Close Vertical Transcription in Writing Center Training and Research

by Magdalena Gilewicz and Terese Thonus

[Close vertical transcription] allowed me to pay attention not only to what I said but also when and how I said it. The when and how seem to matter more than my actual words. (Tutor)

Not long ago one of us submitted an article about writing tutorials to a journal for consideration. As our research focuses on tutor-student interaction in tutorials, the paper contained a large number of transcribed excerpts. In the first set of reviewer comments returned, we read:

The transcription conventions, though well intended, are confusing and hard to follow. They could be dropped in favor of the usual way of transcribing tutorials. As in play dialogue, one person speaks, then another. The author wants to represent the tutorial more realistically, but the effort is more distracting than effective. [emphasis supplied]

The reviewer's advice, however, goes contrary to what takes place during conversation, in which speakers only sometimes synchronize their turn-taking. As speakers, we expect our own utterances to be punctuated by listener feedback; we pause to retrieve or to digest information; and we construct joint utterances through overlaps, interruptions, and completions—features that can carry significant information for the researcher.

The representation of tutorial conversations as playscript depicts language as primarily written, not oral. As horizontal transcription, it misrepresents temporal placement of speaker contributions, and it "edits out" linguistic and nonlinguistic contributions that are judged nonessential, relegating them to the category of "conversational dust" to be swept under the carpet. We will argue that close vertical transcription, because of its greater depth and complexity, more accurately captures the writing tutorial as a speech event. We will also report how we used close vertical transcription in tutor training, and how tutors' analyses of transcripts of their own sessions increased their understanding of interaction and modified their practice.

Although in the past two decades writing center studies have employed transcripts, Blau, Hall, and Strauss's 1998 article "Exploring the Tutor/Student Conversation: A Linguistic Analysis" is the first publication in the writing center forum purposefully advocating the importance of accurate linguistic transcription in writing center research. Blau et al. undertook a focused analysis to investigate the nature of collaboration between tutor and student. They looked at tutor and student questions, "echoing" or "conversational fillers," and tutor use of "qualifiers" (I don't know, maybe, sometimes). Recognizing the added depth inclusion of these features offered, they issued an explicit call to the writing center research community to use methods established in linguistics and other fields for tutorial analysis:

We encourage other writing centers to join us and build on our work on the linguistic analysis of tutorial conversations. We see our study as a way to continue looking at writing center practice with a scholarly eye, to build theories in our field from what we actually do in our writing centers. (39)

Two years later, Gillespie and Lerner in *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* underscored the importance of tutors' transcripts of sessions by devoting an entire chapter to it ("Discourse Analysis"). When implemented in tutor training manuals such as the Guide, their transcription style (which appears to follow Blau et al.'s) constitutes a clear improvement over the fabricated *idealized* tutor-student dialogues of earlier manuals (e.g., Meyer and Smith) in that tutors are more likely to trust authentic transcripts and see them as realistic models for their own production. The kind of dialogue presented by Meyer and Smith does have its merits: it shows the kinds of questions tutors can ask and how a tutor can direct a tutorial conversation, and we have...
The Practical Tutor used for this purpose. After tutors have conducted a few tutoring sessions, however, these claims begin to ring false. Tutors want more realistic representations of tutorial talk, where tutor talk is represented on paper by employing close vertical transcription style. Thus, we argue, tutor training can move from use of idealized to realistic to "thicker" transcripts.3

The realistic style Gillespie and Lerner choose employs playscript dialogue and depicts conversation participants speaking one at a time. We will refer to this transcription style as "horizontal." ... are used in an undefined manner permitting multiple interpretations and preventing specific functional distinctions:

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Horizontal transcription can also be faulted for its misinterpretation of meaning. Let us take as an example Blau et al.’s study of how tutor and student “trade” conversational fillers, in which they overlook the distinction between different functions of a word, for example, yeah. They argue that “fillers” have “no inherent meaning” and function merely “to mark time or put an idiosyncratic stamp on a conversation” (27). In fact, these “fillers” constitute a whole category of responses with very different meanings: backchannel (yeah = “I support what you’re saying and agree with you—and you still have the floor”), minimal response (Yeah = “I am answering you—and now I have the floor”), and tag question (Yeah? = “Here’s what I think. Do you agree with me?”). Relegating “fillers” to secondary status or omitting them altogether deletes valuable information from a transcript.

