

Transcribe!

created by Seventh String Software

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Over the past few years, I've been working with linguist Michael Walsh and speakers of Murriny Patha (a northern Australian language) to transcribe very fast speech. To do so I have been using Transcriber or ELAN alongside Transcribe!, a shareware application developed by Andy Robinson of Seventh String Software.

Transcribe! is a great little application designed to help musicians to transcribe their favorite jazz musicians from recordings—and as such it is ideal for ethnomusicologists as well. Although the pitch analysis features are designed around the diatonic scale commonly used in Western music and in music notation, it gives quite accurate cent measurements as well. It is not an automatic music transcription tool; rather it analyzes and manipulates the sound signal to make it easier to transcribe, by slowing down at pitch, inserting markers, automatically analyzing pitch, filtering particular frequencies, shifting pitch by set values, computing tempo, etc. (see Figure 1).

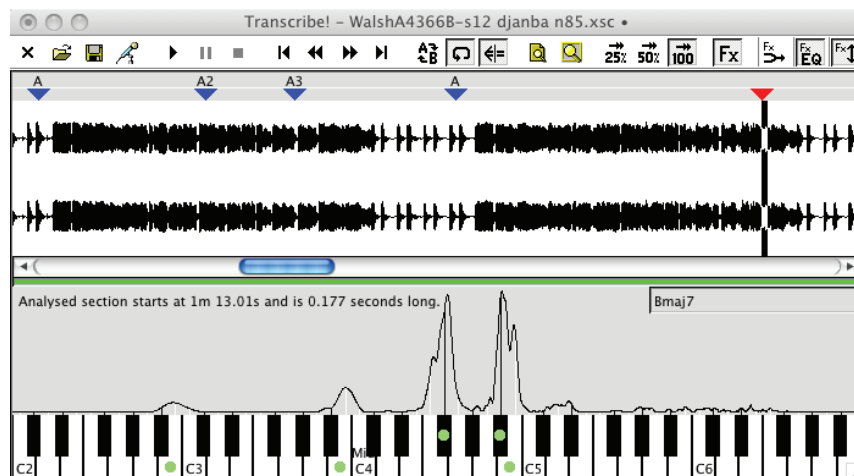


FIGURE 1: Example of Transcribe! window showing pitch analysis of a section of a Murriny Patha song.

Because of the potential for foot pedal control, ease of navigation within the file, and the very good quality of the digital signal processing, especially the “slowing down while maintaining pitch” feature, it will also be useful to almost anyone who needs to transcribe accurately from recordings—that means linguists, oral historians, etc. You can easily hide

the piano keyboard and pitch spectrum part of the window if you're not interested in using it for music transcription (see Figure 2).

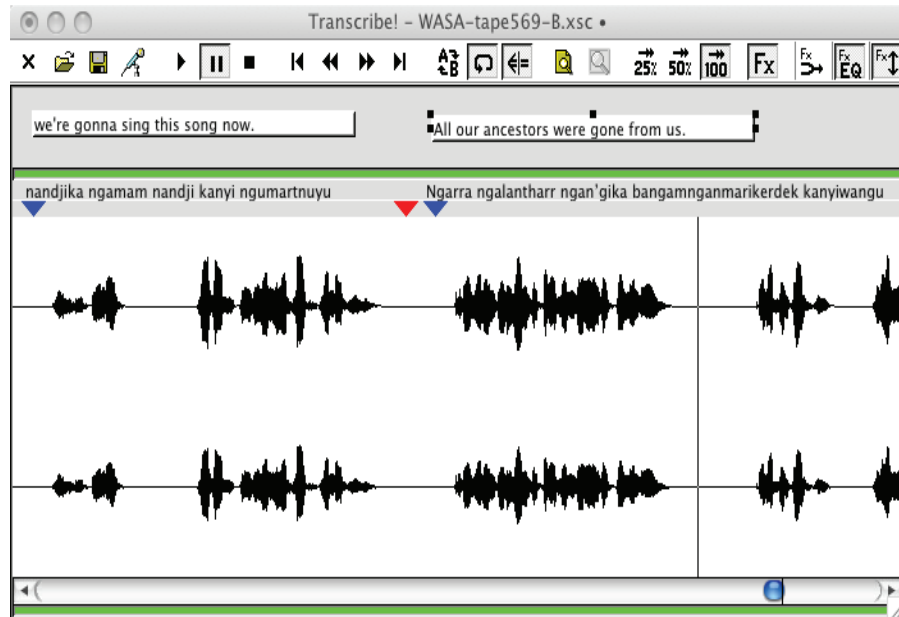


FIGURE 2: Example of the Transcribe! window used for speech transcription (hiding the pitch analysis features).

