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The autistic dialogue

A Bakhtinian framework for singular voices

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From his early texts on language, consciousness, and ideology, to his later contributions to literary criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory centers speech in the dynamics of communicative exchanges. This chapter considers how Bakhtinian notions such as dialogue, double-voicing, and heteroglossia offer significant analytic purchase for understanding autistic phenomena, notably autistic language and autistic semiosis more broadly, what we refer to as *autistic voice*. By way of empirical demonstration, the authors examine everyday verbal exchanges between autistic children, their family members, and tutors in home contexts. These verbal exchanges were video recorded, transcribed and analyzed employing an integrated methodology, which combines linguistic, discourse, and acoustic analyses, highlighting the dialogues' simultaneous singularity and multiplicity. Our examination yields an understanding of the autistic voice as inherently polyphonic, oriented to dialogue and creativity.

Keywords: autism, dialogue, double-voicing, heteroglossia, polyphony

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we set an ambitious objective for ourselves: to apprehend the *autistic voice*, in its making and unmaking. It is a challenging task – the mapping of a plural eventuality, its fluid dispersion co-existing with its substance. We recruit Mikhail Bakhtin as our mentor, an author who is protean and wonderfully plural, like our object of study. We suggest that Bakhtinian theorization – notably the notions of dialogue, heteroglossia, and double-voicing – offers insights and analytic purchase for deepening our understanding of autistic semiosis. Leveraging Bakhtin's ideas outside of his disciplinary field of literary criticism, has proven to be productive, as evidenced by Jaakko Seikkula's (2006) and Peter Good's (2000) contributions in psychiatry, Michael Billig's (2004) work in social

psychology, and Arneha Ball and Sarah Freedman's (2004) in education. Within Disability Studies, Bakhtin has attracted little attention (see Davis, 1990 for an exception), however, and this chapter aims to provide a corrective to this neglect.

2. The challenges of defining *autistic voice*

We begin our investigation by problematizing and interrogating the very notion of *autistic voice*. If taken somewhat literally, the notion of *autistic voice* is reductive, representing a logocentric perspective, which, like Derrida (1982), we choose to eschew. We use the term to refer not only to oral language but every expressive form of the autistic person. No single communicative modality is assumed as uniquely constitutive and defining autistic semiosis. Furthermore, we refrain from essentializing the *autistic voice* as singular. Ian Hacking is peremptory in this regard, claiming, "if you know one person with autism, you know *one* person with autism" (Hacking 2009, 503). Dissatisfied with the characterization of autism as a *spectrum* phenomenon, Hacking affirms that autism is a multidimensional space of dispersal, a *manifold* (Hacking 2010). He writes:

Metaphors tend to be dangerous. I think 'manifold' is pretty safe. The OED gives as its first definition of the adjective, "Varied or diverse in appearance, form or character, having various forms, features, relations, applications etc." In mathematics and physics, a manifold is a space that in the very small looks familiar, like ordinary Euclidean space, but in the large is much more complex. Manifolds are not simply linear; they come in any number of dimensions. Hence the idea captures, far better than the metaphor of a spectrum, our present awareness of autism. (Hacking 2010, 635)

Assuming autism as a *manifold*, we are thus in the realm of variation, of non-conformity not otherwise specified. Yet we wonder: is it possible to identify defining attributes of the autistic voice? Is it possible to discern a *common core* to the specific modes of expression of such a heterogeneous group? This chapter is an attempt to answer these questions in the positive and substantively. Before turning to Bakhtin, we outline a brief history of the diagnostic category, from Bleuler to the DSM-5. We then turn to the social model of disability as foundation to our exploration.

Autism was created as a term to name a symptom of schizophrenia by Eugene Bleuler (Bleuler 1911). Only thirty years later, in the 1940s, autism became autonomous as a specific condition and entered the psychiatric nosography (Asperger 1944; Kanner 1943). The plane of individuation was that of a psychic disability, and more precisely a relational disability. The traits identified by Kanner

and Asperger were then collected by Lorna Wing (Wing and Gould 1979) into a triad of impairments – impairment in social interaction, social communication, and rigidity of thought with difficulty in social imagination – which came to constitute the basis for the diagnosis of the disorder. In the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the DSM5, autism is characterized as a multidimensional spectrum, a complex of discordances from the norm – the normal, the normative – due to excess or insufficiency at sensorial, cognitive, ideational, and relational levels. Autism thus became not one condition, but a wide set of non-compliances to what is expected in social life (Barbetta and Valtellina 2015).

