

Transcription News - 24th May 2023

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Good morning and welcome to the May 2023 edition of Transcription News from University Transcriptions and TP Transcription Limited. Our newsletter includes updates on our charitable foundation's work, a commentary on a new study into ethical considerations regarding the well being of transcribers and pitfalls to look out for when outsourcing transcription work.



Charity Focus - Men in Sheds – £500 donation

The UK Men's Sheds Association provide support and guidance to individuals and groups across the UK in starting

and managing Men's Sheds.

Men's Sheds (or Sheds) are similar to garden sheds – a place to pursue practical interests at leisure, to practice skills and enjoy making and mending. The difference is that garden sheds and their activities are often solitary in nature while Men's Sheds are the opposite. They're about social connections and friendship building, sharing skills and knowledge, and of course a lot of laughter.

Sheds reduce loneliness by 96%, anxiety by 75% and depression by 89% according to a survey of 500 Shedders in 2018, we are currently supporting more research, particularly post lockdowns. There are now over 750 open Sheds in the UK and a further 200 in development.

Sheds are whatever the members want them to be. Although labelled sheds, they can be empty offices, portable cabins, warehouses, garages, and in at least one case, a disused mortuary.

The Association promotes the Men's Sheds movement so as many people as possible know about them. The organisation aims to ensure that Men's Sheds is a household name so that every man knows what they are and how to find one.

In 2022 we donated £500 in support of the charity's Membership Development Function. This is the first stop shop for the general public to find out about Sheds and for members to get support for their Shed. This support varies from accessing resources on the running of a Shed or developing a new Shed through to access on health and wellbeing resources.

Email received from Charlie Bethel, Chief Officer of the UK Men's Sheds Association: "Thank you very much for your support. This support has made a big difference to our work and the transformational power of Men's Sheds adding years to life and life to years."

Looking after the transcribers - a recent University of Cork study

'Research needs to be conducted with the best of intentions and must not inflict harm or distress on participants, the wider public and yourself.' Teesside University

We recently noticed a study released last year by Marita Hennessy et al from the University College Cork on the effects of transcription on transcribers during qualitative research.

The full paper can be accessed here:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10497323221101709>. It is entitled 'Outsourcing Transcription: Extending Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research' and was published in May 2022.

Marita and her colleagues noted that whilst there is significant attention given to researcher vulnerabilities, little has been written about the effect on transcribers, who 'can potentially experience emotional distress and vicarious trauma'. The study looks into the experiences of a transcriber working on a recurrent miscarriage study.

I have quoted extensively from the article and outlined the contents in order to provide further discussion from a transcription company perspective. The article has given us food for thought in improving our systems in relation to triggering and ensuring best practice is applied when we deal with our own transcribers and work coming in.

Transcribers - the hidden professionals

The study notes that audio transcription is poorly addressed in general when it comes to the study of research, although there is quite a bit of discussion about the value of self-completing transcribing 'in order to build intimate knowledge of the data'. There is limited guidance around the ethical issues involved in outsourcing transcription, particularly the support of transcribers.

Little attention has been paid to the psychological safety of transcriptionists who can potentially experience secondary stress and vicarious trauma in a similar way to professional interpreters. Hennessy notes that transcribers can work on different projects of a similar nature, with the potential for long-term impacts. She notes that the lack of attention to transcriptionists is unsurprising, 'given the lack of status afforded to transcription work'.

Do No Harm

The paper argues that the principle of 'do no harm' with research should be extended to professional transcribers. It is a core ethical principle for healthcare research and forms part of 'the duty of care that a researcher owes to research participants, and the duty that a research institution or sponsor owes to both participants and researchers'.

The study notes that:

Transcribers can become emotionally connected to the 'characters they construct based on the tapes'

Transcribers can experience emotional distress and feelings of helplessness, 'emotional labour' (dealing with the voice-to-voice contact and concern for those whose voices they were hearing),

'emotional work' (dealing with the emotions of others/empathy and concern for researchers' physical and emotional wellbeing) .

A study in 2016 noted that a lack of safeguarding protocols in relation to transcription can make the role very challenging 'despite some use of coping skills such as acceptance, compartmentalising, desensitisation, rationalisation and detachment'. A suggestion in the study was made that transcribers should be briefed about any potentially distressing content to the recordings that they are transcribing, 'as this would provide an opportunity to make an informed decision regarding taking on the role and prepare them for any potential emotional impact'. Similarly the same study noted that the emotional impact is important to consider as transcribers tend to work in a more isolated manner than researchers.'

Hennessy describes conducting an interview with the professional transcriber responsible for completing the recurrent miscarriage project to discuss her experience of transcribing the interviews.

The transcriber's insight, as quoted in the study, is interesting:

'Often people will contact me by email without giving me any information about their research topic. The only way I can get an insight, if I don't ask them, is by the title in the signature of their email. So much communication is by email nowadays and working from home as a transcriber can be an isolating experience. If you aren't careful you could go days without speaking to people... I had always transcribed audio without considering the personal impact of sensitive material, so I never expected the researchers to consider my feelings either. I am a people person, and sociology or psychology-based topics are what I enjoy transcribing most. I like hearing the human stories although at times I can find it hard to switch off. I don't just type the words and forget about them. Maybe this is a skill that other transcribers have mastered better than me...The experience of transcribing [the specific research interviews] was much less stressful because I knew I was supported if any issues did arise... It is an added bonus when the researcher considers the transcriber's feelings in this process as well.'

