Standardisation and script trajectories in a London call centre

An ethnography of a multilingual outbound call centre

2013

Johanna-Elisabeth Woydack

A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD Degree at King’s College London

July 2013
Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to several people who have contributed in various ways to this thesis.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisors Prof Ben Rampton, Prof Celia Roberts and Prof Jannis Androutsopoulos, who have assisted me over the years. My warmest and deepest thanks go to my main supervisor Prof Ben Rampton. I am sincerely grateful for all his extraordinarily helpful, meticulous and detailed comments on the various drafts, for being patient with me, taking time for supervision meetings and inspiring me to think deeper and differently about aspects of my work. Many thanks also for his invaluable and long-standing guidance since my BA and teaching me about sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. I am also greatly obliged to my second supervisor Prof Celia Roberts for her insightful observations and feedback on my thesis often aiding me to see another perspective to it. I would further like to thank Prof Jannis Androutsopoulos for his assistance in the early stages of this thesis, which was instrumental in getting me started on this project.

I am grateful to the Funds for Women Graduates (FfWG) for helping me with the funding of this research.

This dissertation would not have been possible if it had not been for the management of my fieldsite who kindly granted me full access and supported me the whole way through always trying to facilitate my research. I do not know how to thank them enough for this. The same is true of all my participants to whom I owe the greatest obligation for sharing their invaluable insights and knowledge and allowing me to represent their experiences in this thesis. It is their voices which have contributed greatly to its insights.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family, in particular my parents, for their continuous support, help and advice, since without this, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I am also very grateful to my brother for assisting me with the editing of this work and my sister and brother-in-law Geoffrey for helping me with the proof-reading of some parts of it.
# Table of contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 2
Table of contents ........................................................................................................... 3

List of tables ..................................................................................................................... 7
List of diagrams ............................................................................................................... 8
List of extracts .................................................................................................................. 8
List of fieldnotes .............................................................................................................. 11
List of images ................................................................................................................... 12
List of documents ............................................................................................................. 12

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 13
Thesis preface ................................................................................................................... 14
  Research focus and objectives ...................................................................................... 15
  Decision to undertake this study .................................................................................. 17

## Chapter 1
Language and standardisation practices in call centres ................................................. 21
1.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................... 21
  1.0.1 Chapter overview ............................................................................................... 21
  1.0.2 Background to this study ................................................................................... 22
1.1 Standardisation ......................................................................................................... 26
  1.1.1 A sociological view of standardisation ............................................................... 26
  1.1.2 A sociolinguistic view of standardisation ......................................................... 30
  1.1.3 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 35
1.2 The new economy ..................................................................................................... 35
  1.2.1 The origins of the new economy ....................................................................... 35
  1.2.2 The term ‘new economy’ .................................................................................. 37
  1.2.3 The new economy’s characteristics ................................................................ 38
    *The new economy as a flexible economy* .............................................................. 38
    *The new economy as a specialised economy* ....................................................... 40
    *The new economy as a linguistic economy* ......................................................... 41
    *The new economy as a standardised economy* .................................................. 42
      The historical and ideological context ................................................................ 42
      Studies on the standardised new economy ......................................................... 44
  1.2.4 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 45
1.3 Theorisations of standardisation in call centres ....................................................... 47
  1.3.1 Background- general features of call centres ................................................... 48
  1.3.2 Theorisations of call centre work and standardisation ...................................... 49
    *Standardisation practices in call centres* ............................................................ 50
    *Standardisation as a rationalising process* .......................................................... 52
    *Standardisation processes as ideologies of language* .......................................... 56
Chapter 2
Methods and Methodology ................................................................. 72
2.0 Introduction ................................................................................. 72
2.1 Guiding assumptions.................................................................. 72
   2.1.1 Ethnography ......................................................................... 73
   Post-modern critiques of ethnography and reconceptualisations .......... 77
   2.1.2 Ethnography in organisations ................................................. 82
   Approaches to organisational ethnography and research design ........ 82
   A discussion of examples of organisational ethnography and their implications for the research design .............................................. 88
   2.1.3 Ethnography and call centres ................................................. 93
   Previous research on call centres using ethnography or taking an ethnographic approach ................................................................. 93
2.2 Research design ......................................................................... 98
   2.2.1 Approach to data collection .................................................. 98
   The fieldsite for data collection .................................................... 100
   2.2.2 Methods and techniques ..................................................... 104
2.3 Role of the researcher ................................................................. 108
   2.3.1 Being reflexive ....................................................................... 108
2.4 Conclusion ................................................................................ 110

