Speakup in a Nutshell

Steve Knoblock, Developer for Folkstreams
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Speakup is a text markup language for moving picture (film, video, etc.) transcriptions. "Speakup" is a neologism of Speak Markup. We chose this approach because text markup is simple, easy for non-technical people to learn and structured (it captures meaning and not presentation). It should be as close to typescript as possible.

During the development of the Folkstreams website, it became desirable and necessary to create a text markup language for representing transcripts. The purpose of a text markup language was to make it possible for contributors to submit and edit transcripts once they were in our system. Since we deliver transcripts over the web, and because we believe that searching a transcript can serve as a surrogate or representative of the film as a finding aid (for example, a video might be found by searching transcripts for a match within a song), it is important that the transcript be stored as text and rendered as HTML. We also needed to support a comprehensive note system. Our transcripts have extensive notes provided by academics. The following explains how I arrived at Speakup and serves as a brief introduction to the markup elements.

Note that there is a similarity between a transcript and closed captions for a visual work. A transcript can be seen as "rich captioning" of a work. It is the richness of meaning and expression available in the transcript that differs from the caption, although some closed captioning approaches this by including non-verbals.

After studying the various approaches to transcript texts, I came to some decisions about our transcript markup language, Speakup.

The markup defines five elements:

* Dialog
* Non-verbal
* Song
* Timecode
* Note References

The PBS transcript became the model for our Dialog expressions. It seemed clear, concise and flexible, as this example shows.

> DAVA SOBEL (Author, Galileo's Daughter): Galileo was honest when he said that the Bible was the true word of God. He just didn't think it was a good astronomy textbook.

A Dialog element consists of two main sections, the Fully Qualified Name and the Spoken Text. The

former names the speaker along with any qualifiers, such as occupation or affiliation and the latter represents the actual words spoken. The name is required to be in all uppercase letters. This ensures the Dialog pattern can be recognized automatically. The qualifier allows mixed case and some punctuation other than colon (the dialog separator).

I chose to define the descriptive element in terms similar to the presidential transcripts at Miller, which defines representations of anything not recognizable as speech as a "non-verbal." This includes vocalizations which are not words as well as descriptions such as "taps pipe on table."

A Non-verbal element consists of any text enclosed in brackets. I chose to avoid the parenthesis used by some transcripts (notably CNN) since it is already used to enclose the Dialog qualifier. It is also the syntax we currently use on Folkstreams for transcript submissions. The only change is that Non-verbals no longer restrict text to uppercase letters. Any text may be enclosed other than brackets (the delimiters). I chose to allow mixed case since typing uppercase can be a chore and this gives us greater flexibility. There is really no reason to require uppercase for non-verbal descriptions and as the Miller Center transcripts show, mixed case is perfectly acceptable. Non-verbals may be block or embedded in text. A good example of an inline non-verbal is:

Knott: [inaudible] a term.

And example employing both modes from one of our original transcripts:

[INTERIOR, JOHN AND PAULINE'S HOUSE TRAILER, STANLEY, VIRGINIA.]

JOHN: And when I went in I set down about five seats from the front, over by, it'd be on the right side as you go down the aisle, and about five seats from the front. And everything that Milburn said, he had the longest finger I believe I ever saw, that night, and it was right at me. And I thought, "My Lord, who's been telling him stuff on me?" I mean, he was a-hitting me up one side and down the other one, you know. But when he made that altar call, which I didn't think he was ever going to do, but he finally did, out of there I went, buddy. And I made a commitment to Christ.

CHARLES: Well, mom and dad sang a lot at home, they were, especially when we were traveling to different places, going to different churches, us boys would be in the back and there was a lot of times we'd be punching each other, or pinching each other, you know, [STILL PHOTO OF JOHN AND BOYS, BACK OF OLD PONTIAC] just being typical boys we were always at each other. I think mom and dad in the front were trying to drown us out and they were singing "Just Give Me One More Day." Seemed like that's the song I remember the most: "Lord, Just Give Me One More Day." And they'd be singing at the top of their lungs. I think they were trying to drown the noise out. And of course, [LAUGHS] you get three boys in the back seat, it's hard to drown that noise out. [18]

Many transcripts submitted to Folkstreams contain songs lyrics. Songs are a vital part of folk study and therefore are a requirement for our transcript markup. I chose a multi-line block element for enclosing

songs, similar to those in use by Wikipedia and forum software:

<song>
Grizzly, Grizzly
Grizzly Bear
Oh Lord have mercy!
Grizzly Bear
You know my papa went a-huntin' for
Grizzly Bear
He died huntin' on the Brazos for
Grizzly Bear
It was early one mornin'
Grizzly Bear
I heard a shootin' and a callin' and
Grizzly Bear
Well Grizzly, Grizzly
Grizzly Bear
Oh, Lord have mercy!
Grizzly Bear
He find the bear on old Brazos
Grizzly Bear
He found him down on old Brazos
Grizzly Bear
You know, I ain't scared of no bear
Grizzly Bear
Because the workin' squad they killed him there
Oh, Grizzly, Grizzly
Grizzly Bear
Well Lord have mercy!
Grizzly Bear
</song>

I considered marking songs by an starting each line with a space, but this can become tedious (in my experience) and therefore the HTML-like tags were chosen.

Another important feature of Folkstreams transcripts is the timecode. This allows the reader to find the text in the video by scrolling the video to the timecode in the transcript. Timecodes are recognized simply as hour, minute, second format (it may be necessary to support hour, minute, second, frame format in future). In future, timecodes may be used to divide the transcript into scene structures or provide links directly to the location in the video.

On Folktreams, transcripts may have notes. This requires support for note references in the transcript body. These are marked by numbers enclosed in brackets. Confusion with Non-verbals is avoided by requiring that note references consist only of numbers. Any set of all numbers in brackets is recognized as a note. See previous example containing a note reference. Notes coordinate with our "popup" note display system.

The Elements

This section describes the elements available for use in a transcript. The examples are informative, not normative (a fancy way of saying they are representative and useful models of usage, but not necessarily definitive). The elements of Speakup are:

- Dialog
- Non-verbal
- Song
- Timecode
- Note Reference

Dialog

The Dialog element consists of a name (with optional qualifier) and body. The former gives the speaker's name and the latter what the speaker said. A dialog element contains text representing a person speaking. The text is marked to indicate who is speaking and what the person says. The name of the person speaking may also include a qualifier.

A dialog element contains text representing a person speaking. The text is marked to indicate who is speaking and what the person says. A qualifier tells the reader something important about the speaker, such as their occupation.

Example

DAVA SOBEL (Author, Galileo's Daughter): Galileo was honest when he said that the Bible was the true word of God. He just didn't think it was a good astronomy textbook.
(pbs.org)

The name is be required to be uppercase letters, the qualifier enclosed in parenthesis, the body free form text to the end of line. The name is required to be uppercase letters, even in the case of a name normally spelled with mixed case, such as "McDonald," "McLeod" or "McNeish."

Example

TOM MCNEISH (Grandson of Endurance carpenter Chippy McNeish): My grandfather, Chippy McNeish, saw an advertisement in the paper, and it said you might not return. So he went and seen about it and got it.
(pbs.org)

An apostrophe may be included in the name, such as in "O'Daniel."

Example

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MARY CREAN O'BRIEN (Daughter of Endurance seaman Tom Crean): My father didn't speak too much about the Antarctic. I often wondered, was it too hard? Did he want to forget it? But he did say they had a tough time. And the one thing he did show us now was his ears. They had suffered frostbite. They were like boards.
(pbs.org)

In a similar vein, names with "von" or "van" are rendered all uppercase.

Example

ALBERT VAN HELDEN (Utrecht University): What we have in Galileo is a package then, of somebody who is mechanically and practically very good, somebody who is a great philosopher about nature and somebody who is ambitious.
(pbs.org)

The qualifier is free to employ most normal text characters, mixed case letters, numbers and punctuation, with the exception of parenthesis (they mark the boundaries of a qualifier) and the colon (separating the name from the dialog text). It is safe to use a colon in the dialog body.

A few examples of dialog follow:

Examples

PEG: Run, Charlie, run!
(Born for Hard Luck)

PRISONER(V/O): I'd never seen so much work did, so many different things did with a hoe in all of my life when I come in prison. Man, we'd even build roads with the hoes, just hoes alone, we'd build roads.
(African American Work Songs)

ELDRESS MARGUERITE: "For in the Kingdom of Heaven they neither marry or are given in marriage." It isn't to say that God or that Christ disapproved of marriage, only, if they wanted to live a Kingdom of Heaven life, if they wanted to prepare for the Kingdom of Heaven, a person has to be separate.
(The Shakers)

NARRATOR: The life to which all Shakers consecrate themselves is based on the teachings of Ann Lee. (Reading from various passages in the Shaker book Testimonies of the Life and Character of Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders with Her [2d ed., 1888],over engravings of Manchester, England).
(The Shakers)

TOM MCNEISH (Grandson of Endurance carpenter Chippy McNeish): My grandfather, Chippy McNeish, saw an advertisement in the paper, and it said you might not return. So he went and seen about it and got it.

