interviewer normally probed further.
- Insert timestamps at the beginning of each paragraph. Interviews with an interpreter:
 - Timestamps are set at the beginning of the English/French parts, i.e. timestamps for the response should be inserted after the respondent finished talking and before the RA starts

translating. This is only for reasons of simplicity as it helps to quickly find and check the transcription. However, sometimes the respondent's voice should be relistened to as well in order to get the context (especially if non-verbal utterances have been noted).

- If the respondent is talking at length, you may double the playing speed but don't jump sections as in-between comments might be lost. It cannot be read from the audio waves who is talking.
- Any non-spoken elements that need to be noted (see below) are added in brackets, i.e. [].
- Never use round parentheses, (), as they can be confusing.
- Insert memos if you need to add a commentary, question, etc. or if you don't understand a word, so that we can double check it.
- Use the following font colour coding scheme for review when necessary:
 - **Red**: identifying information
 - **Yellow**: unknown key words in Kinyarwanda
 - **Blue**: questions about uniformity
 - **Green**: pronunciation unclear or word/spelling unknown
- Work with the following shortcuts in MAXQDA:
 - Timestamp on enter.
 - Automatic speaker change only if one respondent (always bold) with I: and P:
 - 0=I: (bold)
 - 1=P: (bold) or P1: (if two speakers, bold)
 - 2=P1&2: (bold)
 - 3=RA: (bold)
 - 4=[Kinyarwanda word] or [Lao word]
 - 5=[RA clarifies without translating]
 - 6=[incomprehensible]
 - 7=[identity withheld]
 - 8=[participant speaking English].
 - 9=[participant speaking French].

Spelling and grammar

- Use proper spelling, capitalisation and punctuation.
- Informal contractions are retained (e.g. isn't, gonna, wouldn't) as well as slang vocabulary (e.g. dope fiend). It turned out that contractions were just added by the transcribers even when they were not used by the speakers – words being contracted or not has no meaning.
- Use punctuation for the sake of legibility (point or comma according to the emphasis). Three dots can be used to link two parts that belong together but don't form a coherent sentence, e.g.: I was bringing the bag to your house... these kind of tasks.
- If a person talks in a way that is not grammatically correct, type "[sic]" immediately after the error to indicate that it is actually what they said rather than an error in transcription. Interviews with an interpreter:
 - As the grammatical level of our three RAs used is rather limited, do not put [sic] behind every mistake but make sure to transcribe what you hear without correcting the grammar [it turned out that this rule was not always followed as in the speed of writing, the grammatical person (especially the third person) was often corrected, i.e. "he go to the

market” became “he goes to the market”]. Only mark [sic] if the word or sentence is substantively wrong in order to clarify that it was not a transcription mistake, you may also add the corrected version in brackets. Exception: very often the interpreter confuses he/she, him/her or his/hers and this can be very confusing given that people might talk about themselves or others. Write the correct pronoun for the person who was referred to when the case is clear without putting [sic]. This is often the case when only one person was speaking, i.e. P or P1. If you are unsure who the pronoun is referring to, add [unclear who RA is referring to]. If two people were speaking, P1&P2, always leave the pronouns as they are since we can't know who was meant. If there are manifest mistakes or confusions, you can always add comments in brackets.

