COST Action 15221 – We ReLaTe

Transcription Protocol

Purpose of this document

This protocol has been designed to provide guidance to the transcribers of the audio of recorded focus group discussions with key informants as part of COST Action 15221.

The document is divided into six sections as follows:

1. brief overview of the COST Action
2. contextualising the focus groups within the COST Action
3. contextualising the focus groups as part of the research methodology
4. introduction to transcription – what the literature tells us (the 'Ladybird' version)
5. practical steps in transcribing the focus group data – agreed and recommended approach
6. next steps.

Brief overview of the COST Action

COST Action 15221 addresses the challenge of creating synergy among the increasingly more specialised and centralised supports for four key higher education activities – research, writing, teaching and learning – which frequently fail to capitalise on their shared territories and common ground.

This Action will address the identified challenge by:

- classifying, as 'frontier taxonomies', the common ground in terms of shared purposes, processes, knowledge, values and skills among centralized institutional supports for research, writing, teaching and learning in order to capitalise on their synergies
- offering the most advantageous models and practices for supporting these four areas that are mindful of the availability of new technologies and assessments and that prompt a reworking of current institutional supports which will be valuable and far-reaching.

In order to achieve these aims, one of the objectives associated with the Action is to classify the elements that have typically led key informants to success, effectiveness and productivity across the four areas of research, writing, teaching and learning.

Contextualising the focus groups within the COST Action

Data gathering with key informants i.e. colleagues who are deemed expert across the four areas, was discussed by the Action's working groups and Management Committee when it met in Malta in Feb/March 2018. After much consideration it was agreed that two data gathering tools would be used in succession with key informants, namely focus group and questionnaire, where the results of the former would influence the design of the latter. At that meeting, the broad parameters and scope of the focus group data gathering were also agreed. This included the following elements:

- that the focus groups would take place online
- that they would be largely discipline specific
- that they would be conducted in English
- that they would be audio recorded
- that there would be a gender balance across the groups
- that the participation would be made up of one representative from each of our partner countries
- that there would be approximately 6 focus groups each made up of 5-6 people
- that the facilitators of the focus groups would be drawn from our Action's working groups and MC and that we would seek volunteers in this regard
- that the focus groups would take place in May – June 2018
- that a protocol be drafted and provided to the facilitators and participants
- that a pilot focus group be organized for facilitators.

Contextualising the focus groups as part of the research methodology

The purpose of the focus groups was twofold:

1. to begin to identify with key informants the elements that have typically led them to success, effectiveness and productivity across the four areas of research, writing, teaching and learning.
2. to inform the design of the questionnaire for use with key informants.

For practical reasons, the focus groups took place during June and July 2018. Despite our intentions to provide for gender balance and disciplinary alignment, participant availability became the key factor in terms of focus group make up.

The data gathered in the focus groups will be subjected to thematic analysis by participants on the *We ReLaTe* autumn training school (2018). The outcomes of that analysis will inform the design of a questionnaire to be used more widely with higher education colleagues with a view to gathering quantitative data that can be used to address our research question.

Introduction to transcription – what the literature tell us (the 'Ladybird' version)

In a useful article entitled 'Transcription: Imperatives for Qualitative Research' published in the *International Journal of Qualitative* Methods, Davidson 'provides a review of three decades of literature on transcription between 1979 and 2009' (2009, 1). As a result of her review Davidson notes the following important points from the literature for researchers embarking on transcription:

- transcription is 'a process that is theoretical, selective, interpretive, and representational'
- 'Transcription entails a translation … or transformation of sound/image from recordings to text '(38)
- there is much variety in term of approaches to transcription and that because 'data can be transcribed in many ways … researchers need to think about transcription carefully before beginning the development of a transcript' (42); that the approach to transcription must be 'suited to the needs of the specific study' (42)
- with regards transcription systems, 'guidelines … and procedures might be useful for researchers' (40)
- that there is added complexity associated with working with 'hired' or other transcribers which include issues around absence of direction given to transcribers, use of transcripts rather than returning to the data, errors in transcription, 'transcribers' omission or alteration of words when transcribing, and ethical matters related to confidentiality agreements for hired transcribers' (43)
- the links between transcription and technology – 'How transcription is done has always had an integral relationship with the technology available to record data and to transcribe it' (44)
- that 'transcription continues to be overlooked by those analysing language data in the social sciences …' (41); 'Transcription and transcript development are neglected in written reports of research' and the 'Trustworthiness of qualitative studies is raised as a question when transcription is overlooked' (45).

Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) argue that 'researchers make choices about transcription that enact the theories that they hold' (66). 'Each researcher makes choices about whether to transcribe, what to transcribe, and how to represent the record in text' (66). They note that Kvale (1996) 'characterizes transcriptions as interpretive constructions arrived at through choices made by the researcher' (74). Lapadat and Lindsay themselves think that transcription 'facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data' (1999: 82).

In a similar vein, MacLean, Meyer and Estable (2004) note that 'How content is both heard and perceived by the transcriptionist and the form and accuracy of the transcription play a key role in determining what data are analysed and with what degree of dependability' (113). They record, with reference to Sandelowski (1994) that 'transcribed text can never totally capture the complexity of the interaction nor by completely error free' (2004: 113).

In our research 'the informational content of the data has priority, and the transcription process needs to focus on the accuracy of the information content' (MacLean et al., 2004: 116). In addition, we agree with MacLean et al. that 'Many transcription errors are avoidable when transcriptionists are trained appropriately and included as professionals who form part of a qualitative research team' (122).

Practical steps in transcribing the focus group data – agreed and recommended approach

An articulated process contributes to clarity, consistency and reliability with regards transcription. An agreed approach is essential where a number of researchers are involved in transcription.

The following steps and guidance are the agreed approach to transcription for COST Action 15221 – *We ReLaTe* focus group data. The approach draws heavily on the 'Sample Qualitative Data Preparation and Transcription Protocol' included in McLellan et al.'s article entitled 'Beyond the Qualitative Interview: Data Preparation and Transcription' published in *Field Methods* (2003). We acknowledge here the inclusion of many elements recommended in McLellan et al.'s approach; where we have quoted verbatim from the article those extracts are noted in inverted commas.

Text Formatting

All focus groups shall use the transcription template which will be sent to transcribers in advance of the process.

All focus group interviews shall be transcribed using Arial 12 point font. All text shall begin at the left-hand margin (no indents) and the document shall be left justified.

UK English spelling shall be used.

Labeling for Focus Group Transcripts

Focus group transcripts shall include the following labeling information much of which will be provided to the transcriber in the template:

Name of recording:
Date of recording:
Focus Group individual prefix (which will include location information and be used in the Facilitator and Participant IDs):
Facilitator ID:
Transcriber ID:
No of participants:
Gender of participants in terms of numbers:
Countries in which participants are based:
Length of recording:

Inclusion of 'chat' from recording as a separate document – Yes or No:

Source labeling

The facilitator ID will be used throughout to identify contributions made by the facilitator. The facilitator ID will be recorded in the provided focus group template.

All other participants should be given a Participant ID by the transcriber which should be used when their contributions are being recorded. The participant ID should begin with the focus group prefix (provided in the template) followed by 'P' to designate the contribution as being from a participant (and not a facilitator), followed by the participant ID which should be a fictional first name e.g. MUFG1-P-Peter, where MUFG1 is the focus group prefix, P stands for 'participant', and Peter is the fictional name given to the participant. 'For focus group participants who cannot readily be identified, the transcriber will type focus group prefix, followed by P for participant, followed by "UNKNOWN'".

Content

Audio recordings shall be transcribed verbatim (i.e., recording word for word, exactly as said), *but excluding* any nonverbal or background sounds (e.g., laughter, sighs, coughs, claps, snap fingers, pen clicking, typing etc).

'If interviewers or interviewees mispronounce words, these words shall be transcribed as the individual said them. The transcript shall not be "cleaned up" by removing foul language, slang, grammatical errors, or misuse of words or concepts. If an incorrect or unexpected pronunciation results in difficulties with comprehension of the text, the correct word shall be typed in square brackets. A forward slash shall be placed immediately behind the open square bracket and another in front of the closed square bracket.

Example: I thought that was pretty pacific [/specific/], but they disagreed.