The foot pedal control feature works with various different pedals, including MIDI pedals (if you're a musician) or joysticks (if you're a gamer)—I use the VPE Vpedal (USB), which cost me \$AU112 a few years ago. The Transcribe! website has useful information about what to look for. Apart from the benefits of hands-free operation, the foot pedal feature is also good for operating Transcribe! in the background while you use another application in the foreground (such as ELAN, or a music notation application). The default pedal functions are the standards of (1) rewind, (2) play, (3) fast forward, familiar to those of us who were around in the old days of foot pedal operation of reel or cassette players. But we are in the digital age, so Transcribe! allows you to reprogram functions. Since I have little use for the fast forward command (I prefer navigating within the file visually) I have my foot pedal set up to (1) rewind, (2) play at normal speed, and (3) play at 70% speed (see Figure 3).

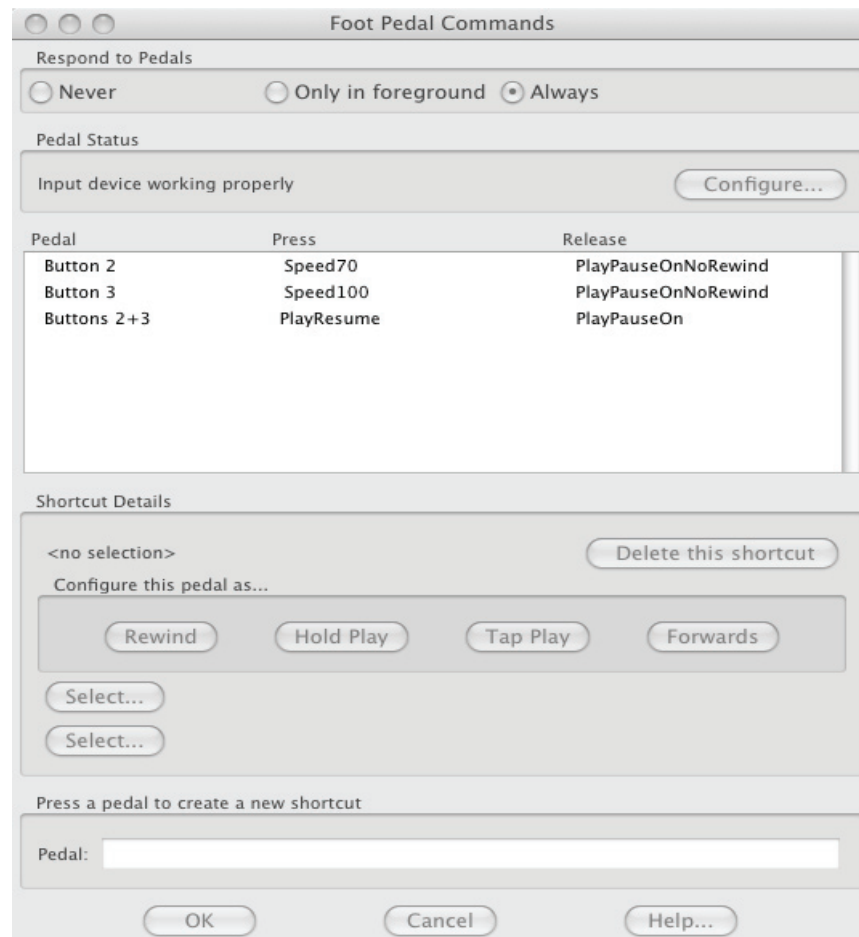
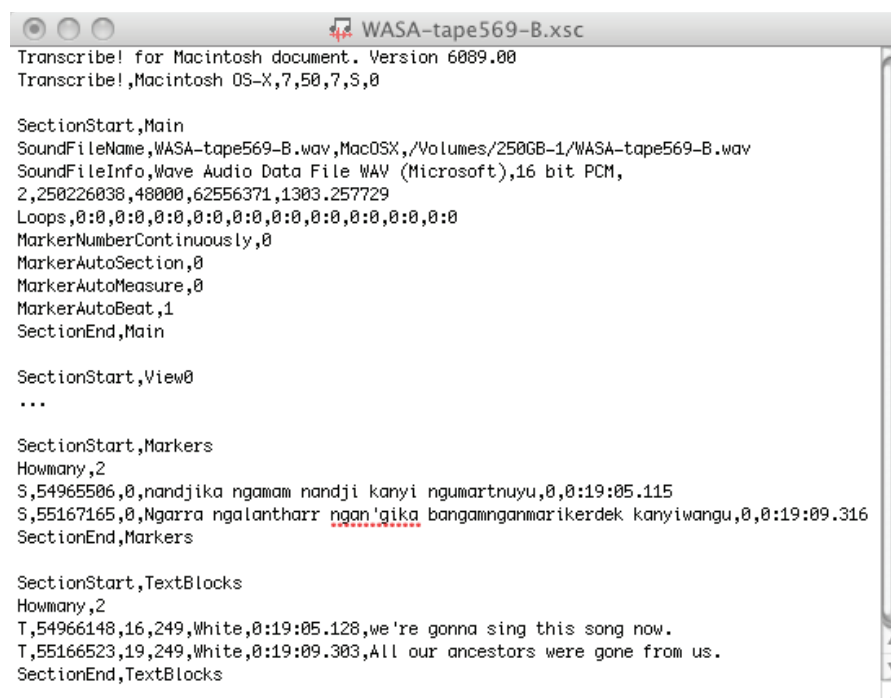