- For numbers that are nine or less write out the number (e.g., type “seven” instead of “7”). However, measurements/quantities (e.g. in kg), decimals, equations, house numbers, page numbers, telephone numbers, dates, etc. are always in numerals. Also write “50/50” instead of “fifty-fifty”.
- Write out “to” in order to indicate a range, e.g. “12 to 15”, not “12-15”.
- Retain commonly used abbreviations such as e.g., kg, RWF, etc. even if it was spoken out differently (“for instance” would turn into “e.g.”, “kip” would turn into “LAK”).
- Spelling of key words used:
 - Kinyarwanda:
 - kuragiza: institutional arrangement for cow-sharing
 - kwisuma: the work of carrying heavy loads on your head, etc.
 - murakoze cyane: thank you
 - nyiragabana: sharecropping
 - ubudehe: welfare categories
 - imihigo: performance contracts
 - umuganda: mandatory community work
 - uruteerane: unclear meaning; possibly sharecropping or land use consolidation programme
 - VUP: public works programme
 - ROSCA: rotating savings and credit association
 - SACCO: saving and credit cooperative organisation
 - English:
 - marshland
 - manure
 - pruning
 - mulching
 - probe and prompt
 - land-use consolidation program
 - cultivate
 - mason
 - receive
- If the interviewer himself/herself speaks in the local language and there is no oral translation, we decided to translate those parts directly into English (it is mostly just greetings, asking names or age and thank yous at the start and the end of some transcripts).

Smoothing

- Transcribe literally; do not summarise or transcribe phonetically (no improvements or embellishments). The sentence form is retained, even if it contains syntactical errors. However, if the meaning of the transcription is incomprehensible because of that or because a word is missing, clarify this in parentheses. Interviews with interpreters:
 - In general, RAs were instructed to translate as literally and accurately as possible and should not paraphrase or summarise participant statements. However, emphasis was put on conceptual equivalence and not on word-by-word translation.
 - RAs were encouraged to take on a more active role, add their own questions as well and to clarify answers with the participants in the local language in order to be sure to grasp the right concepts so that the translation will be correct (sometimes the participant also asks for clarification of the question). RAs were asked to translate significant exchanges as well, especially when they added their own questions. However, if they fail to do so and there is a significant exchange happening without a corresponding translation into English/French, add [RA clarifies without translating] and then just continue with the next English/French sentence, which might often be in the RA, not the P, role.
 - Beyond that, the RA is treated the same as the interviewer regarding smoothing of the transcript. I.e. confirmational interruptions, repetitions, fillers and the like by the RA are not transcribed (even when they are said in English) and there is no need to add [RA clarifies without translating]. It is part of the normal conversation flow in order to make the exchange more natural.
 - The same goes for short exchanges between RA and respondent where the RA usually tries to confirm and fully understand the answer in order to translate the response or clarifies the question (sometimes the respondents might ask back and that was not always translated). This was important to ensure accuracy and a natural conversation flow but it, of course, adds the risk of the respondents being somewhat led in a way that we can't fully follow in the transcript. That is why the RAs were trained in interviewing, were asked to translate their own questions or significant exchanges as well and why we note [RA clarifies without translating] for significant exchanges but it is not possible to do so for every brief exchange or confirmational question.
 - It does not have to be noted if statements made by the participants are not translated as it is hard to know if it was simply a repetition of something that came before, a reaction to an interruption (such as a child) or irrelevant. In any case, these instances are rare. In addition, some parts maybe have been left out by the RA even if they translated others and it would be impossible to mark those.
 - If respondents exceptionally use English/French, add [respondent speaking English/French]. Similarly, if the interviewer exceptionally uses a local language, add [interviewer speaking X].
 - If the interpreter uses a local language key word in the English/French translation, just add for example [Kinyarwanda word].
- Stuttering, stammering and false starts are omitted (unless they add information, in which case you can add... to mark the change in thought). An example of a false start is "I went to the vet-- to the store to buy coffee", simply write: "I went to the store to buy coffee".