3. Rethinking autism within the social model of disability

Disability Studies' intervention reframed our understanding of *disability* by situating individual conditions in relation to the societal fabric. We refer in particular to the Social Model of Disability, which was introduced by Paul Hunt, a British man with muscular dystrophy who had been institutionalized since his adolescence in a Cheshire Foundation facility (see also Bartesaghi and Hughes, Introduction to this volume). In 1966, Hunt edited one of the very first books written by disabled persons, with the title, *Stigma* (Hunt 1966), drawing from Erving Goffman's (1963) work on spoiled identities, which bore the same title. In the edited collection, Hunt published his own text *A critical condition*, which in many ways inaugurated the critical discourse on disability. In 1971, he then wrote an open letter to *The Guardian* urging readers to join his association of disabled people, The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). Two notable respondents to Hunt's letter were Paul Abberley, who later on became one of the main theorists of the English Social Model, and Vic Finkelstein, a white South African clinical psychologist and Trotskyist, disabled by spinal trauma, in exile in London after being arrested and tortured by the racist apartheid regime for his support of the emancipation of black people.

For years, Hunt, Abberley, Finkelstein and others met on a regular basis to articulate the theoretical foundation of their thought and action. In 1976, they published a booklet titled *Fundamental principles of disability* (UPIAS 1976) in collaboration with another association devoted to disability rights, *Disability Alliance*. The booklet represents the founding act of the first and most radical theoretical perspective on disability, the English Social Model. The power of its proposal – born in opposition to the charitable-religious model and the medical model – consists in a redefinition of the concept of disability itself. This

is achieved through the proposed partition between impairment and disability, defined as follows:

We define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression [...]. In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. (UPIAS 1976, 4)

The partition, which triggers a simple semantic shift, integrally reformulates a discourse. Disability is to be addressed and dismantled, as any form of oppression that acts toward the detriment of a human category.

Approaching the autistic condition from the perspective of the Social Model is both an imperative and a challenge: unlike the prototypical conditions centered by this model in which impairment is physical and self-evident, autism as impairment is more complex and elusive. However, autistic people, much like physically impaired individuals, endure “disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization” (UPIAS 1976, 20). Whereas the impairment is elusive, the disability is apparent. In their effort to move autism altogether away from a deficit perspective, neurodiversity scholars and activists have advanced a characterization that situates the condition in the brain, yielding distinctive synaptic wiring (Silverman 2015; Singer 2017). Establishing an homology to biodiversity, neurodiversity affirms autism as a form of neural difference that has the potential to enrich human modes of existence. We are thus compelled to study autism as an irreducibly social, cultural and interpersonal phenomenon. Autism manifests at the intersection of the individual and the socio-cultural, the person and the world (Ochs *et al.* 2004).

4. A Bakhtinian framework¹

While a comprehensive account of Mikhail Bakhtin's work is beyond the scope and possibilities of this chapter, we are going to introduce Bakhtinian notions that are relevant to understanding autistic language and communication: dialogue, double-voicing, and heteroglossia.

4.1 Dialogue as essential attribute of language

Authors are often summarized in an iconic phrase that affirms their dedication. Mikhail Bakhtin, praised by Tzvetan Todorov as “the leading Soviet thinker in the field of human sciences, and the greatest theorist of literature of the twentieth century” (Todorov 1984), is traditionally connected to dialogism. In Bakhtin, the centrality of dialogue is given according to unique coordinates, which render Bakhtin's approach distinct from previous and contemporary theorizations, from Socrates and Plato, to Ricoeur and Gadamer (Bartesaghi and Hughes, Introduction to this volume). Bakhtin's proposal for a theory of dialogue is also distinct both from structural linguistics, which relates to language as a formal system, and from linguistic idealism, for which language is an act of individual creation (Bakhtin 1981; Vološinov 1973). At the center of Bakhtin's theorization is the *utterance*, understood as a complex phenomenon, inextricable from the chain of communication in which it is embedded:

an utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations. (Bakhtin 1986, 94)

Thus, dialogue is not conceived of as simply the alternation of two voices but rather as language in its essence. Any act of language is inherently dialogic, crafted in response to a preceding act of language and anticipating in its own form other acts to follow.