Chapter 3
Standardisation in the call centre – a first encounter ....................... 112
3.0 Introduction ................................................................................. 112
3.1 An introduction to the call centre and the organisation of a workday .... 113
   3.1.1 A brief account of a new agent’s first day ............................... 113
   3.1.2 The seating order and layout of the call centre ....................... 115
   3.1.3 The hours of work ................................................................. 120
   3.1.4 Monitoring agents electronically ........................................... 122
   3.1.5 Systems training ................................................................... 130
   3.1.6 Campaign training ............................................................... 131
   3.1.7 Objection handling session ................................................... 134
   3.1.8 Regulation and non-regulation of non-work activities during working hours ................................................................. 135
   3.1.9 Summary of the description of the work day ......................... 137
3.2 The organisation and its workers ............................................... 139
   3.2.1 The call centre’s three levels of management ....................... 139
   The senior company management: ‘upstairs’ ................................ 142
   The call centre management ......................................................... 142
The management on the floor - the team leaders ........................................143
3.2.3 The agents: the language workers ..................................................146
Hiring multilingual speakers ......................................................................149
Recruiting through a language agency ......................................................150
Recruiting semi-multilingual and semi-fluent speakers thanks to a translated
script .........................................................................................................152
3.3 The agents’ views ..................................................................................153
3.3.1 Agents’ rationales for call centre work ..............................................154
3.3.2 Agents’ experience of the call centre .................................................161
3.4 Conclusion ..............................................................................................167

Chapter 4
The first stage of the script’s career: The production of ‘the master script’ .....170
4.0 Introduction ............................................................................................170
4.0.1 A model campaign .............................................................................177
4.1. The features of the institutional system: contractual expectations ......178
4.1.1 Summary of the institutional system: contractual expectations ......191
4.2 The production of the script ..................................................................192
4.2.1 The sales meeting ..............................................................................193
4.2.2 The script drafting .............................................................................196
4.2.3 The client approval meeting ..............................................................201
4.2.4 Summary of the production of the script ...........................................201
4.3 Interim conclusion ..................................................................................203

Chapter 5
The second stage in the script’s career:
The adaptation of the ‘master script’ ..........................................................208
5.0 Introduction ............................................................................................208
5.1 Monitoring: a key structural feature of the institutional system .................212
5.1.1 The operations manager’s account of monitoring ............................212
5.1.2 The team leaders’ perception of monitoring ......................................214
5.1.3 Discussion ...........................................................................................220
5.2 Briefing on the master script by the campaign managers
and team leaders .......................................................................................220
5.2.1 Briefing the team leaders .................................................................221
    Personalisation of the master script (“make it your own”) .................222
    Consultative approach (going beyond the master script) ....................223
5.2.2 Briefing the agents ............................................................................227
    Personalisation of the master script ......................................................229
    Being ‘consultative’ with the master script .......................................231
5.2.3 Discussion ...........................................................................................234
5.3 Example of personalisation of the master script in an interview role play. 236
5.4 Conclusion ..............................................................................................248
Chapter 6
The final stage of the script’s career:
   The enactment and use of ‘the master script’ ........................................... 253
6.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 253
6.1 The institutional system: data entry, call logging
   and updating of the database (computer system) ........................................... 257
   6.1.1 Agents’ training on data entry, call logging
   and updating the database ................................................................................... 257
   6.1.2 Agents’ perception of data entry, the database and call logging ............... 261
6.2 Rehearsing and using the master script: ‘A script in progress’ ....................... 265
   6.2.1 Before dialling: translating the master script and adapting it ................. 265
   6.2.2 Experimenting with the master script:
   in search of the perfect version ......................................................................... 270
   6.2.3 The strategies around the use of the script on the phone ......................... 274
      Country specific strategies: ........................................................................... 277
      Gender related strategies: ............................................................................... 282
6.3 Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 284

Chapter 7
Discussion and conclusion ....................................................................................... 288
7.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 288
7.1 Methodological contributions ........................................................................... 290
7.2 Summary of the discussion on scripts and standardisation .............................. 293
   7.2.1 General points ........................................................................................... 293
   7.2.2 Scripts, standardisation and the issue of deskilling ..................................... 295
   7.2.3 The question of resistance against scripts, standardisation, and control ......................................................................................................................... 297
   7.2.4 Rationalisation, scripts, and standardisation ............................................. 304
7.3 The wider issue of scripts, scripted Taylorism, and standardisation .............. 306
7.4 Further research ................................................................................................ 312
7.5 Summary of thesis findings .............................................................................. 317

Appendix A – Glossary of terms .............................................................................. 319
Appendix B – Examples of scripts .......................................................................... 321
Appendix C – Transcription conventions ................................................................. 326
Appendix D – Agents’ and team leaders’ profiles ................................................... 326
Appendix E – Agents’ background mapped ............................................................. 331
Appendix F – Interview questions ............................................................................ 331

Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 336
List of tables

| Table 1.1 | Conceptualisations of linguistic standardisation | 33 |
| Table 1.2 | The new economy – current theorisations | 45 |
| Table 1.3 | Summary table on different theorisations of standardisation practices | 64 |
| Table 1.4 | A summary of relevant studies in industrial sociology, their methods and participants | 66 |
| Table 2.1 | The causes of stress at work “To what extent do the following contribute to the pressures of your job?” | 73 |
| Table 2.2 | Summary of insights from some workplace ethnographies | 91 |
| Table 2.3 | Ethnographic studies on workplaces and implications | 97 |
| Table 3.1 | Hours of work for agents: | 122 |
| Table 3.2 | Call outcomes explained: | 126 |
| Table 3.3 | Some aspects of call centre work and the organisational means of control | 138 |
| Table 3.4 | Advantages and disadvantages of direct vs. agency recruitment | 151 |
| Table 4.1 | Details of the model campaign | 177 |
| Table 4.2 | List of contractual terms discussed and agreed on as part of the sales meeting | 194 |
| Table 4.3 | Contractual agreements for the BIS campaign | 195 |
| Table 4.4 | Textboxes on the script and their source | 198 |
| Table 5.1 | The team leaders’ professional, linguistic and educational background | 210 |
| Table 5.2 | Types of scripts and their expected transformations | 235 |
| Table 5.3 | Ada’s version of the S.1-2 | 236 |
| Table 5.4 | Siiri’s version of S.1-2 of the master script’s pitch | 237 |
| Table 5.5 | Barbara’s version of S.1-2 of the master script’s pitch | 238 |
| Table 5.6 | The BIS master script pitch and Ada’s personalisation of it | 239 |
| Table 5.7 | The master script pitch and Siiri’s personalisation of it | 240 |
| Table 5.8 | The master script pitch and Barbara’s personalisation | 240 |
| Table 5.9 | The BIS master script pitch and Ada’s inclusion of personal pronouns | 242 |
| Table 5.10 | The master script pitch and Siiri’s inclusion of pronouns | 243 |
| Table 5.11 | The master script pitch and Barbara’s inclusion of pronouns | 243 |
| Table 5.12 | The use of personal pronouns (personability axis) | 244 |
| Table 5.13 | The BIS master script pitch and Ada’s inclusion of sub-and co-ordinate clauses | 245 |
| Table 5.14 | The master script pitch and Barbara’s inclusion of sub-and co-ordinate clauses | 245 |
| Table 5.15 | Ada’s personalisation of the pitch’s conclusion | 246 |
| Table 5.16 | Siiri’s personalisation of the pitch’s conclusion | 246 |
| Table 5.17 | Barbara’s personalisation of the pitch’s conclusion | 247 |
| Table 6.1 | Agents’ educational, linguistic, and professional background | 255 |
## List of diagrams

Diagram 3.1 The layout of the call centre: ................................................................. 117  
Diagram 3.2 Dialling through the system ............................................................... 123  
Diagram 3.3 Dial/lead statistics .............................................................................. 124  
Diagram 3.4 The dial report .................................................................................... 127  
Diagram 3.5 Overview of dials and leads per agent 1 ........................................... 128  
Diagram 3.6 Overview of dials/lead per agent 2 ..................................................... 129  
Diagram 3.7 The sales funnel .................................................................................. 133  
Diagram 3.8 The overall hierarchy ....................................................................... 141  
Diagram 3.9 Factors affecting the value of languages in the call centre ............... 149  
Diagram 3.10 Linda’s ‘Becoming a Londoner’ ...................................................... 159  
Diagram 3.11 Gavin’s and Rabeya’s conceptualisation of their working day ....... 160  
Diagram 3.12 The scripts and their relation to different aspects of call centre work ........................................................................................................ 168  
Diagram 4.1 The entire career of the script ............................................................ 176  
Diagram 4.2 The generation of statistics based on the master script to monitor the campaign’s progress ................................................................. 190  
Diagram 4.3 The production of a script ................................................................. 193  
Diagram 5.1 The adaptation of the master script .................................................... 209  
Diagram 5.2 The hierarchy in the call centre ............................................................ 211  
Diagram 6.1 The enactment and use of the script ................................................... 254

## List of extracts

Extract 3.1 ................................................................................................................. 154  
Extract 3.2 .............................................................................................................. 155  
Extract 3.3 .............................................................................................................. 155  
Extract 3.4 .............................................................................................................. 155  
Extract 3.5 .............................................................................................................. 156  
Extract 3.6 .............................................................................................................. 157  
Extract 3.7 .............................................................................................................. 157  
Extract 3.8 .............................................................................................................. 157  
Extract 3.9 .............................................................................................................. 157  
Extract 3.10 .......................................................................................................... 158  
Extract 3.11 .......................................................................................................... 158  
Extract 3.12 .......................................................................................................... 159  
Extract 3.13 .......................................................................................................... 159  
Extract 3.14 .......................................................................................................... 161  
Extract 3.15 .......................................................................................................... 161  
Extract 3.16 .......................................................................................................... 161
List of fieldnotes

Fieldnote entry 4.1 (09/09/2010) 'Delivering textual fidelity to please new high-profile client X' .................................................. 183

Fieldnote entry 4.2 (15/03/2011) 'Problems with a campaign and Jenny’s secret solution' .................................................. 184

Fieldnote entry 4.3 (02/02/2011) 'A client complains about the lack of quality' .................................................. 188
Fieldnote entry 5.1 (14/04/2010) ‘The operations manager’s view of monitoring’ ........................................................................ 214
Fieldnote entry 5.2 (14/10/2010) ‘Visits by the operations manager: Pressure on meeting increased targets and coping with them’ ....... 217
Fieldnote entry 5.3 (20/12/2010) ‘The impact of monitoring on the master script at the end of the quarter’ ........................................ 218
Fieldnote entry 5.4 (01/03/2010) ‘The operations manager’s unannounced visits to the call centre’ ........................................... 219
Fieldnote entry 5.5 (08/09/2010) ‘Changes to the typed master script allowed downstairs’ ......................................................... 229
Fieldnote entry 6.1 (02/03/2011) ‘The special database training for new agents’ .......................................................... 262
Fieldnote entry 6.2 (18/04/2011) ‘Translating master scripts’ ......................................................................................................... 266
Fieldnote entry 6.3 (06/04/2010) ‘Laughing and flirting on the phone’ ........ 283