We will argue that such information is not only linguistically salient but carries meanings important for understanding what happens in tutor-student dialogues. We will demonstrate that tutor analyses of vertical transcripts, because they contain a more complete illustration of tutorial interaction, result in increased consciousnessraising and changes in practice, and we will urge that research into writing tutorials employ this style of transcription if it intends to investigate more complex issues in discourse.

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Elements of Close Vertical Transcripts

Since the interest in incorporating transcription into writing center studies is clearly ascendant, the next logical step, in our view, is not to reinvent the wheel but to bring the standard of transcription into our field to a level where both writing center studies and tutor training can more easily and accurately reflect the language and conversational features necessary only for very specialized study. We do not intend to advocate for these here.

Some of the purposes for which we use close vertical transcription in tutor training and research concern issues of tutor and student expectations, facilitation of student awareness of the relationship between their own and their tutor’s language and ideas, fostering a more active and creative role for students in their own revision. We will argue that this kind of transcription also provides a more complete picture of the conversation of the tutorial session by including the interpersonal and affective aspects of the students’ speech that are difficult to capture in more direct styles of transcription. In this way, tutors and writing center directors can see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors. This kind of transcription also allows tutors to see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors. This kind of transcription also allows tutors to see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors. This kind of transcription also allows tutors to see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors. This kind of transcription also allows tutors to see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors. This kind of transcription also allows tutors to see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors. This kind of transcription also allows tutors to see more clearly the different roles that students take in the session and the different ways that they interact with their tutors.
response, comprehension, ownership, collaboration, dominance, and negotiation of input, as illustrated by these questions:

1. What do tutors and students expect of one another and of the session?
2. How does gender influence how tutors and students interact with one another?
3. What are tutors doing to facilitate or undercut student responses?
4. How well tutors and students know that the other understands what they are saying?
5. What aspects of student speech can distract tutors from their purpose, and vice-versa?
6. Are tutors doing for students what students should be doing for themselves?
7. When and how does collaborative talk take place?
8. What markers of dominance or opting out appear in tutorials, and what role do they play in the outcome?
9. How much tutor talk is too much? Too little?
10. What conversational indicators signal student acceptance or rejection of tutor suggestions?

Here, we explain certain conversational conventions of English that are key to the interpretation of writing tutorials and explain how they can best be transcribed in close vertical style.

**Transcription Conventions**

**Pause:**
- (.) Short pause (1-2 seconds)
- (5s) Timed pause (2+ seconds)

**Filled pause:**
- um, hmm

**Overlap:**
Beginning shown by a right-facing bracket (l) placed vertically. Overlaps between participant contributions are marked using brackets aligned directly above one another. Overlaps continue until one interlocutor completes his/her utterance.

**Backchannel:**
- uh-huh, yeah, o.k., (all) right
Contributions made by other participants while the first speaker maintains the floor. Backchannels are written in lower-case, (o.k.) to distinguish them from minimal responses.

**Minimal response:**
- Uh-huh (= yes), Uh-uh (= no), Yeah, O.K., (All) Right
Brief responses made by participants when they have the floor.

**Paralinguistic:**
- Nonverbal features
  - (( )) Additional observation—laugh, cough, sigh, etc.
  - ^ ^ Finger snaps
  - > > Hand striking a surface

**Analytic:**
- *** Indecipherable or doubtful hearing

**How To Read a Close Vertical Transcript**

The vertical feature of the style we advocate captures the reality that several speakers may share a channel and allows for the whole spectrum of linguistic utterances to be represented visually. The close feature of the style denotes the addition of rich detail for interpretation of writing center interaction. Conventional punctuation (periods, commas, question marks) signals basic intonation contours, and exclamation points mark emphatic statements.

Close vertical transcriptions are read from left to right, top to bottom, in paired lines called *turns*. However, the reading of this type of transcript is linear only up to a point. Each participant’s speech occupies one or more lines that can be overlapped or cut off by the speaker on the line just below. At this juncture, the reader of a transcript must “unplug the other ear,” activate a stereo feature, and “hear” two channels at the same time. When noticing a gap in a line of speech, the reader should glance below to see how the other speaker fills it. New turns after one speaker has finished are signaled by the speaker’s designation (T, S, etc.) and a line of speech beginning at the left margin. We provide more details below.

Floors, turns, and pauses. A *floor* is a temporal space available to conversationalists to fill with talk. In “A Simplest Systematics,” Sacks et al. demonstrate that when taking the floor, conversationalists are familiar with and usually sensitive to “turn relevance places” (in English, sentence and clause boundaries). Quite often no pause occurs between one person’s turn and the next; that is, the turns are *latched*. Latching, according to Jefferson, is marked only by a change in speaker; in our version of close vertical transcription, we indicate this by beginning a new line of text at the left margin.

