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 [pʰ].

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 /-z/.

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 /ði/. The article in the end is pronounced as /ði/.

'…'

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.