FIGURE 3: Transcribe! foot pedal commands configuration window.

Transcribe! outputs .xsc files, which are basically text files with timecode information. You can use regular expressions to convert this information into useable form for importing into other programs (see Figure 4). However, I prefer to use ELAN or Transcriber for the actual markup, but have the file simultaneously open in Transcribe! for playing in the background while slowing down, etc.



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Transcribe! for Macintosh document. Version 6089.00
Transcribe!,Macintosh OS-X,7,50,7,S,0

SectionStart,Main
SoundFileName,WASA-tape569-B.wav,MacOSX,/,Volumes/250GB-1/WASA-tape569-B.wav
SoundFileInfo,Wave Audio Data File WAV (Microsoft),16 bit PCM,
2,250226038,48000,62556371,1303.257729
Loops,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0,0:0
MarkerNumberContinuously,0
MarkerAutoSection,0
MarkerAutoMeasure,0
MarkerAutoBeat,1
SectionEnd,Main

SectionStart,View0
...

SectionStart,Markers
Howmany,2
S,54966148,0,nandjika ngamam nandji kanyi ngumartnuyu,0,0:19:05.115
S,55167165,0,Ngarra ngalantharr ngan'gika bangamnganmarikerdek kanyiwangu,0,0:19:09.316
SectionEnd,Markers

SectionStart,TextBlocks
Howmany,2
T,54966148,16,249,White,0:19:05.128,we're gonna sing this song now.
T,55166523,19,249,White,0:19:09.303,All our ancestors were gone from us.
SectionEnd,TextBlocks

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FIGURE 4: Transcribe! .xsc file sample, showing how it saves the Marker and Text Block information used in Figure 2.

This is one of the best value applications I have in my armory. There is a 30-day free trial, and I urge you to play with it and investigate the useful tips on the website. On the website you can also subscribe to an email list (Yahoo! Group), useful for posting queries to the user community and the developer, who is very responsive and has incorporated many user-requested features into the current version.

Pros:	Very effective digital signal processing (DSP), programmable foot pedal control, email list for communication with developer
Cons:	None
Primary function:	Signal processing for transcription of digital audio files
Platforms:	Mac, Linux, Windows
Open Source? :	No

- Proprietary?** Shareware, available from Seventh String Software (<http://www.seventhstring.com>). Current costs: Individual license \$US50 (discounts apply for institutions buying multiple copies: \$US40 per seat for 2–4 licenses, \$US30 per seat for 5 or more).
- Reviewed version:** Transcribe! 7.50.0 for Mac
- Application size:** 8.4MB
- Documentation:** Included. Well written and comprehensive (English only).

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