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All right. What are we doing today? Nice to see you again. ((to K)) Do you have any writing?

K: No. I passed my portfolio.

T: Congratulations! What did you get?

K: Two threes.


If tutorial conversation consisted only of latched turns, then horizontal transcriptions would be adequately representative. However, not all turns are so neatly taken. Most of the time participants take the floor after pauses or with overlaps. In close transcription, pauses between turns are indicated at the end of the previous speaker’s line (although they may occur in mid-utterance as well). Pauses are timed in seconds: (.) signifying a pause of one second; (2s), a pause of two seconds; and so on, as illustrated here:

C: Sometimes it seemed like I seemed to repeat.

T: All right. Such as? (7s)

C: I can’t remember where it was.

T: Did you mark it as you went?

C: Uh-uh. I was too busy thinking and reading ((laugh)). (3s)

In close vertical transcripts, both silent and filled pauses are included because, according to Local and Kelly, they mark participant “information fetching.” Filled pauses constitute hesitations during which a speaker utters sounds or words (such as um, hmm, and like) as a means of maintaining the floor (to prevent interruptions and overlaps) or formulating a response. During tutorials, one not only has to process information that is coming in but also information that is going out. Consequently, differences in speakers’ and hearers’ processing times may indicate varying levels of certainty, accuracy, and ability, for example, how confident a speaker is in his/her suggestion, or whether he/she is retrieving internalized knowledge or ideas, or brainstorming new ones. In this excerpt from a group tutorial, a student responds to another group member’s paper. Notice her strategic use of like, hmm, you know, yeah, and and stuff like that:

R: And I liked his conclusion, too, like I really liked hmm the ending. Stuff like the first, like, the thing that stuck in my head, you know, yeah, that were like “bite” and “no bark” and stuff like that. I like that.

Filled pauses are often omitted from horizontal transcripts as they are considered semantically “empty.”

Backchannels. Because horizontal transcripts are only one floor “deep,” they cannot represent what a second speaker is saying while the first has the floor. Vertical transcription, however, can represent the main channel and one or more “secondary channels,” or backchannels, simultaneously. The most recurrent backchannel utterances in American English are yeah, uh-huh, o.k., and all right. Because of their low volume and pitch, backchannels differ noticeably from the higher volume and often higher pitch of main-channel utterances. Jefferson explains that speakers generally deploy backchannels at sentence and clause boundaries as a supportive move to show agreement, attention, or empathy while accompanying the on-the-floor speaker:

T: O.K. ((to R)) Yeah, from listening to it, you made the transition, I think before it was different, it was kind of different, it was hard to understand, but I think

R: uh-huh

T: you fixed it much better, and as a narrative kind of thing it’s extremely

R: uh-huh

T: believable, so that was kind of cool. So what changes exactly did you, did you make to it?

R: Like the transitions and how I explain my examples more and

T: uh-huh yeah, yeah

R: I switched some sentence that I would jump from one sentence to another,

T: yeah

R: so I connected them all. And that’s it.

T: o.k.

Through her backchannels, R, the student, uses uh-huh to show attention, though not necessarily agreement, with what T is saying. T’s use of yeah, yeah and o.k. are clearer demonstrations of agreement and acceptance (see Gilewicz and Thonus).
Occasionally, however, speakers use backchannels as a strategy to seize the floor or to signal displeasure. The tutor in the following excerpt does both (with I see what you’re saying and I understand what you’re saying):

(6)

M. So I’m basically saying nobody would read the book unless they were familiar with the Islamic, I mean they would not, they won’t read it, but they would be really confused reading the book if they didn’t know anything about Islam or these terms. So if I’m writing for an audience that’s (.)

T: uh-huh

⇒ I see what you’re saying. I see what you’re saying. And when I s-

M: um actually whether I should change that?

T: what you’re saying, I understand what you’re saying. And when I said that, what I was thinking of is you don’t need to give us the plot summary at the beginning of this paper. Note that this struggle for the floor and backchannel repetition-as-displeasure might both conceivably be omitted in a playscript. In fact, in a horizontal transcript, the tutor’s critique might be construed as an affirmation:

(?)

M. So if I’m writing for an audience that’s actually whether I should change that?

T: I see what you’re saying. I understand what you’re saying. And when I said that,..