List of images

Image 3.5 An agent’s desk................................................................................................................................. 136
Image 3.2 Mocking of targets .......................................................................................................................... 166
Image 3.3 Super heroes on the target boards................................................................................................. 167
Image 6.1 Screenshot of question on the computer system ............................................................................. 259

List of documents

Document 3.1 Adding and updating records .................................................................................................... 130
Document 3.2 An example of a pitch on a script ............................................................................................... 134
Document 3.3 Generic job advertisement used for the recruitment of new agents (European languages) online .... 147
Document 4.1 Extract from a promotional brochure for sales prospects ...... 181
Document 4.2 The closing section of the master script ...................................................................................... 187
Document 4.4 The template for scripts ............................................................................................................ 196
Document 4.5 An example of a campaign specific script (BIS campaign) ...... 197
Document 5.1 The script as a skeleton or scaffolding ....................................................................................... 225
Document 5.2 Internal training document for the consultative approach .... 232
Abstract

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing debate on call centres, more specifically, their characterisation as inherently problematic standardised and globalised workplaces. These issues are the main focus in this ethnography of a multilingual outbound London call centre. Drawing on four years of participant observation, interviews with staff, linguistic analysis of documents and of interactional data, ‘the script’ and ‘its career’ as part of a trajectory is followed from its production to its enactment and use on the phone. In this case study, the script is shown to be ‘good to think with’ as it is not only the controversial symbol of standardisation, but also underpins the organisation. Following the script’s trajectory permits a multi-level analysis of ‘call centres’ addressing:

i) their working

ii) the understanding and experience of them by different participants

iii) the implementation and outcome of standardisation practices and the perception of the latter at each level of the hierarchy in an everyday context.

This thesis problematises current theorisations of scripts and standardisation. These are shown i) to draw on a long tradition in social theory that views standardisation negatively leading to homogenisation and deskilling and as ii) restricted in their vision, focusing only on managements’ official account of ‘static scripts’, enforced top-down through surveillance, but not that scripts unofficially take on different meanings whilst travelling down the hierarchy. The ‘career of the script’ reveals those meanings, with each company segment’s view of it reflecting the different pressures they are under. For instance, agents unaware of the official reading verbatim policy are supportive of scripts, seeing it possible to ‘make their own’ within the set framework and not leading to homogenisation or deskilling. Moreover, having them facilitates working in the call centre and improving their language learning, which subsequently helps them to find a better job elsewhere.
Thesis preface

In the past fifteen years, call centres have risen to prominence in the UK as a significant sector of the British service economy. As such, call centres have not only become a considerable source of employment for many people working in the service economy\(^1\), they are also widely seen as a revolutionary model of efficient organisation, taking advantage of the latest progress in technology (cf. McPhail 2002: 5). The call centre model has become so influential that it has been adopted for various purposes across public and private sectors and on a business and consumer level (cf. Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) 2004).

However, call centres’ expansions have not gone unchallenged. One important strand of controversy surrounding call centres amongst academics, the media and the public, has been the widespread use of ‘standardisation practices’ (cf. Belt, Richardson and Webster 2000: 367). In fact, sociologists like Stanworth (2000) and Belt et al. (2000) suggest that call centres have a particular image, being associated in the public mind with low-skilled and standardised work.

Similarly, in academia, even though research about call centres is relatively recent, the sociological and sociolinguistic findings to date tend to evoke a “negative imagery of call centres as the digital communication factories of the post-industrial service economy” (Holtgrewe, Kerst and Shire 2002: 1). While taking into account particular perceptions of some researchers, this thesis will raise questions about the relative effect of standardisation practices on workers and managers, the efficiency of the organisation, the institutional discourse surrounding standardisation, and

---

\(^1\) The service sector currently employs around 80% of the British working population (CFA 2012: 22).
the call centre work itself. These are issues which have been of lesser focus in service sector and call centre research so far (cf. Leidner 1993: 22²).

Research focus and objectives

This study aims to develop a better understanding of perceptions and practices towards standardisation by workers and managers in call centres. I will not take the position that the standardisation of call centre work and its effect on the human personality it can entail is only negative. Although some of these manipulations might be infantilising, invasive, and demeaning, if one wants to understand standardisation practices in call centre work better and how workers and managers perceive them, it is necessary to obtain a more subtle and precise account of them by drawing on a variety of methods, including participant observation.

Chapter 1 consists of a literature review on scholarly work related to how standardisation practices in call centres have been assessed. This account, informed with insights from industrial sociology and sociolinguistics, will provide the starting point for this study. In this chapter, I will also develop the research questions that will guide the rest of the study.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical presuppositions that this study is based on, along with a description and explanation of the methods and techniques that are employed for data collection during fieldwork. It also includes consideration of the recognised lack of ethnographic studies in research on call centres. Consequently, it will outline how an ethnography can facilitate discussions on standardisation practices in call centres and call centre work (including standardisation practices) itself.