This interpretation of the nature of language radically calls into question the interpretation of autistic communicative forms in terms of an individual deficit, a point also elaborated in Savarese's chapter in this volume. If enunciation is a situated event inextricable from the context of production, the non-conformities in

1. It is perhaps not superfluous to recall that, unlike his friends Vološinov and Medvedev, Bakhtin was saved from the Stalinist purges because of his disabled condition, having had a leg amputated due to osteomyelitis that struck him in his youth. For biographical events, see the reference monograph by Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark (Clark and Holquist 1984).

relationships, the mismatches that are given as autistic phenomenology, are never relevant to the autistic subject alone. They pertain to the responsiveness of the interlocutor as much as the intelligibility of the autistic enunciation. This claim is further substantiated in Bakhtin's notion of double voiced discourse, which we shall unpack in the next section.

4.2 Double voiced discourse

Discussed most thoroughly in Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky's poetics (1984),² double voicing is presented in contrast to single voiced, monological discourse, which is closed onto itself. Specifically, single voiced discourse presents itself as authoritative, eschewing opportunities for dispute and polysemy. It is the discourse that aims at hegemony and consensus, positing an unambiguous univocal meaning. Double voiced discourse, on the other hand, is polysemous and polyphonic, a discourse that, in Bakhtin's words "serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions [...] in such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they – as it were – know about each other" (Bakhtin 1984, 324).

Bakhtin proposes three different types of double voiced discourse, the first being the unidirectional double voiced discourse, in which the voice of the other is appropriated, a case in point being stylization. The second, vari-directional speech, is that of parody. As in stylization, in parody the author animates someone else's speech; in contrast to stylization, however, parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one, producing a tension between contrasting aims. The third form of Bakhtinian double voiced discourse is the "active" one, to distinguish it from the others that are characterized as passive. Here the discourse of the other is anticipated as a controversy, it is a discursive strategy aimed at controlling the dialogue through anticipation.³

2. Bakhtin's interest in Dostoevsky concerns the controversy inherent in the main character, or the hero, in Dostoevsky's novels. Following Bakhtin, the character, in Dostoevsky, encompasses a plurality of controversial issues. The expression is not a function of the structure of the character. To the contrary, it is the character who is a function of the expression (Bakhtin, 1984). In reading any novel written by Dostoevsky, the reader can observe such a heteroglossia: the presence of more voices, which is the *file rouge* of his novels.

3. The double voiced discourse proposed by Bakhtin in reference to Dostoevsky's poetics that we analyze here, namely the appropriation of the voice of the other, has found interesting developments in relation to the view of communication as a generalized form of "ventriloquism" in the analyses of Holquist (1981) and more extensively in Cooren (2010).

Double voiced discourse, in its different forms, affirms multiplicity, drift (the slippage that Derrida (1982) understands as *différance*), the possibility, perhaps even the inevitability, of indeterminacy in meaning-making and interpersonal communication. As such, double voiced discourse can propel a reframing of autistic language as polyphonous rather than parrot-like, polysemous rather than abstruse or imprecise. We shall illustrate this perspective in the next section. Before that, we close this section with a discussion of heteroglossia, the third Bakhtinian notion relevant to our work.

4.3 Heteroglossia: Centrifugal and centripetal forces in language

In *Discourse in the novel*, Bakhtin (1981) introduces the term heteroglossia to indicate the simultaneous presence of a multiplicity of different languages within a linguistic horizon. In other words, heteroglossia is the constitutively multiple dimension of any language. Centripetal and centrifugal forces constantly act upon languages – the former drawing towards normalization and conformity, and the latter producing variation and difference. Centripetal forces in language have given rise to national languages, prescriptive grammars, language as a canon. Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, have led to the proliferation of idiolects and the dynamics of language variation and change. The prevalence of centripetal forces in language gives way to the rejection of expressive divergence and stigmatization of any non-conformity to the expectation of face-to-face interaction.