Conversational conventions are most frequently brought to light through their mis-application. In the two excerpts below, notice the positioning of the backchannels.

Tutor backchannels:

(8)

S: Yeah, because this means what I mean with this one. Because you know, right

T: before he meets, you know, him, he was totally lost, well after he meets, you know, he finds out that there’s like, you know, future or hope, you know,

S: like that.
Tutors offered positive reactions to the experience of taping and transcribing ten-minute segments of their tutorials and transcribing them in close vertical format. Some of the comments revolved around silence and pauses. One tutor, Craig, realized that he talked more than was useful during the session. “I think that at a couple of key points, my silence would have been more helpful to the session than what I had to say at these moments.” By timing pauses, Marianne realized that her “wait time” for student responses was only five seconds when her tutees needed about fifteen “to develop their thoughts and ideas.” Since transcribing her recording, she had become “very aware of allowing extra time and not stepping over [tutees’] thought processes.” From the close transcription of filled pauses, she understood “how many fillers and stalling devices we all used. There were a lot of ums, umms, uhs and the like.” She also realized that ESL students in her tutoring were “unsure of the English language, [and] therefore…hesitant to interrupt when somebody else is talking.”

A second topic of tutor commentary dealt with overlaps and interruptions. Doris wrote, “I’ve realized that I need to stop myself from doing it [overlapping] in a group setting because it could prohibit someone from making a very valid point.” Another observant tutor noted how his interruption of a student influenced the outcome of the tutorial:

In some of these moments, I could hear that she was about to perhaps make an important realization on her own, or at least make a relevant point on her own, and I had cut her off, in a sense, fed the realization/point to her, turning what could have been for C a moment of active learning into a moment of passive acceptance of information. It is a big failure on my part to let such moments slip away.

When analyzing backchannels, Alice noticed that one member of her semester-long tutoring group used backchannels in an “interesting” way and decided to change her interpretation of them as a result:

M sprinkles these liberally and with a very enthusiastic tone of voice. She spent a good part of the semester making me believe she understood whatever I was explaining. This, however, is NOT SO…. I’m no longer fooled by the positive backchanneling because it does not indicate comprehension.

Although not instructed to do so, some tutors found it valuable practice to share their transcripts with tutees. Monica offered:

I intend to share my transcription with my group. I am very eager to hear their reactions. I think it can be a good tool to see how we can improve as a group. I know my analysis and the things that I felt I should have said or not said, but I wonder what my group would change about this session.

To sum up, tutors were intrigued by the use of close vertical transcripts. Their observations and analyses resulted in a change in tutoring practice for some. Louise, a third-year tutor, wrote this reflection after her transcription experience, which centered on turn-taking and response:

I’ve completely changed the way I tutor. I’ve tried to make it more student-based. I listen more. In fact, if a student is speaking, I listen and don’t talk until they have finished. To make sure they have finished, I usually ask them if they are done, or if that’s all they have to say…. Also, other students in this same group have imitated this model of listening, repeating what someone has said with the phrase What I hear you saying is ….

Two Case Studies in Transcript Analysis

In training sessions we use transcripts in two ways. In general meetings we use our transcripts of sessions by former tutors to point out effective and detrimental practices, as well as to illustrate to new tutors during the orientation preceding actual tutoring what a tutorial conversation is like. Then mid-semester we ask tutors, as Lerner and Gillespie suggest, to transcribe their tutorials and also write narrative self-reflections. These pieces are discussed in individual conferences with the director to help tutors become aware of patterns in their practice. In our present discussion we will concentrate exclusively on how features of close vertical transcription informed tutors of their effectiveness in sessions.

Following are two examples of how tutors employed and interpreted pauses they marked in their transcripts and the writing center director’s responses. The first tutor, Robert, even though allowing long pauses, requires students to perform tasks impossible for them during the pauses he offers. Excerpt (16) depicts at least ten attempts on the part of the tutor to get each student in turn to compose orally a polished thesis statement for W, the writer. He does not invite a collaborative exercise in composing the thesis.
So, so you, all you need what you were missing is the initial the statement here saying what you’re gonna talk about.