- Word repetitions are only captured when they are used as a stylistic device for emphasis: "This is very, very important to me." Never capture more than one repetition, e.g. "This is very, very, very important to me" becomes "This is very, very important to me" when transcribed. Capitalise words that the respondent emphasises strongly in their talk.
- Fillers and hesitation sounds (e.g. "hm, yes, aha, em, like, you know", etc.) are only transcribed if useful and adding meaning to the the phrase, otherwise not. For example, transcribe them if a person finds the question difficult or means yes or no. If that is the case, add a description of the emphasis in parentheses: affirmative, negative, reflective, questioning, sympathetic, etc. Example: "hm [affirmative]".
- Omit interruptions by the interviewer of a confirmational nature. E.g. "uh-huh, I see, yes, I understand, ooo, wow, that's a lot, thank you, I'm sorry, go ahead" etc. or literal repetitions of what was just said (e.g. repeating names to practice pronunciation) unless the interviewer answers a question of the respondent or clarifies a statement.
- If the interviewer repeats individual words spoken by the respondent without adding substance (e.g. names in order to correct the pronunciation), this is not transcribed unless it is deemed relevant for the context.
- Also omit small interruptions, such as greeting bypassers, turning off a ringing phone, etc. unless they seem relevant or disturbing. If the recording has been paused, add [recording paused] and a timestamp.

Noises and non-verbal communication

- Capture the content, i.e. situational context, speech melody, facial expressions, gestures, outside or background noises (e.g. animal sounds, children speaking in background, respondent speaking to children or a phone ringing) etc. can be left out and don't need to be noted unless they are deemed very relevant. The same applies to noises with no meaning (e.g. clearing the throat, coughing).
- Non-verbal utterances that support or clarify a statement (such as laughter or sigh) are noted in parentheses. Interviews with an interpreter:
 - Non-verbal utterances are only noted if it is clear what phrase it refers to (as the interviewer might often not know why and where exactly they laughed) or if it is deemed relevant to the situation. In general, it is not very important to note if the RA was laughing while in the P role but if it seems relevant add [RA laughing] to clarify who was laughing – else the laughter will be assigned to P.
 - Sometimes people don't say yes/no but just "hmm" or express it non-verbally. In such cases, it is ok to just take the words of the RA, even if the participants didn't actually say those words, e.g. "She is saying yes, they have done it".
 - If the interpreter doesn't interpret some part, mark it in a memo. We will relisten to it. If it is clear what is meant, i.e. from the sound (in Rwanda "hmm" means yes) or because we understand enough Kinyarwanda, we will change it directly to the English meaning. This is most often the case for "yes" and "no".
- Don't interpret the non-verbal communication. For example, don't transcribe: My father is funny [nervous laughing].
- Be consistent with how the same behaviour is identified. For example, don't write [laughing] one time and then [laugh] the next time.

- Thought pauses don't have to be indicated unless they are meaningful or exceptionally long. Interviews with an interpreter:
 - Thought pauses are not indicated.

Digression and incomprehensible material

- If a person digresses extremely and speaks of content that does not serve our research questions, put the exact time (from-to) in parentheses and summarise briefly what the person was speaking about in this period.
- Incomprehensible words are indicated as follows: [incomprehensible.]. The reasons don't have to be indicated as they are too varied in the field (phone ringing, animal sound, car passing, etc.). If you assume a certain word but are not sure, put the word in brackets with a question mark, e.g. [Xylomentazoline?].
- Make a note at the corresponding place if the recording has been paused and continued and explain why (e.g. due to a phone call).

Quotations

- If someone indicates that they said something to another person, indicate this with double quotations and use proper punctuation. For example: Then I said to him: "You shouldn't do that" rather than: Then I said to him you shouldn't do that.
- Similarly, do this for when people are indicating they were thinking something, such as: She was thinking: "Do I want to do this or not?". Interviews with interpreters:
 - Do not use quotations when the interpreter is just referring to what the respondent is saying, using the third person for the respondents as the interpreters were instructed to do. E.g. She is saying when it's time, they'll know, rather than: She is saying: "when it's time, they'll know".

Confidentiality and review

- Transcripts need to be fully anonymised. Mark all identifying information (e.g. any names, towns where they live, hospitals that they visit, etc.), in red for me to check case by case. If in doubt, mark too much rather than too little.
- General information that is non-identifying can be left (e.g. if somebody visited Kigali).
- I will use four ways to anonymise the identifying information:
 - If the information is unimportant (or the meaning is clear from the context and the actual name is not needed), I will replace the identifying word with [identity withheld]. The real identity can only be found in the original recording.
 - If the meaning is relevant but not the actual name (or the actual name can be inferred to from the respondent's identity in the interview list), I will explain it in brackets, e.g. [respondent's village or name]. The real identity can only be found in the original recording.
 - If the meaning and the actual name are relevant, e.g. if many people refer to it, I will replace it with a pseudonym in brackets, e.g. [Michel]. The pseudonym's identities can be found in a separate and encrypted document.

