

 **RCPCE** Research Centre for
Professional Communication in English

"TALKING ACROSS THE WORLD" Symposium

Communication Skills in Hong Kong and Regional Contact Centres

Programme

<https://www.polyu.edu.hk/engl/event/TAW2019>

16 May 2019

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China

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Welcome Message



The mission of the Research Centre for Professional Communication in English (RCPCE) in the Department of English at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is four-fold:

1. To create and host on-line specialized corpora related to Hong Kong;
2. To promote the applied research which underpins the professional communication focus of our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes;
3. To provide an environment which attracts research students committed to pursuing applied research within the broad area of professional communication;
4. To provide forums for academics and practitioners with an interest in communication in professional settings to engage with each other and exchange ideas.

It is this last mission which we are focusing on today in the "Talking Across the World" Symposium.

We are honored to have the opportunity for Dr. Jane Lockwood, Associate Director for RCPCE, to share with us the research that she and other colleagues have conducted at RCPCE in the areas of business product outsourcing and contact centres.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Hong Kong Call Centre Association (HKCCA) and FuturePerfect for their support and I would like to thank all of you for engaging in this important and worthwhile discussion.

Kathleen Ahrens, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of English

Director, Research Centre for Professional Communication in English

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

<http://rcpce.engl.polyu.edu.hk/rcpce/>

Time	Programme
8.30- 9.00	Registration
9.00- 9.10	<p>Welcome on behalf of Department of English and the Research Centre for Professional Communication in English (RCPCE) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Professor Hans Ladegaard Head of the Department of English The Hong Kong Polytechnic University</p>
9.10-9.20	<p>Welcome on behalf of the Hong Kong Call Centre Association (HKCCA)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Chapman Lam Chairman, Hong Kong Call Centre Association</p>
9.25- 10.10	<p>The Perpetual Fantasy: From Offshoring and Outsourcing to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the contact centre industry</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Dr. Jane Lockwood Associate Director, Research Centre for Professional Communication in English Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of English The Hong Kong Polytechnic University</p>
10.10-11.00	<p><u>Talent Acquisition and Career Development Panel</u> Assessing language for business impact in customer service (Short papers received from industry, practitioners and academics)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Facilitator: Rayland Chan (Executive Director, HKCCA)</p> <p>Addressing Cultural Differences in English Speaking at the Workplace Jennifer Cheung (AXA General Insurance, Hong Kong)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Getting the Right People for the Job – An Investigation of Contact Centre Hiring Practices Ruby de la Cruz (Future Perfect, Manila)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Q & A discussion</p>
11.00-11.15	Coffee Break
11.15 -12.30	<p><u>Quality and Coaching Panel</u> (Short papers received from industry, practitioners and academics)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Facilitator: Neil Elias (CEO, Future Perfect)</p> <p>What Winning Looks Like: Coaching for Success Garro Ho (Director of HKCEN Global Services Group, American Express)</p>

How Good is the Service Provided to English Speaking Customers
by Hong Kong Contact Centres?
Rayland Chan (Executive Director, HKCCA)

Can Subject Matter Experts Rate the English Language Skills of
Customer Services Representatives at Work in Indian Contact Centres?
Dr. Michelle Raquel (The University of Hong Kong) and Dr. Jane Lockwood

Q & A discussion

12.30- 13.45

Lunch

13.45-14.45

Training and Skills Development Panel
on Teaching speaking skills for the global workplace
(Short papers received from industry, practitioners and academics)

Facilitator: Dr. Jane Lockwood

Developing International Negotiation Skills in
University Students Majoring in International Relations Studies
Elena Korokova (Far Eastern Federal University, Russia)

Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms: Emphasis on Speaking Aspect
Dr. Tatyana Panushkina & Anna Illintseva (Far Eastern Federal University, Russia)

Q & A discussion

14.45-15.00

Coffee Break

15.00-16.30

Technology Impact on Contact Centres Panel
(Short papers received from industry, practitioners and academics)

Facilitator: Neil Elias (CEO, Future Perfect)

Technology Impact on Contact Centre Communication
Milton Yeung (Assistant VP, HKT Ltd)

A Move Analysis of E-commerce Customer Service Webchat Exchange
Dr. Xu Xiaoyu (Assistant Professor, City University of Hong Kong)