Heteroglossia allows us to appreciate the autistic voice as embodying centrifugal forces. The eccentricity of the autistic voice, as well as its exceeding singularity, counters centripetal forces that mandate conformity, uniformity, and unity. As expression of centrifugal forces, the autistic voice joins that of poets, satirists, and others who unsettle the linguistic conventions and exploit the polysemy of language, producing meaning at the fringe of (un)intelligibility.

5. Analyzing autistic language with Bakhtin

To illustrate the analytic purchase that Bakhtin offers to an examination of autistic engagement with language, we consider a much studied, indeed quite salient feature of autistic verbal behavior: echolalia. Noted in autistic children since Kanner (1943), echolalia was generally understood as the rote repetition of words of self or others with no or minimal communicative function. Bakhtin's conceptualization of the basic natural environment for language as dialogic interaction compels us to examine echoic utterances in the context of their production, in naturalistic settings. When we situate echolalia in conversational sequences, in

the Bakhtinian chain of speech communication, two correctives to the common-sense understanding of autistic verbal repetition become imperative:

1. Echolalic utterances are not monological strings produced all at once but are developed conjointly with interlocutors.
2. Echolalic utterances are not simply manifestations of repetition compulsion, parrot-like regurgitation of words, bearing no indexical trace of the context from which they were lifted. They are better interpreted as forms of reported speech, thus not simply repetition of words but animation of voices. In Bakhtinian terms, therefore, as double voiced discourse.

We provide an illustration of these two insights by drawing from previous work by Laura Sterponi (Sterponi and Shankey 2014; Sterponi *et al.* 2015). Sterponi collected a data corpus of interactions of autistic children, ranging from 5 to 7 years old, who were video-recorded bi-weekly in their home settings, for approximately a month. From this data corpus, she assembled a collection of echolalic utterances. The analysis employs an integrated methodology that considers linguistic, discourse and acoustic features. At the linguistic level, the lexical and syntactic composition of the children's echoic utterances is examined, paying particular attention to whether repetition occurs verbatim or with variation. At the discourse level, is considered, when echoes occur, whether they are immediate or delayed repeats, and the syntactic and pragmatic relationships between the turn that includes (or is entirely constituted by) the echolalic behavior and what precedes and follows it. In addition, spectrograms and pitch plots are offered as demonstration of the role of prosody, rhythm and voice quality in echoic utterances.

In what follows, we present two interactional sequences from one child drawn from the data corpus. We have selected these in order to keep consistent verbal ability across examples. These two extracts offer a clear illustration of the two key correctives mentioned above.

5.1 Echolalia as joint production in dialogic exchanges

Aaron (pseudonym) is 5 years and 10 months old at the time of the video recordings, a single child, living with his parents in a residential area in northern California, where he is also attending a fully inclusive kindergarten class. While Aaron's language development was initially delayed, he had made significant progress and at the time of the data collection his Mean Length of Utterance was 3.92, which is only slightly below that expected in typically developing children. In fact, Aaron is an active participant in verbal interactions with his parents

and familiar interlocutors. His speech includes idiosyncratic phrases and echoes, along with generative language.

In the first extract below, we observe a transcript of the interaction between Aaron and his mom. Our transcription follows the Jefferson system of transcription notation (Jefferson, 2004) and represents features of speech production, not the spelling or grammar conventions (See Appendix for Transcription notation; also see Savarese, this volume, for a variation to orthodox transcriptions of interaction). The child is at the beginning of a bath, a favorite moment of his day. Mom is helping him regulate the temperature of the water. We will observe the child producing immediate repeats of Mom's utterances, but also notice that repetitions between Aaron and Mom are mutual, and that Aaron builds on Mom's prior turns to produce generative variations rather than exact echoes.