Chapter 3 summarises in the first part some of my impressions and observations of the fieldsite and in the second draws on interviews with agents. That is, the first part introduces its employees, daily routines and

² Throughout this thesis, I may refer to literature that is not very recent. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, according to many sociologists (Timmermans and Epstein 2010; Mumby 2005; Watson 2003) there is a lack of studies on standardisation in workplaces or resistance to standardisation in workplaces and the few studies that do exist are thus from the 1980s and 1990s. Secondly, according to Doellgast (2011 personal communication), who was part of a research team investigating the call centre industry globally, there is now little research on call centres in general as the majority of sociologists like her researching call centres have “moved on”. The most recent studies have focused on outsourced inbound call centres in India or the Philippines (e.g. Sonntag 2009; Cowie 2007).
working through the eyes of a typical new agent on their first day and highlights how the general theory and impression of call centres as sites of standardisation in the literature are only partially successful often because of unpredictable elements of the organisation and how it is run. However, there are further several elements in the call centre where flexibility and strategies around standardisation are even encouraged. Therefore, while the first section serves as a commentary on the mix of standardisation, unpredictability and relaxation, the second shows how individuals articulate these tensions. The description also reveals how scripts run like a common thread through the company, connecting participants across the organisational hierarchy, serving as an agreed reference point for: (i) communication between agents and people on the phone, (ii) training, (iii) qualitative and quantitative measurement, (iv) hiring practices and (v) pay and bonus structures. In view of the scripts’ centrality to the business and the literature’s critique of call centres, following the trajectory of the scripts and its transposition not only helps to examine the workings of the organisation, but also to address the wider issue of standardisation and the tensions that seem to exist. I analyse potential textual transformations of a script and participants’ perception towards those as part of three separate ‘career’ stages, each representative of a different company segment. This should allow for a thorough investigation of how workers themselves perceive and deal with standardisation practices on a daily basis beyond the negative connotations commonly evoked by previous studies.

Chapter 4 presents the first stage - the script’s production at the hand of the client, management, and campaign manager. The description indicates that this phase is marked by disagreement between the various parties because of their contrasting notions of the script.

Chapter 5 further explores this and depicts what happens at the team leaders’ level and how they draw on the script during training.

Chapter 6 examines its final phase, where agents need to translate it into other languages and work with it on the phone.

Chapter 7 gives a summary and discussion of the findings and their implications. I further propose new areas for future research.
The research questions this thesis addresses are the following:

(i) To what extent are standardisation practices common and implemented in call centre work?
(ii) What are the agents’ and team leaders’ perceptions, perspectives, and strategies towards standardisation practices?
(iii) What are the managers’ perceptions, perspectives, and strategies towards standardisation practices?
(iv) How adequate are previous accounts in the sociological and sociolinguistics literature?

Using ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis addresses the role of standardisation practices in the nature of service work, specifically regarding that of language practices in call centres. It investigates how details from fieldwork and interviews, connect with large-scale issues. Rather than focusing exclusively on standardisation in call centres from a purely linguistic point of view, as much of the sociolinguistic research has tended to do, this research will discuss standardisation as part of a larger cultural process by drawing on relevant perspectives outside sociolinguistics, such as industrial sociology. Although this study is situated within sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, it selectively draws on other non-linguistic theories put forward on standardisation and the new economy.

**Decision to undertake this study**

London is now widely regarded as a one of the world’s ‘global cities’. The term was coined by Saskia Sassen and is now widely used to denote a few cities “that are strategic sites in the global economy because of their concentration of command functions and high-level producer-service firms oriented to world markets” (Sassen 1999: 145). London’s status as a global city and as a hub of the global service economy is often linked to the strong presence of the financial services. However, according to Sassen (1998) the stigmatised, less glamorous, and often overlooked parts of the service industries, such as call centres, also play an important role in its service economy. In fact, it is home to the pan-European call centre industry, as many headquarters host their multilingual call centres there, with incoming
and outgoing calls from across Europe being co-ordinated. A recent survey by the government on the British call centre industry suggests that after the end of the millennium the call centre phenomenon began to penetrate the consciousness of the British public, as call centres expanded on an unprecedented level for businesses and consumers, and the outsourcing of call centres to other English speaking countries began (DTI 2004: 9). This expansion has led to the fact that currently over one million of the working population in the UK work in call centres (CFA 2012: 5).

The present study has in part been stimulated by my experience of working in a variety of such multilingual call centres in London, ranging from financial services to IT, for the past five years and encountering strong perceptions about such work from customers (I have worked in total for ten different call centres in London but visited another five). Whilst not wishing to make this thesis solely about my working experience in call centres and being aware of the limits and biases of my experiences, I, nevertheless, want to highlight this knowledge as informing reasons why I have chosen to pursue standardisation practices in a call centre as a topic.

During my initial assignment in a call centre, I came across new practices of standardisation that I had previously had not known existed. They ranged from scripting entire conversations on the phone between consumers and agents to handing out guidelines agents were supposed to follow. The scripts were also enforced by extensive monitoring (e.g., how many calls had been made/accepted and the recording of phone conversations). The role of technology was crucial in this, as it made it possible to record what every worker had done qualitatively as well as quantitatively. At first, I was horrified and opposed to the amount of monitoring and standardisation that occurred, for being German and in view of recent German history, I was raised to oppose standardisation and monitoring. However, conscious about the monitoring process and in fear of my job, as with most call centre employees I was employed as a temporary employee and could be fired the same day. I thus tried to stick to the script and rules as much as I could in spite of my mental opposition. After some

---

3 Throughout this thesis, I will use agents and workers synonymously. When I use the term ‘staff’ it is meant to encompass agents, trainers, and management.
time, I got used to the whole process to the point that I almost forgot about it, just as my fellow workers had. When I asked my colleagues about the standardisation and monitoring practices, I was told not to worry about them. On another level, I realised that the sheer amount of data collected, due to the various means of monitoring, reinstated our privacy somewhat, since individual monitoring was rendered impractical, because of its labour intensity, if not impossible.