W: uh-huh
O.K. well (to X and E) Guys?
X: Don’t ask me, I don’t do thesis statements. (laugh)
T: (to X and E) Well, if this was your paper how would you write a thesis statement in the intro paragraph? (10s)
X: I would probably use the sentence where she says (3s) their special uses include oils, medicine, food, dyes, *** art work, fuel feed and gardening. I’d probably use that as her thesis. Because that’s what she talks about in the paper. and then you can just
T: hmm
X: rephrase the, that the special uses include to say something like and like the reader know that that’s what they’re gonna talk about.
T: Give me an example. Give us an example. How would you phrase it?
X: ((sigh)) (5s)
T: (to W and E) How would you guys phrase it?
W: That the major uses that this paper explains are and then list all those, I don’t know.
T: O.K. What kind of (to E) If this was your paper, how would you state the thesis?
E: She talks about the um people around the world, right? I mean I would kind of say something about (1s) sunflowers were used around the world for da da da da da.
T: O.K.
E: ((laugh))
T: I don’t know if that da da da da da would work
E: Or um ***
X: ((laugh))
E: *** kinda say something about how they were used? Like in the different parts.

In his written reflection, Robert realized that his perceptions of silence changed while doing the transcription. Yet he seemed unsure about how pauses should be used productively:

I also pondered how much of the time was spent in silence. When tutoring, the silence seems to fill a certain duration of time that seems rather short. Upon listening, I found those durations of time to be endless. There’s a striking distinction between the silence during the session itself and the taped silence which I listened to. I think that when one is present with others the silence tends to be awkward and so one must say something. When listening to the taped session, I failed to see the awkwardness, and the time seemed to drag on and on in silence. Five seconds seemed like a minute.

Responding to this reflection, the writing center director wrote, "But silences can be very productive as well—if thinking is taking place"—followed by a critique of Robert’s insistence that students compose a precise thesis statement orally on the spot, without recognizing that students’ thinking on paper would be more productive and require an even longer pause in the conversation. The latter part of the excerpt illustrates how difficult those oral attempts are for students and that the tutor’s insis-
tence on getting them to do so fails. As a tutor trainer, the writing center director expected Roberto to allow students to rehearse (with pauses) possible ideas and wording, capturing those attempts in writing, which then could be phrased successfully as he insisted a thesis statement should be.

The second tutor, Alexandra, understood the value of pauses in tutorial conversations, as demonstrated in her transcript, which showed significant pauses during which both she and the tutee wrote, reviewed the draft, pondered, and waited for the other's contribution. Alexandra, however, overshot the target by using pauses to incite the student to answer her questions as if saying, "You answer this. I won't do it for you." Yet as evidenced throughout the transcript, she consistently answered those questions (for herself, not for the student) in order to pursue her own agenda.

Below are two excerpts in which we illustrate Alexandra's deliberate (but unproductive) use of pauses. The student she is tutoring (S) is writing about her experience in high school. Having met some new friends who influenced her behavior in a negative way, she later realized that school was important. Diagnosing the problem to be solved during the tutorial, Alexandra wrote, "Her teacher and I had been, for several weeks, attempting to get her to expand on that area of experience she had reduced to 'months passed, and things changed.'" The following excerpt was preceded by a tutor question regarding the bad influence her new friends had on her:

(17) T: O.K., so what (.) what was going on right there that you chose to be friends
S: uh-huh
T: with them? (7s) What was more important, right there? (9s) Do you know what I mean?
S: Yeah. (3s)
T: Those friends offered something (7s) and so, so what you have to do
S: yeah
T: right here is where the analysis comes in. Why do people do this? (3s)
S: Um, I don't, I don't (9s)
T: Why will the high school students that you're talking to why will they do it, too? (12s) In order to avoid going through
S: uh-huh

The writing center director wrote repeatedly on the transcript excerpts: "Why was there such a long pause? I wonder if the student got the question, if she knew what you were asking about?"

The conversation continues. In this second excerpt from Alexandra's tutorial, following a short break for writing, she re-engages the topic nominated by S, popularity:

(18) T: Well, O.K., so let's talk some more about. (.) 'cause you keep raising that idea about wanting to be popular, you raised that before, you wanted to be popular. (8s)
S: uh-huh
T: So, what, (.) what did you think being popular would give you?
⇒ S: Um (11s) I don't know, that you would know everyone.
T: You would know everyone. (6s) And why would you want to do that?
⇒ S: Just 'cause to be cool, I guess, you would look, I don't know (5s)
T: Being cool. ((writing)) O.K. So where does being cool come from? (2s) If somebody "bees" cool (3s) who decides whether they’re cool?

S: uh-huh

You, I guess it’s up to you, being cool.

T: Well, but that’s not the way you were thinking, is it? You were thinking (3s) that the only way to be cool is if everybody in school thought you were cool.

S: uh-huh

T: Right?