How Does Webchat Work Linguistically?
Dr. Jane Lockwood

Q & A discussion

16.30 - 17.00

Panel discussant wrap up: Key issues going forward

Plenary

The Perpetual Fantasy: From Offshoring and Outsourcing to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Contact Centre Industry

Jane Lockwood

Research Centre for Professional Communication in English
Department of English
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract

20 years ago companies from developed English speaking countries began to outsource and offshore their customer service support operations to developing countries such as India and the Philippines. This was enabled by technological advances in fibre optic cabling. So Prasad in Bangalore was pretending to be Chuck in Houston. Such a fantastic transformation however challenged companies in areas of communication and culture that they had hardly considered, and the wisdom at the time within the BPO industry was that accent neutralization and accurate English language grammar would solve problems in communication between Prasad and his English speaking customers. We know now after two decades of collaborative research between the academe and the contact industry that this is not the case and the communication challenges have been indeed more linguistically and culturally challenging than first thought.

Now 20 years later, we are in the grip of another fantasy. Prasad is still Chuck but Sophie, the AI virtual assistant, is poised to displace both of them. This second fantastic transformation is perhaps even more challenging in areas of communication, and companies are only just beginning to consider how further advances in technology and AI will impact high quality communication at contact centres. Questions such as:

- Can Sophie speak, chat and write competently to customers?
- What level of service makes Sophie a viable virtual assistant?
- What do we do when Sophie gets only 71% CSat rating?
- How do we upskill Prasad to take more complex enquiries?

This plenary paper provides both a retrospective and prospective account of the challenges the global contact centre industry have faced, and continue to face in providing excellent customer service to English-speaking customers.

Working Papers

Addressing Cultural Differences in English Speaking for Contact Centres

Jennifer Cheung
AXA Insurance HK Ltd, Hong Kong

Bio

Jennifer Cheung is a Senior Manager of AXA Retail Business, where she is responsible for two important partnerships development as well as managing a contact center in driving quality sales and services on various initiatives from sales to retention.

With over twenty years of experience in customer services, sales and marketing in the financial sector, Jennifer particularly developed her career and profession in contact center business. She witnessed the evolution and development of contact center by transforming contact center from traditional cost center to profit center in adding great value to both business and customers.

She is currently the Secretary of Hong Kong Contact Center Association and she has been serving as the panel judge of the Annual Award since 2007.

Abstract

In Hong Kong, good communication skills are essential for the servicing industry, however Hong Kong is challenged by this need. Some companies simply hire native speakers of English to overcome this problem, others pay high costs where customers get angry or simply walk away. As well as the language problem however, there is also a cultural one. These problems do not only exist in English but also in the Chinese contact centre context.

This paper will highlight the problems and then provide some ways in which we, in the Hong Kong context, can deal with our need to be excellent language speakers with high levels too of intercultural awareness in the very important contact centre industry.

Recruitment Assessment for Contact Centres

Ruby de la Cruz

Manager Quality and Product Development, Future Perfect, Philipiness

Bio

Ruby spent five years in the BPO Industry before a further five teaching English in China, Korea, and Australia, and then joined Future Perfect five years ago. She has a Master's degree in Development Communication and a Postgraduate Certificate in TESOL. She is responsible for product development and improvement, and for ensuring quality in our project outcomes.

Abstract

How do contact centres hire their agents for excellent English communication skills? Does accurate grammar and an American accent really make a difference to customer service? This paper looks at how research has informed valid, reliable and practical assessment solutions where communication breakdown has been shown to be the result of poor customer relationship building and poor extensive speaking capability. It also explores how the key performance measures within contact centres such as average handling time (AHT) and first time resolution (FTR) are linked to these domains.

What Winning Looks Like

Garro Ho

Director, HKCEN Global Services Group, American Express, Hong Kong

Bio

Garro Ho joined American Express in 1990 as a customer service representative and since then she has been holding various leadership roles within the company. Under her leadership, both of her teams in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur were named Best Inbound Contact Center Gold by HKCCA and CCAM in 2017.

Abstract

American Express must be able to attract and engage the best talents in the industry and have an infrastructure to set our colleagues up for success. In Asia Pacific, American Express has 3 global in-house contact centers in India, the Philippines and Malaysia servicing US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Of all the critical ingredients in our winning framework, we want to deep dive a little bit more into the profile for success and our unique customer engagement coaching model. We believe that these make American Express essential to our customers by providing differentiated products and services to help them achieve their aspirations.