The study includes a number of recommendations for best practice:

Transcriptionists should be briefed about the project at the outset, including, but not limited to, any potentially distressing content in the audio recordings that they are transcribing. Appropriate distress protocols, including briefing and debriefing, should be put in place if there are no such procedures within the transcriptionist's own organisation, as applicable. Researchers should establish what is in place as part of any tendering/pre-contractual (or more informal) processes. The use of informal check-ins is recommended.

Potential risks, and protocols to minimise any harm should be documented within ethics applications, as a requirement.

Commentary

We note that this study was only completed based on the experiences of one transcriber undertaking one project, but as the writers of the study acknowledge, it is very difficult to get information on who completed what transcription work in order to conduct any research into it.

The study gives us lots to think about as a company in terms of how we address triggering & difficult emotional subjects with our transcribers, and also how our clients notify us of any audio files that may contain particular details we need to be aware of in order to be able to tell our transcribers so they can make an informed decision as to whether to take the work on.

As a company we have protocols in place for ensuring that transcribers can decline work based on informed decisions, but we take on board the advice above about briefing and debriefing. We

provide all transcribers with support as and when needed, but a more formal support structure from our management team would clearly benefit our transcribers going forwards. Our own policy on trigger warnings & content notifications is here: <https://www.universitytranscriptions.co.uk/trigger-warnings-content-notifications/>

The Pitfalls of Outsourcing Transcription Work

Outsourcing transcription has lots of benefits for organisations, including the cost implications, efficiency, professional service standards and support as and when needed. However it also carries a number of disadvantages, Below are five disadvantages to outsourcing transcription.

Confidentiality Risks

Confidentiality is vital for all of our clients. Any company you contract with for outsourcing transcription is going to provide you with a confidentiality agreement or non-disclosure agreement. However, whenever data leaves your facility, you are still at risk of a confidentiality breach. For this reason, it is very important to make sure whoever you use has secure systems and strict data security in place to ensure this does not happen. There are transcription companies out there, including some of the larger websites, who send out their audio files to transcribers across the world. They have very little idea as to who is receiving access to the data. Our company is UK based, ISO & Cyber Essentials accredited (and just completing Cyber Essentials Plus - an extended security accreditation) with professional human transcribers, and we have never had a security issue with any audio data.

Lack of Efficiency

This really depends on the amount of work you are outsourcing, but it can take weeks to receive transcription work back. If you use a budget option and send the work off shore or use AI systems, it is very likely that you will need to spend considerable time correcting for inaccuracies.

This really depends on the type of work you have. Two or more person interviews can usually be transcribed very accurately and quickly by professional transcribers with full accuracy. A larger sized professional transcription company should be able to complete orders of any size within a very short period of time due to capacity. We have had reports in the past of very small transcription companies taking on very large orders at an extremely low price and then failing to complete them.

Significant Costs

Outsourcing transcription costs less than having an in-house transcription department but the costs associated with it are still quite significant. Some transcription companies tie their customers in for a set amount each month of minimum amounts of work, or insist on ongoing payments for a fixed amount. This can build up significantly if you then do not need to use the service.

You can of course lower the costs by looking at using overseas, non-native speaking transcribers, but the problem here is that you then increase costs when the work comes back and requires constant checking and amending.

Lack of Control

You send your audio and video files out to be transcribed and immediately lose control of them. As far as you know they could be sent anywhere in the world. And indeed they are by some companies. Fortunately, if you use a reputable professional business who are based in the UK this is not an issue.

Contractual Obligations and Changes

Relying on an outside company for transcription services can mean that you are locked into a contract for a specific period of time. You are at a disadvantage in this because your ability to make adjustments based on your organisation's needs is impeded.

I took a number of the above pointers from a US site discussing medical transcription outsourcing and the latter one is very interesting. There are still a number of transcription businesses out there who use the subscription model of transcribing, which essentially requires their clients to commit to using them for a set period of time and at a fixed price, so regardless of the amount of work sent across they still have to pay some or all of a bill each month.

Transcription has moved on in recent times, and the majority of companies now use the ad hoc model - ie you have work and they complete it. This seems a lot more efficient and useful than essentially providing fixed cost services. We have even come across transcription services where a fixed fee is charged, but then the company have gone back to ask for more money when the audio was not as perfect as they thought it would be, even though the organisation were paying them a fixed monthly fee.

Summary

There are lots of pitfalls to outsourcing services to external businesses. It is simply a question of managing the risks so that they are minimised as much as possible.

Recent Advice Articles & News

[How can I improve my typing speed? What are the main characteristics of a professional transcriber?](#)

[Best ways to record a qualitative research interview](#)

[Machine Polishing Transcription](#)

[Transcribe it yourself - advice from some lecturers to students](#)

[Transcription for bosses - its harder than it looks](#)

[How long does it take to transcribe 20 minutes of audio?](#)

[Human transcription - why do automated companies recommend it?](#)

[How useful are DBS checks when ordering transcription work?](#)

[Ordering transcription work at universities - a guide](#)

[Spending research budgets before deadlines](#)

[For a full list of over 50 articles on our website please click here](#)

The Transcription Society - providing professional accreditation to academic and business transcribers

The Transcription Society is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving standards in the transcription industry and providing accreditation to both individual and corporate members. The organisation is run on a not for profit basis and registered in the UK with Companies House. The society offers individual transcribers the chance to obtain professional recognition for their standards of work and provides corporate members with recognition that they subscribe to a professional level of industry standards for quality and ethics.

Needless to say, TP Transcription Limited is a corporate member and our directors sit on the board

of the Transcription Society. For details of the transcription standards the Society promotes, please visit www.transcriptionsociety.org.

We hope you have enjoyed reading our monthly newsletter and look forward to hearing from you if we can assist further.

Kind regards

Jonathan Fagan (he/him)

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