The monitoring and standardisation practices that occurred in the various workplaces that I have worked at have been varied. While in some call centres, entire conversations between employees and customers had to follow a word-by-word pre-written standard script, other call centre managers were more lenient. That is, although we were still required to follow a script, we did not have to read it aloud verbatim, and could respond more freely to customers’ questions. While scripting and monitoring practices varied across these call centres, customers’ complaints about workers’ low level of education and standardisation practices were common. Moreover, these tended to emerge as soon as customers realised that we were working in call centres. This often went along with questions about (a) where we were from, (b) where we were calling from and (c) where we were based as well as verbal abuse⁴. It was the case, as Belt et al. (2000: 368) suggest, that there was a common public image of a low-skilled call centre agent who worked in a heavily standardised environment.

Whilst many of these assumptions about call centres, their operations and their agents made by customers, especially in the UK, appeared unjust to me, I had to learn to deal with them. Thus, I attempted to conceal the fact that I worked in one by attempting to make the scripts we worked from sound less standardised and to appear more educated. Ironically, these strategies motivated me to standardise my own conversations, as creating individual strategies for each person called would have been very difficult.

---

⁴ Questions about the callers’ origins may appear less surprising if one considers the multilingualism that was prevalent in the call centres where I worked. Since many agents were fluent in more than one language, it could frequently happen that customers were not talking to native speakers.
Overall, it was this experience of being confronted with outsiders’ strong views about call centre work which sensitised me to the issues rather than my personal experience of standardisation. I realised that there was something special about call centre work and that was the extreme degree of standardisation. As a result, I became interested and was more attentive to the issues discussed in the media surrounding call centres.

In 2008, I decided to study for an MSc in Social Anthropology. As part of my course, I attended modules which introduced me to social theory about the social and economic transformations that have occurred in Britain in the last twenty years. My engagement throughout my MSc with social theory and post-modern theories about post-industrial societies helped me to gain a better understanding of a liberal economy like Britain and the context within which call centres have emerged. Having lived most of my life in several European countries which do not have such economies, I have never experienced dramatic changes like those in Britain in the past twenty years, with a massive decline in the industrial base and a switch to a primarily service economy. Thus, works by Sassen (1998; 2001), Hochschild (2003), and Ritzer (2004) were particularly influential, as they enabled me to deconstruct my experiences of call centre work and people’s assumptions about it. My interest in the social impact of the economic transformation also formed my main motivation for embarking on a PhD.

---

5 Moreover, the account I have given so far of my subjective experiences is not meant to be an evaluation or appraisal of call centre work but merely to show how outsiders’ and insiders’ views can differ significantly.

6 Interestingly, after discussions about call centres it emerged that most of my fellow students, sharing my age, being in their early twenties, after initial embarrassment, admitted to having themselves worked in call centres.

7 Economies are often distinguished between liberal (USA, UK and Canada), co-ordinated (Germany, France, Israel, Denmark, Netherlands etc.) and industrialising (China, India etc.) (cf. Holman, Batt and Holtgrewe 2007).
Chapter 1

Language and standardisation practices in call centres

1.0 Introduction

By way of introduction, I will begin with a short overview of the issues that are explored throughout this chapter, which will help to set the context for the subsequent discussion. This is followed by a brief chapter outline.

1.0.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, I explore the relevant literature from sociology and sociolinguistics in order to shed light on the historical and ideological context within which standardisation practices in call centres have been addressed. As I have explained in the thesis introduction, the macro social-historical context is likely to affect standardisation practices in call centres as well as agents’ and managers’ perception of standardisation practices.

I will discuss the standardisation theme in three contexts: in relation to the theorisations of standardisation, the new economy, and to call centres. Considering that standardisation practices and call centres often hold pejorative associations for the public (see the thesis preface), it is important to address the following guidance questions throughout the respective sections:

a) What is standardisation?

b) Why has standardisation been associated with the service economy (call centres)?

c) How have standardisation practices in call centres been described by academics?

d) How have agents’ and managers’ attitudes towards standardisation practices in call centres been discussed in the academic literature?
More specifically, this chapter will initially (section 1.1) trace how different theorisations of standardisation have emerged in sociology and sociolinguistics, and how it has come to be regarded pejoratively.

In section 1.2, using frameworks from industrial sociology, I will explain the ideological as well as historical processes that have resulted in the rise of the new economy and new discourses about powerful standardisation processes. I will also explain, methodologically and theoretically, why workers’ and managers’ perceptions towards standardisation practices have been of a lesser focus in sociology.