(sample from PBS.org)

CHIPPY MCNEISH VOICEOVER: We look the lot of convicts and we are not much short of that life at present...but still hoping to get back to civilization some day.
(sample from PBS.org)

SAPOZNIK (O/C): The thing is I don't really know. This is like a real potpourri of some of the stuff.

SAPOZNIK: It just needs to be....

SAPOZNIK: How about this? Have you ever seen this picture?

SAPOZNIK: I don't think so no.

SAPOZNIK: Can you name that Jew? All right then.

NETSKY: Very interesting.

Song

The song element represents lines of lyrics or poetry and encloses multiple lines.

Example

<song>
Grizzly, Grizzly
Grizzly Bear
Oh Lord have mercy!
Grizzly Bear
You know my papa went a-huntin' for
Grizzly Bear
He died huntin' on the Brazos[7] for
Grizzly Bear
It was early one mornin'
Grizzly Bear
I heard a shootin' and a callin' and
Grizzly Bear
Well Grizzly, Grizzly
Grizzly Bear
Oh, Lord have mercy!
Grizzly Bear
He find the bear on old Brazos
Grizzly Bear
He found him down on old Brazos
Grizzly Bear
You know, I ain't scared of no bear
Grizzly Bear

Because the workin' squad they killed him there
[GUARD WATCHING] Oh, Grizzly, Grizzly
Grizzly Bear
Well Lord have mercy!
[PRISONERS] Grizzly Bear
</song>

Note that the song includes descriptions and note references.

Usage Note: Please avoid placing non-verbals within songs (as above). If you need to describe what people are doing while singing a song, break the lyrics up into more than one song section. Songs may contain note references.

Please avoid this arrangement.

CONGREGATION (Voiceover):

<song>
I don't know what you came to do
But I came to praise the Lord
(REFRAIN REPEATS)
</song>

I understand the attempt to name the singer, but the parser does very badly with this configuration and it will mess up the HTML generated from the transcript.

I recommended using a non-verbal.

[Congregation, Voiceover]

<song>
I don't know what you came to do
But I came to praise the Lord
(REFRAIN REPEATS)
</song>

Non-verbals

A "non-verbal" describes aspects of the scene that are not spoken, such as the location, what people are doing, gestures or utterances other than intelligible words. Non-verbals come in two types, embedded in text and standalone.

Example

Knott: Did you have any difficulty making the transition from Baker to Reagan?

Ryan: No. It was interesting.

Knott: [inaudible] a term.
(Miller Center)

The only difference between this Miller Center example and our transcript style is the requirement names be in uppercase.

Counter to our previous guidelines, only brackets will be accepted as non-verbals. Any kind of non-verbal indication or explanation will be contained in brackets, no differentiation between indication and explanation is necessary, as in...

Usage Note: The description is uppercase text enclosed in brackets. It may be alone on a line or embedded within text.

Example

NETSKY: Phillip is going to play something, if everybody could please be quiet.

[MUSIC AND DANCING]

NETSKY (V/O); When I started the band back in 1980, I was already teaching at the New England Conservatory of Music where there was a very creative musical environment and a lot of the students there were fair game for just about any kind of exciting music. Although actually very few of them had heard or played any Jewish music and I played very little of it myself. My own connection comes well it actually comes from my family in Philadelphia. I was down in my grandmother's basement poking around for old relics and I chanced upon a very large photo of my grandfather's band[15].
(Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden)

Timecodes

A timecode is used in filmmaking or video to identify when in the runtime a frame occurs.

Example

(00:01:03)

[Jerry turns pottery on an electric wheel.]

JERRY BROWN: My daddy was known better as Jug Brown than he was - his name was Horace Vincent. Everybody called him Jug Brown.

[Photo: Horace "Jug" Brown]

JERRY BROWN: A lot of people he'd know for years never did know his first name, called him "Jug." He got some mail one time, "Jug Brown."

NARRATOR: According to family tradition, John Henry Brown came to America in the 18th century. Some 30 of his descendants established potteries from the Carolinas to Texas. In 1935 Horace V. Brown moved from Georgia to Alabama, opened a pottery and raised a family. Jerry Brown is his son.