- Extract 1.
- 1 Mom okay, now put the plug in. yep. (.) there we go.
 - 2 Aaron ((*quiet singing and humming*))
 - 3 Mom you need to be >careful<
(.)
so it doesn't get too::: hot.
 - 4 Aaron [((*laughs*))]
 - 5 Mom [()]
 - 6 Aaron → it's gonna be hot.
 - 7 Mom → you don't want it to be hot. believe me. [or else
 - 8 Aaron → [or else?
 - 9 Mom it'll get- it hurts.
 - 10 (1.0) ((*Aaron's laughter*))
 - 11 Aaron → hot hurts. all hots hurt.
 - 12 Mom if it's too hot, it will (.) burn you.
 - 13 Aaron → ((*giggles*)) hot water (.) bu[:::rns.
 - 14 Mom [yahu:: do not wanna be burned.
 - 15 Aaron → hot waters will burn. hot water bu:::rns.
 - 16 ((*Aaron plays with toys while Mom pours bath salt into the bathtub*))

In line 6, Aaron recycles Mom's warning with some variation, then Mom deploys "or else" as a follow-up to her warning (line 7), which is a phrase Aaron frequently uses, a signature phrase his parents reported to the researcher. Aaron, as a matter of fact, utters "or else" in unison with his mom (see overlap in line 8). Then Mom cautions her son about getting hurt as the possible consequence of letting the hot water run. Drawing on Mom's prior turn, Aaron formulates a

double generalization (“hot hurts” and „all hots hurt,” in line 11). In line 12, the mother again picks up an element from Aaron’s talk (i.e., „hot”) and offers an expansion. Aaron follows up by building another generalization based on Mom’s utterance (“hot water burns,” line 13), which brings the sequence to its close. Leveraging conversational material produced by his interlocutor, Aaron is able to use repetitions, abstractions, and generalizations as resources to progressively exercise considerable conversational control and bring the sequence to its close, having the last word on the matter, even if the last words are partial repeats of Mom’s phrases. In fact, conversation analytic research has demonstrated that modified repeats are a device deployed to assert “primary rights from second position,” i.e. the primacy of the speaker uttering the repetition over the one making the initial claim (Stivers 2005).

5.2 Echolalia as revoicing

Bakhtin’s articulation of the notions of voice and double voicing is useful for unearthing further complexity in autism echolalia. A sensibility towards the lamination of the production format – said a slightly different way, being alert to the possibility that the speaker voices the words of another, or of self from prior usage, or of self and another at the same time – allows us to identify indexical traces in the echolalic utterances, that is, traces of their history, of them being lifted from previous chains of communication to find new purpose in the present exchange. This lamination renders the utterances enactments of revoicing, forms of *dequotation*, that is, direct reported speech for which the framing clause is omitted (Urban 1984).

In delayed repetitions of the words of his conversational partners, Aaron indicates that he had done so primarily through phonetic and deictic means, without overtly quotative forms. To pursue this argument, we now turn to Aaron and his mother having dinner. Prior to the exchange in Extract 2 below, Mom has been attempting to make small talk with her son about the events of the day, but Aaron has offered no or minimal responses. After another of Mom’s open-ended prompts, Aaron produces an echoic utterance that, while not actually answering his mother’s question, is responsive to its implicit re-engagement aim. In fact, by way of revoiced rejoinder the child avoids simple acquiescence and binds Mom to an echolalic communicative plane, wherein she repeats herself:

- Extract 2. 1 (12.0)
- 2 Aaron mh-uh-uh *((looking away from Mom))*
- 3 Mom what are you thinking about.
- 4 Aaron *((turns further away from Mom towards the barista))*
- 5 Mom uh-oh.
- 6 Aaron → you're looking at the barista *((singsong voice))*
- 7 Mom you're looking at the barista. we are not together.
- 8 Aaron *((turns immediately and rapidly))*
- 9 Mom uh *((of surprise))* now we are together.
- 10 Aaron *((turns away from Mom again and then turns back))*
- 11 Mom now we are together.
- 12 Aaron *((turns away rapidly))*
- 13 Mom uh-oh.
- 14 Aaron *((laughs and turns back toward Mom))*
- 15 Mom do you want to be together?
- 16 Aaron yes.
- [...]
- 17 Aaron *((turns away again and laughs))*
- 18 Mom uh-ho.
- 19 Aaron *((laughs and turns back))*
- 20 Mom *((laughs))*
- 21 Aaron → now we're together.
- 22 Mom m:h. *((nods and looks at Aaron))*
- 23 Aaron now we're together.
- 24 Mom uh huh.
- 25 Aaron *((turns away and laughs))*
- 26 Mom *((laughs))*