The last part of this chapter (section 1.3), discusses standardisation practices in call centres with regard to:

i) Current sociolinguistic and sociological discussion in relation to skilling, monitoring, stress, rationalisation and ideologies of language, drawing on critiques of standardisation from social theory by Weber and Marx;

ii) Existing sociolinguistic and sociological studies about call centres in Britain. This review reveals a lack of research that addresses call centre staff’s perception towards standardisation practices and research that draws on participant observation - an aspect this study seeks to cover.

1.0.2 Background to this study

According to sociologists Richardson and Belt (2001: 71), call centres were introduced on a larger scale to Britain and Europe in the 1990s, when businesses recognised the need to reduce cost, centralise services, and widen customer services, both in terms of quality and availability. The role of technology was crucial in this - not only did the technology make call centres possible and allow extensive monitoring to ensure high-quality customer service, it further helped to reduce the costs by ways of ‘intelligent networks’ with their toll-free and local call rates. As Belt, Richardson and Webster (2002: 28) point out, call centres are designed to be “environments in which work can be standardised to create relatively uniform activities to achieve
economies of scale and consistent quality of customer service”. However, standardisation as a phenomenon is not unique to call centres and is often linked in social theory to other social transformations, as explained next.

For Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 72), there has been a longstanding debate, often critical in social theory, with regards to standardisation, dating back to Marx and Weber. However, especially in recent years there has been a renewed interest among sociologists in this field, because “many authors subscribe to the notion that increased globalisation requires more standardisation” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 75). Moreover, according to Ritzer (1998: 61) and Leidner (1993: 1-2), it is of great interest to sociologists that standardisation practices that are now applied on a large scale to interactive service work were originally devised for manual labour. Regarding this, sociologists like Leidner (1993: 1) and Ritzer (1998: 60) consider the kind of standardisation processes described in the call centre context as a common feature of the now dominant service economy, or ‘new economy’, which has emerged over the past twenty years. While the routines might be the same as for manual labour, as Leidner (1993) suggests, when these practices are applied to the service context, there are some changes. For instance, service workers’ employers tend to use strategies that aim to control employees, causing a greater moral and psychological impact on their workers than manual work could have ever done (Leidner 1993: 2).

In effect, standardisation, compliance, and control of workers in new workplaces are achieved through language as a crucial managerial tool. As a result, as Leidner (1993: 8) notes:

“Employers [of interactive services workers] may try to specify exactly how workers look, exactly what they say, their demeanours, their gestures, their moods, even their thoughts. The means available for standardisation interactions include scripting, uniforms or detailed dress codes; rules and guidelines for dealing with service-recipients and sometimes with co-workers; instruction in how best to think about the work, the service-recipients, and oneself; and manipulation of values and attitudes through consciously constructed corporate cultures (...) that provide indoctrination” (1993: 8).

As “employers of interactive service workers may claim authority over many more aspects of workers’ lives than other kinds of employers do” (Leidner 1993: 2), it is thus possible to say that standardisation in interactive service
work goes deeper than for manual labour, where standardisation and the standardisation debate in sociology originated from. More specifically, with manual labour, workers were only involved in the standardisation process of the actual production processes of physical goods, while in the interactive service context, “workers themselves have become the raw material” that is being sold (Leidner 1993: 2).

One branch of sociology which attends to the latter issue in more detail is industrial sociology8. According to Brown (1992: 7), ever since the publication of Braverman’s *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism* in 1974, in which he examines how standardisation leads to the deskilling of workers, standardisation has been an important topic for industrial sociologists. Braverman’s publication did, however, not only result in standardisation practices becoming a major focus for industrial sociologists, for the Marxist analysis advocated by the author9 was also widely adopted by British industrial sociologists even by those unsympathetic to it. This school is often referred to as labour process theory. Leidner (1993: 23) further argues that thirty five years later, and despite many major social changes, such as de-industrialisation and the rise of the service economy, studying standardisation practices is as important as ever for the discipline, because in the interactive service economy they are more encompassing than those described by Braverman for manual workers. She further points out that this is not only the case on the psychological level, but also because outsiders as customers have become participants in the standardisation processes occurring in the interactive service economy and “may adjust their

---

8 The goal of industrial sociology has been described as an attempt “to examine the direction and implications of trends in technological change, globalisation, labour markets, work organisation, managerial practices and employment relations to the extent to which these trends are intimately related to changing patterns of inequality in modern societies and to the changing experiences of individuals and families the ways in which workers challenge, resist and make their own contributions to the patterning of work and shaping of work institutions” (Watson 2008: 392).

9 Brown suggests that Braverman’s analysis has been so influential because it “offered an approach drawing on aspects of Marx’s analysis of capitalism which had largely been neglected in sociology up to that time; and he was able to show Marx’s work provided the basis for an illumination (...) interpretation of contemporary industrial organisation” (1992: 15). As a result, debates about the capitalist labour process became one of the main reference points, at least for British industrial sociologists. Much of the literature published in subsequent years was often critical on one or the other point about Braverman’s analysis. This particular branch of industrial sociology has often been referred to as ‘British labour process theory’ (ibid: 15).
assumptions about the norms of guiding social interaction more widely” (Leidner 1993: 23). Equally, Edgell (2012) argues that with the rise of the service economy, Braverman’s theories have gained new currency as they have been reconceptualised by authors such as Leidner, Bain and Taylor.