How Good is the Service Providing to English Speaking Customers by Hong Kong Contact Centres?

Rayland Chan

Hong Kong Call Centre Association, Hong Kong
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Bio

Rayland Chan is currently the Executive Director of Hong Kong Call Centre Association (HKCCA). He has over 20 years of experience in customer service, contact centre and training management across a variety of industries including telecommunications, travel, government call centre and banking in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Macau.

He has been Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists in the UK since 1991 and Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in the UK from 1992 to 2017.

Abstract

This paper will describe the current state of the Hong Kong Contact Centre Industry and reveal the result of a “Mystery Calling” exercise that uncovers the service standard of Hong Kong contact centres in providing services to English speaking customers. We gauge the service standard of four major business sectors that provide their service to English speaking customers through voice channel these being Banking; Insurance and Finance, Telecommunications, Commerce and Utilities. This paper will open with an overview of the challenges HK contact centres have when serving customers in English and the impact of this on quality, and the decision in some sectors to offshore services to the Philippines, India and Malaysia.

Can Subject Matter Experts Rate the English Language Skills of Customer Services Representatives (CSRs) at Work in Indian Contact Centre?

Michelle Raquel

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Jane Lockwood

Research Centre for Professional Communication in English

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Abstract

Millions of customer services representatives are assessed each year by subject matter experts (e.g., recruiters, team leaders) in Asian contact centres to ensure good spoken communication skills when serving customers on the phones. In other workplace contexts, language experts are employed to do this work but in Asian contact centres, a successful transfer of language expert assessment knowledge and skills to subject matter experts is preferred for practical and cost reasons. To date however, no studies have been carried out to demonstrate that subject matter experts can do this language assessment in a reliable way.

This study explores how a linguistically-informed spoken assessment rubric, called the Business Performance Assessment Scale (BUPLAS), is used by subject matter experts to assess the English communication skills of customer service representatives employed in an India-based contact centre. After a week-long training programme on how to use BUPLAS, the results revealed that the subject matter experts had high intra-rater and inter-rater reliability when they scored real calls. They also understood, interpreted, and ‘indigenously scored’ the linguistically-informed criteria. The implications of these results in deferring to subject matter experts to conduct language assessments in this workplace are discussed.

Keywords: language for specific purposes (LSP) assessment; rater reliability; rater training; subject matter experts; contact centre industry

Developing International Negotiation Skills in University Students Majoring in International Relations Studies

Elena Korotkova

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Institute of Oriental Studies, Far Eastern Federal University, Russia
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Bio

Elena Korotkova is an Associate Professor, working in the Department of English, School of Regional and International Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, Far Eastern Federal University. Her research area includes Methodology of Teaching ESP English, teaching Reading and Viewing Comprehension Strategies to students majoring in International Relations Studies, guidelines of building study guides in the area of IR Studies. She is the author of over 30 research articles on methodology, psycho-linguistics and psychology.

Abstract

Fostering international negotiation skills as part of professional communication training is necessitated by the general professional competence requested by the Syllabus of School of Regional and International Studies to solve professional issues including those of holding negotiations with foreign partners.

Quality communication skills the International Relations (IR) students acquire at the University can become the potential to be used in the Contact Centre Industry at the points of recruitment, training, performance coaching and quality assurance. For this reason we presume that international negotiation skills in the area of diplomacy covering such points as preparing to negotiate, relationship building, setting goals, applying questions as an alternative to disagreement as well as rules of entering the bargaining zone, principles of persuasion, handling breakdowns and concluding negotiation can become the springboard for successful business communication and negotiation skills highly required for job candidates to contact centers.

In our paper not only do we make use of role plays, skill-building games and teamwork in the format of microlearning which make the education process more motivating for learners, but also correlate the way the professional negotiation skills can be transferrable to the collection of business negotiation and communications skills highly demanded in the contact center industry.

Keywords: international negotiation skills; business communication skills; microlearning; skill-building game; team work; contact center industry

Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms: Emphasis on Speaking Aspect.

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Bio

Tatyana Panushkina, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the Academic English Department. Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russia. She has authored more than 20 articles on methodology of teaching English. TESOL Certificate (Griffith University, Australia).