After a 12-second silence, in which Aaron progressively turns his torso and gaze away from his mother and then mumbles at low volume, Mom proffers a question: “what are you thinking about” (line 3) that she frequently uses to reorient her son’s attention when he seems to be disengaged from their dyadic exchange. Aaron responds with a delayed other-echo (line 6) that revoices another of Mom’s typical engagement devices, this one specifically related to a playful interactional format of rapid shifts between withdrawal and involvement. Typically, Aaron’s interlocutor establishes the format by noting aloud that the child is not making eye-contact or facing them. The opening phrase usually deployed is: ‘Uh-oh. you’re/Aaron’s looking at the ___,’ uttered with a very distinct prosody and voice

quality (notably elongated vowels and sing-song voice) and frequently followed by another phrase, ‘we are not together’, with the same suprasegmental characteristics. The playful exchange then unfolds with Aaron turning to face his interlocutor (who signals their satisfaction with the expression ‘now we are together’) before abruptly turning away again, thereby triggering another round of the same exchange. Aaron’s echoic utterances in lines 6 and 21 are prosodically and pronominally marked as re-animations of Mom’s voice and familiar expressions. They are produced with a sing-song voice and a prosodic contour similar to Mom’s typical re-engagement device. As such, these echoes establish a backward link with their source. At the same time, however, the child’s revoicing is anticipatory: it tells in advance what Mom would likely have said next. Indeed, in both cases the mother confirms that Aaron was right; the first time by repeating Aaron’s echo herself, with a sing-song voice and remarkably similar prosodic contour, and adding the next typical phrase (‘we are not together’, line 7), the second time assenting, verbally and gesturally (line 22). Aaron’s laughter and repeated initiations of new rounds of the game attest to his pleasure in animating his mother’s utterances and having her confirm that his guess was correct.

Thus, what *prima facie* could be labeled as delayed echolalia, a Bakhtinian sensibility combined with a discourse analytic approach interprets as a complex layering of voices and the processing of another’s perspective. Revoicing offered the child the possibility of making conjectures about the other and submitting them to that very other, for ratification or revision.

6. Conclusion: The emergence of the autistic voice

In this chapter, we have recruited Bakhtin to guide us in reflecting on the autistic voice. In the Bakhtinian notions of dialogism, double voicing and heteroglossia, we have found conceptual leverage for debunking the interpretation of the autistic voice as solipsistic and defective. Our findings are well aligned with the insights generated by disability studies, and critical autism studies in particular (Davidson and Orsini 2013).

The autistic voice has emerged as deeply engaged with the voices of others. In fast paced conversational exchanges, we have observed the autistic child capable of soliciting, responding to, completing and transforming the utterances of his interlocutors. The autistic voice is oriented to dialogue. Furthermore, we have found that voices of others are also laminated within the very utterances of autistic children. This lamination, conceptualized by Bakhtin (1984) as double-voicing, renders the autistic voice plural, polyphonic, inherently social. Finally, we have suggested that Bakhtin’s heteroglossia prompts recognizing a revolutionary force

in the autistic voice. Just like Kristeva (1974) recognized the revolutionary force of poetic language, heteroglossia allows us to appreciate the subversive and innovative potential of the autistic voice. With gained understanding of the complexity of the autistic voice, we invite deepening our engagement in social polyphony.

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Appendix. Transcription notation

- . The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
- ? The question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
- , The comma indicates “continuing” intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.
- ::: Colons indicate stretching of the preceding sound, proportional to the number of colons.
- A hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption.
- word Underlining indicates some form of stress or emphasis on the underlined item.
- WOrd Upper case indicates loudness.
- ° ° Degree signs indicate segments of talk that are markedly quiet or soft.
- > < The combination of “more than” and “less than” symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed.
- < > In the reverse order, they indicate that a stretch of talk is markedly slow.
- = An equals sign indicates no break or delay between the words it connects.
- (()) Double parentheses enclose descriptions of conduct.
- (word) All or part of an utterance in parentheses indicates uncertainty on the transcriber’s part about the accuracy of the transcription.
- () Empty parentheses indicate an inaudible stretch of talk.
- (1.2) Numbers in parentheses measure silences in tenths of a second.
- (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a “micro-pause,” ordinarily less than 2/10 of a second.
- [Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers, indicate onset of a point of conversational overlap.
- hhh letter “h” indicates audible aspiration.