Enunciated reductions (e.g., *betcha*, *cuz*, *'em*, *gimme*, *gotta*, *hafta*, *kinda*, *lotta*, *oughta*, *sorta*, *wanna*, *coulda*, *could've*, *couldn't*, *coudn've*, *couldna*, *woulda*, *would've*, *wouldn't*, *wouldn've*, *wouldna*, *shoulda*, *should've*, *shouldn't*, *shouldn've*, *shouldna*) plus standard contractions of *is*, *am*, *are*, *had*, *have*, *would*, and *not* shall be used.

Filler words such as *hm*, *huh*, *mm*, *mhm*, *uh huh*, *um*, *mkay*, *yeah*, *yuhuh*, *nah huh*, *ugh*, *whoa*, *uh oh*, *ah*, and *ahah* shall be transcribed.   Word or phrase repetitions shall be transcribed. If a word is cut off or truncated, a hyphen shall be inserted at the end of the last letter or audible sound (e.g., he wen- he went and did what I told him he shouldn've).'

Inaudible Information

‘The transcriber shall identify portions of the audio that are inaudible or difficult to decipher. If a relatively small segment of the tape (a word or short sentence) is partially unintelligible, the transcriber shall type the phrase “inaudible segment.” This information shall appear in square brackets.

Example: The process of identifying missing words in an audiotaped interview of poor quality is [inaudible segment].

If a lengthy segment of the tape is inaudible, unintelligible, or is “dead air” where no one is speaking, the transcriber shall record this information in square brackets. In addition, the transcriber shall provide a time estimate for information that could not be transcribed.

Example: [Inaudible: 2 minutes of interview missing]’

Overlapping Speech

‘If individuals are speaking at the same time (i.e., overlapping speech) and it is not possible to distinguish what each person is saying, the transcriber shall place the phrase “cross talk” in square brackets immediately after the last identifiable speaker’s text and pick up with the next audible speaker.

Example:

Turn taking may not always occur. People may simultaneously contribute to the conversation; hence, making it difficult to differentiate between one person’s statement [cross talk]. This results in loss of some information.’

Pauses

‘If an individual pauses briefly between statements or trails off at the end of a statement, the transcriber shall use three ellipses. A brief pause is defined as a two- to five- second break in speech.

Example:
Sometimes, a participant briefly loses . . . a train of thought or . . . pauses after making a poignant remark. Other times, they end their statements with a clause such as but then . . . .

If a substantial speech delay occurs at either beginning or the continuing a statement occurs (more than two or three seconds), the transcriber shall use “long pause” in parentheses.

Example:
Sometimes the individual may require additional time to construct a response. (Long pause) other times, he or she is waiting for additional instructions or probes.’

Questionable Text

If the transcriber is unsure of the accuracy of a statement made by a speaker, this statement shall be placed inside parentheses and a question mark is placed in front of the open parenthesis and behind the close parenthesis.

Example:
MUFG1-P-Peter: I went over to the ?(club on Avalon)? to meet with the street outreach team to talk about joining up for the study.'

Sensitive Information

If an individual uses his or her own name during the discussion, the transcriber shall replace this information with the appropriate interviewee identification label/ naming convention.

Example:
MUFG-P-Peter: My family always reminds me, "MUFG-P-Eve think about things before you open your mouth."

If an individual provides others' names, locations, organizations, and so on, the transcriber shall enter an equal sign immediately before and after the named information. Analysts will use this labeling information to easily identify sensitive information that may require substitution.

Example:
MUFG-P-Peter: We went over to =John Doe's= house last night and we ended up going to = O'Malley's Bar= over on =22nd Street= and spending the entire night talking about the very same thing.'

Reviewing for accuracy

The transcriber/proofreader shall check (proofread) all transcriptions against the audiotape and revise the transcript file accordingly. Subsequently, all transcripts shall be audited for accuracy by the facilitator who conducted the focus group or by a member of the Core Group.

Saving transcripts

The transcriber shall save each transcript as an individual '.doc' file using the file name of the transcription template that they have been given.

Next steps

When the transcription is completed it should be sent to the MC Chair. The MC Chair will then send the transcripts to a member of the COST Action Core Group for verification of accuracy. Subsequently, the transcripts will be sent to the focus group participants again for verification of accuracy and for any 'off the record' remarks to be removed. The transcripts will be adjusted based on feedback from participants and the finalised version sent to participants for their information. When participants get the finalised transcripts they will be reminded about the next phases in the project and how they can keep in touch or be kept informed of the research.

References

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