[Jerry looks at a jug he has placed to one side of his wheel. A pitcher is also in view. These forms rest on temporary "bat boards" where they are allowed to dry.]

JERRY BROWN: I make all different shapes. I set that one off it made me think of one of my daddy's jugs. I didn't really notice it 'til I set it off and looked at it. It's got, you know, he made his top real thick and heavy up here at the top. And it's just slant in sort of a little at a time. I make mine more rounded top, most of them, than I do that one. When you make face jugs you make them in all different shapes because everybody's head is shaped different just about.

(00:02:18)

[Music & credits. The winter scene includes Jerry Brown's house, dog pen, and barn and follows his red Ford pick up truck on the snowy dirt road to his pottery shop.]

[Photo: Jack Brown 1941-1964. Jerry's brother Jack is pictured in his National Guard uniform.]

JERRY BROWN: My brother, he was a real good potter. He was 14 months older than me. It was on a Friday. And he wanted to build us a shop. He had some property there in Detroit - down here at Detroit, Alabama. He wanted to build a shop on his property down there and go in together and make pottery. And we'd done agreed on what size, you know, shop to build. And we had it in mind starting it in just the next few days, soon as we got a chance. And that night he got killed in a car wreck. About less than a year after that my daddy passed away. And that's when it left me by myself and that's - didn't think I could stand the pressure, you know. It brought back too many memories. I went back down to the shop, you know, with the intention of making stuff, you know. I couldn't stand the pressure, you know. I'd just have to get out. Then I moved to Hamilton and somebody stole all my daddy's equipment before I got the chance to go back there and get it. I ain't got nary a piece of my daddy's equipment left. Then I started, uh, that's when I moved to Hamilton. That's when I started logging up here.

[John Brewer cuts down a tree with a chainsaw. Jerry works with Ruff the mule to pull cut timber to the truck, where it is then loaded.]

JERRY BROWN: I was logging for a living and, uh, we had about two bad winters right after another. Stayed around here with nothing to do, you know. I told my wife, "I'm fixing to clean out my barn and put me in a pottery shop. I did have four mules and two trucks when I was logging. I'm down to two mules and one truck. And probably by spring, if the pottery business keeps on progressing, I can quit all that. See, I'd been out of it twenty years. A lot of my friends come by and said, "Man, you're crazy!" A lot of them said, "You don't even know what a churn looks like." They didn't know that I'd made them before.

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Usage Note: Timecodes must not appear within any other content. They must appear by themselves on a line. Timecodes, in our transcripts represent the start of a *scene*. You would only place a timecode every few lines of dialog, not on every line.

Note References

Transcripts offer associated notes concerning subjects mentioned in dialog.

Usage Note: Any numeric content that appears between brackets is a note reference.

Example

NETSKY (V/O); When I started the band back in 1980, I was already teaching at the New England Conservatory of Music where there was a very creative musical environment and a lot of the students there were fair game for just about any kind of exciting music. Although actually very few of them had heard or played any Jewish music and I played very little of it myself. My own connection comes well it actually comes from my family in Philadelphia. I was down in my grandmother's basement poking around for old relics and I chanced upon a very large photo of my grandfather's band[15].

Special Cases and Tips

Voice over (and other) indications

One way to indicate voice over or off camera remarks is to place the abbreviation in parenthesis. V/O stands for Voice Over and O/C stands for Off Camera.

SAPOZNIK (O/C): The thing is I don't really know. This is like a real potpourri of some of the stuff.

Please, be careful to avoid substituting zero for the letter oh.

DOLL MOODY (V/O): Well, she just be sittin' here [37], and all at once she just start singin'. And if you ain't payin' her no attentions, you will pay her some 'tentions. Because the song that she was singin', you don't know it, and (you) just wondered how a person like that just sittin' there singin' a song like that and you had never heard it before. And so, we just know it's a new song come to her. And she gets through, she says, "Well, I got it." Be another new song done come to her.

If you prefer, you may spell out voice over as part of the name.

PRISONER VOICEOVER: I'd never seen so much work did, so many different things did with a hoe in all of my life when I come in prison. Man, we'd even build roads with the hoes, just hoes alone, we'd

build roads.
(African American Work Songs)

Voice of the narrator

The narrator should always be indicated by

NARRATOR:

Non-verbals

Some useful non-verbals.

- Inaudible (insufficiently clear to transcribe)
- Crosstalk (two persons talking at once)