Linguistic Notation Conventions

Brackets

ANGLE BRACKETS are used when referring to orthographic letters (also called graphemes).

Example: In English, the letter sequence <sh> usually refers to just one sound.

When referring to sounds on a phonetic level (i.e. when talking about concrete sounds as found in actual speech), SQUARE BRACKETS are used – square brackets refer to the formal aspect of speech sounds.

Example: The sounds [b] and [g] are articulated in different places in the oral tract.

Allophones (the realizations of a phoneme) are also put in square brackets.

Example: Depending on the phonological environment, the English phoneme /p/ is pronounced as [p], as [pʰ] or as [pʷ].

SLASHES are used when referring to phonemes as part of a sound system (when the differences between the sounds of a language have to be indicated, but the precise realization is not important) – slashes refer to the functional aspect of speech sounds.

Example: The existence of minimal pairs such as cat/pat shows that /k/ and /p/ are two distinct phonemes in English.

Allomorphs (the realizations of morphemes) are also put in slashes.

Example: The regular English plural ending of words like fish and loss is realized as /-ɪz/.

CURLY BRACKETS indicate morphemes.

Example: English uses the morpheme {-z} to form regular plurals.

Others

*italics* Use italics if you provide examples, no matter if your example consists of just a single word or a whole paragraph. Compare the clarity of the following two lines:

(1) The article *the* in the end and the in the box are pronounced differently.

(2) The article *the* in *the end* and *the* in *the box* are pronounced differently.

If italics are not available (if you're using handwriting or an old typewriter, for example), you may use underlining instead.

Examples: The article in *the end* is pronounced as /ðiː/. The article in *the end* is pronounced as /ðiː/.

*...* The use of single quotation marks is restricted to explanatory notes, such as translations or paraphrases.

Example: The German word *Dose* (*tin*) should not be confused with English *dose* (*a quantity of medication*).

*CAPITALS* Semantic concepts are set in capital letters.

Example: OAK and BIRCH are hyponyms of TREE.