Anna Ilintseva is senior instructor in the Academic English Department, Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russia. Post-graduate, research interests are methodology problems of teaching English.

Abstract

Nowadays the need for good communication skills is essential for the contact centre industry. Problems of intercultural awareness, conducting negotiations and ideas for more effective training are raised in the paper. It aims to present communicative language teaching approach in multicultural classroom in Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU, Russia). Communication skills have been more in center of creating atmosphere of “common culture” in the classroom. An associative experiment was carried out among ESP Students FEFU who belong to different culture groups, such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Uzbekistan and Russian. The results of the research showed the attitude of foreign students to their native culture and contained essential features for creating favorable atmosphere for forming and mastering English Communications skills.

Keywords: multicultural; communicators; skills; International

Technology Impact on Contact Communication

Milton Yeung
HKT Limited, Hong Kong

Bio

Milton Yeung - Assistant Vice President in HKT looking after post-sales services and supporting design and selling of enterprise solutions. He is currently the team head of Project Management and Application Development in Integrated Projects & CPE Services. Milton is passionate about technology for communication, customer engagement, analytic and workforce optimization solutions for Banking, Finance, Telecommunications, Government and Utilities. He was the pioneer in implementing speech recognition technology in Hong Kong. He leaded a team of professional experts to deliver workforce optimization solution for over thousand of agents in mega sized companies in Greater China and in APAC.

In his current role as Application Development team head, Milton has rich experience in solution design, development and selling of communication system, omni-channel solutions, Fintech and emerging technologies.

Milton holds a Bachelor Degree and a MSc Degree of Electronic Engineering from Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Abstract

Across the world, the contact center business is evolving through emerging technologies. Customer intimacy across multiple channels with improved short cycle time, convenience and high efficacy is the primary driver that will increase customer satisfaction. Companies and organizations using Artificial Intelligence (AI) application and platforms to optimize customer engagement is one of the biggest trends in customer experience. This paper will focus on three of these AI applications, namely Speech analytic and QA systems; Virtual Chatting Assistant and Intelligent Routing (IR).

A Move Analysis of E-commerce Customer Service Webchat Exchange

Xiaoyu Xu

Department of English
City University of Hong Kong

Bio

Xiaoyu Xu is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at City University of Hong Kong. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics, a MA TESOL, a Bachelor's major degree in Sociology and a Bachelor's major in Accounting and Finance. She has previously taught at Coventry University in the UK. Her interests include English for Academic Purposes, Corpus Linguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Discourse Analysis and Business Communication. Her previous research focuses particularly on stance and evaluation in academic discourse from a cultural perspective, using Appraisal Theory and UAM CorpusTool. She intends to continue her research on academic discourse and professional communication and explore computational linguistic methods.

Abstract

The business world is fast entering a virtual environment where technology is applied in all areas to improve efficiency. Web-based synchronous chat has become a popular way of communication for customer support, which is now superseding telephonic support. This means that the norms of customer service webchat are becoming diverse as different businesses may require different needs of customer support. However, this phenomenon has received little attention from the research world. This paper focuses on the structural norms of customer service webchat of a large ecommerce company whose customers are usually 'signed-in' and whose labour is usually divided into different departments for online customer service. We have collected 15 ecommerce customer service webchat exchanges from an online retail company that provides webchat support for customers all over the world. A move analysis is conducted following other move analyses carried out on webchat (e.g., Lockwood, 2017). Ten moves have been identified in our data with two mandatory moves, four common moves and four rare moves. Not all moves are in line with the literature that looked at non-ecommerce customer service webchat. The time demanded for each move in each webchat exchange is also calculated, and the most time-consuming moves have been identified. The results of this move analysis can be a valuable resource for the coaching of online customer service for ecommerce. Particular attention can be drawn to the most demanding moves. This study also lays a foundation for further discourse analysis of each move.

How does webchat work linguistically?

Jane Lockwood

Research Centre for Professional Communication in English
Department of English
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract

Webchat is fast replacing voice as the preferred medium for communication with customers in contact centres. However what do we know about this hybrid text using features of spoken and written communication? As with voice, management devise policy directions using this media that at time mitigate the good communication exchange they are hoping to achieve. This paper will review recent studies exploring the unique features of webchat exchange in contact centres implications for recruitment, training and coaching in contact centres.



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