S: Uh-huh.

T: You had to be.

As a high-involvement speaker, Alexandra might be expecting latching, overlap, and joint production from S, a low-involvement speaker. The 8-second, 6-second, and 12-second pauses indicate Alexandra is waiting for S to latch on her responses in order to extend the tutor’s own utterances. She ascribes to S the inability to engage in the conversation despite the space-offering pauses:

I knew going in that I talk far too much in these sessions and that the student talks far too little, and the tape confirms that. I did see, however, that I have become much better about waiting for a response to my questions. At one point in the tape, I waited 31 seconds before rephrasing the question. Nevertheless, in this particular situation, it doesn’t seem to make much difference. The student tries, really tries, to respond to the kinds of questions that I ask her, but it seems as though she has never thought about things in the way that I’m asking her to.

When she says that she doesn’t know (and she says it a lot!), she really doesn’t know and seems utterly unaccustomed to thinking of things in that way—especially in the area of being responsible for making choices (or of having choices, for that matter).

In her response to Alexandra, the writing center director explained that instead of offering the student space, the pauses instead might have put the student on the spot, perhaps even embarrassing her. The transcript showed that S did answer some questions in latched turns, which suggests that unfilled pauses signify not knowing how to answer a question as posed, rather than “not being responsible for making choices.” S’s responses, when they came, were often mitigated with more I don’t know, indicating that she might have been guessing at what she thought the tutor wanted. Alexandra was asked to speculate on the effect the repeatedly unfilled pauses and “I don’t know” responses had on S and weigh that against the tutor’s own feelings of frustration. What was suggested for the tutor is first, learn how to recast rather than “pile up” questions, and perhaps change the overall approach to tutoring this student by having S respond in writing to one question at a time, as that proved productive at one point in the session.

Conclusion

Close transcription goes beyond representing the essential syntax and vocabulary of an utterance to capturing most of the elements of the stream of speech; vertical transcription includes temporal spacing and renders horizontal “monody” as homophony and polyphony.

By taking the time to prepare close vertical transcriptions of tutorials that include hesitations, repetitions, timed pauses, backchannels, overlaps and paralinguistic features, writing center tutors and researchers obtain much more information to work with. It needs to be stated, however, that in advocating the use of close vertical transcription we do not claim that adopting it for examining tutorial conversation will result in radical change in writing center practice or philosophy. Employing this transcription format will modify the focus and give us more defined criteria for the analysis of tutorials, which in turn will help us operationalize such categories as collaboration, facilitation of response, negotiation, awareness of comprehensibility, acceptance of response, dominance, etc., to reveal how and how effectively they are constructed in tutorial conversation. Conference presentations and publications by Gilewicz, Plummer, Thomus and Walker, which employ close vertical transcription, have already shown how it can aid in answering such questions as “How directive are tutors, really?”, “How do males and females talk differently in writing tutorials?” and “How do students interact with one another and with their tutor in group vs. individual tutorials?” Areas that can also be examined through such transcription include tutorial myths (e.g., “Don’t interrupt the student”), functions of laughter, and comparisons between the responses of native and nonnative tutees, among others.

Besides addressing practical concerns in the methodology of tutoring writing, close vertical transcription could help to answer larger questions of interest to those researching talk about writing. If adopted more extensively by writing center researchers, this style of transcribing could help us delineate more clearly the differences between tutorials and other talk about writing, such as classroom peer groups and writing conferences with teachers. Furthermore, this transcription style will...
permit comparison of writing center tutorials with the multitude of studies available in the discourse and conversation analysis literature. Ultimately, writing center tutorials will gain legitimacy as an oral discourse genre in the academy when transcribed in the detail and depth of close vertical transcription.

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**NOTES**

1. This perception was initially shared by several of the tutors at our writing center who did close transcription: “Reading the transcript word for word is hard to understand what each student is saying. Ideas are choppy, and it is difficult to digest what has taken place because the ideas are intercepted by excess words... An example of this is shown at the beginning of the transcript. I asked, ‘What is most interesting to you about this paper?’” His response alone took up ten lines of computer text while all that was said could have been done in one sentence. That is why I attempt to ask leading questions or make brief comments to the students’ response. Capturing those raw ideas and putting them down on paper was a task that opened my eyes to understanding the importance of conveying my thoughts clearly, as if they were to be captured and written down at that moment.”

2. “The inclusion of works by Davis et al., and by Walker and Elias, as well as unpublished dissertations by Thomas and by Young, among others.”


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