- If the gender would make the person easily identifiable, I will replace the gendered pronoun with “the respondent”.
- Always review the transcript by re-listening the tape and reading the transcript at the same time.

Character use

/	word or sentence abort
//	speech overlaps are marked by //. At the start of an interjection, // follows. The simultaneous speech is within // and the person's interjection is in a separate line, also marked by //.
[...]	longer breaks
[laughs]	expression of emotions in parentheses
[phone rings]	events independent of the interview. Note only if this creates a big interruption or is important.
<Toni>	anonymised name
<Tina>	anonymised name
[incomphrensible]	incomprehensible (possibly write justification in parentheses)
CAPITALS	strong emphasis
hm	hm (not: "hhhm", "mhm", "hmh")
em	em (not: "äm", "ehm", "öhm")
units	tendered, e.g. Euro, meter
percent	%
abbreviations	as spoken (if pronounced fully then, the write fully)
quotes	in quotation marks (and then I said: "Well, let's have a look")
V	single letters are always capitalized
Numbers zero to nine	as words unless it indicates measurements/quantities
Numbers from ten	in numerals
3.5 4 + 5 = 9	decimals and equations are always written in numerals
078 856 00 23	measurements/quantities (e.g. in kg), house numbers, page numbers, telephone numbers, dates, etc. always in numerals
50/50	in numerals instead of words
enumerations with letters	"A we have no time and B we have no money."
sound representation (e.g. speaker makes car noise)	brrummm – if misleading write in parentheses (car noise)

Note-taking guidelines

A substantial number of recordings will not be properly transcribed but only paraphrased. This applies especially to stakeholder interviews:

- Use MAXQDA and the same formatting (including saving “rtf” files). Add description of stakeholders without identifying them.
- Do maintain the Q&A paragraph changes, indicating a timestamp before the English/French part of each question and answer section.
- Answers can be paraphrased (grammar, words, sentence structures, etc. can be changed) and slightly shortened/summarised in neutral note-taking style (use standard English/French but sentences can be incomplete/shortened). As such, the note-taking contains much more interpretation and data reduction than the clean verbatim transcription. It is, however, a very detailed note-taking, and all substantive points have to be retained.
- The grammatical person (he/she said, etc.) doesn't have to be maintained unless deemed relevant.
- If several respondents answer, the answer can be summarised as if it was coming only from one speaker unless the distinction is deemed relevant.
- Note all the key questions asked (not verbatim or including transitions but their main thread). However, introductions, thank yous, follow-up questions, comments and discussions don't have to be noted but their final outcome can be summarised in one answer paragraph (this applies especially when there is confusion or further probing). Similarly, interruptions and non-verbal behaviour don't have to be noted, unless it seems relevant.
- RA contributions are only noted if relevant and are summarised. However, key questions asked by the RA are indicated as such. If the RA clarifies without translating, this does not have to be noted.
- Any comments on noteworthy observations that are not part of the answer can be inserted in brackets, i.e. []. The same goes for the note takers interpretations, i.e. anything that is not contained in the participant's answer itself. Similarly, if an answer is unclear this should be noted as [answer unclear] instead of guessing the meaning and summarising it wrongly – this allows the researcher to go back and listen to it again or to mark it as unclear.
- Very important or revealing statements have to be quoted between quotation marks and in which case everything has to be written in clean verbatim using the rules outlined above as they may be quoted in publications.
- At the end, make sure to note any other comments by the participant in the following way:
 - I: Comments?
 - P: No comments or X,Y,Z