As in industrial sociology, sociolinguistics has started to attend to these issues. Duchêne (2009: 27) notes that:

“in recent years, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have addressed central questions related to both the impact of globalisation on language practices and their standardisation. (...) specific attention has been given to the increasing importance of language and communication as a tool for regulation of communication patterns, the standardisation of language varieties and the performance of identities (...)” (2009: 27).

Nonetheless, there have only been a few linguistic studies on call centres, for the majority of the literature stems from quantitatively-oriented research in industrial sociology. Moreover, hitherto ethnographic and interactional research has not featured prominently in either sociology or sociolinguistics in the study of call centres. On the one hand, industrial sociology studies have generally focused on issues of standardisation in the context of stress, technology, monitoring and rationalisation, drawing extensively on Marxian, Weberian and Foucauldian traditions. It has also been industrial sociology that has tended to describe call centres in negative terms, such as “modern sweatshops” (Fernie and Metcalf 1998: 5), “semi-skilled labour” (Russell 2008: 199) and heavily “standardised” (Belt et al. 2002: 28). On the other hand, in sociolinguistics, there have only been a handful of studies on call centres and standardisation, focusing on such practices in call centres in the UK (Cameron 2000a; 2000b), Canada (Heller 2005; Roy 2003), India (Sonntag 2009; Cowie 2007) and the Philippines (Friginal 2007; 2009). However, their analyses tend to be based on managerial discourses surrounding standardisation instead of the actual practices, and how these practices work for agents. Moreover, few of these studies feature detailed interactional/ethnographic accounts of call centres. In general, it can be said that there is a lack of sociolinguistic work on the service economy, a criticism also raised by Heller (2005: 2).

While standardisation practices in the new economy have not been discussed extensively in the sociolinguistic literature, their motivations
outside the new economy have been, such as in the case of nation building and the rise of a standard language. These general theorisations of standardisation may prove useful for scrutinising the different practices, views, and ideologies involved in call centre standardisation, and, by extension, the role that standardisation practices have in call centres’ interaction between agents and customers.

1.1 Standardisation

In this section I will explore how standardisation has been discussed by sociologists and sociolinguistics. To do so, I will briefly refer to some of the important sociological and sociolinguistic theorisations on standardisation, which will resurface in section four as major themes for current theorisations of practices in call centres.

1.1.1 A sociological view of standardisation

For the purpose of reviewing sociological theorisations of standardisation, I will mainly draw on a review article by Timmermans and Epstein (2010) entitled “A World of Standards but not a Standard World: Towards a Sociology of Standards and Standardisation”, as there is little specific literature on standardisation in sociology (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 70). As Timmermans and Epstein explain, even though standardisation in sociology has been “a frequent object of sociological attention” (ibid: 72) as e.g. in national standards of education “(...) most such writing adopts the terms in their everyday senses and avoids examination of the broader sociological significance of standard-setting and standardising” (ibid). In support of their observation, Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 71) cite Lampland and Star (2009: 11) who:

“observe standards quite often fall into the category of ‘boring things’ that fail to elicit much attention or scrutiny. Although standards are often formally (or legally) negotiated outcomes, they also have a way of sinking below the level of social visibility, eventually becoming part of the taken-for granted technical and moral infrastructure of modern life” (2010: 71).
They suggest that where standards have been addressed, “the study of standardisation remains an underappreciated framework for the analysis of many core aspects of modernity” (ibid: 70).

Another reason why I will extensively draw on this article is that the authors make claims about the use of terms of standards and standardisation in sociology that are based on their extensive surveying and expert reading of a massive literature in sociology covering ground ranging from Marxian, Weberian, Foucauldian analyses to science literature. It would not be possible for me to do the same within this thesis. In addition, I will show the relevance of their account to the literature on call centres, while also critically appraising this relationship based on extensive reading of my own.

In their article, Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 71) attempt to establish the genealogy of the term and why standardisation tends to be overlooked by sociologists. To do so, they draw on the findings of the literary theorist Raymond Williams. Williams (1985) found the origins of the English word “standard”, defined as “a source of authority” and “a level of achievement”, during the fifteenth century (ibid: 70). Conversely, he notes, “‘standardisation’ came into recognisable use only in the late nineteenth century by way of the domains of science (standardising the conditions of an experiment) and manufacturing (standardising parts)” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 70). Williams (1985) further makes a note of the apparent contradictions between the meanings of these two etymologically related terms: Standards tend to be regarded as desirable; something one strives to achieve. However standardisation in its popular usage tends to have negative connotations; it indicates mundanity against individuality and in favour of the industrial uniform. For Timmermans and Epstein, “the derogatory connotation [of standardisation still] persists” (2010: 71). They argue that it is, for instance, well encapsulated by Ritzer’s (2000) McDonaldisation-of-society thesis, “as well as by much writing that views the standardisation of people as inherently dehumanising” (ibid: 71). Nevertheless they find it hard to see “how standards can be purely good while standardisation is wholly bad, given that standardisation presumes the existence of standards, whereas standards cannot endure with any potency unless they are standardised across social domains” (ibid: 72).
Further exploring this tension, Timmermans and Epstein continue to excavate “the history, within social theory and sociology, of an engagement with standardisation” (2010: 72). They come to the conclusion that, even though the term was not often used, nineteenth and twentieth-century social theory, mainly in the works of Marx, Weber, and then later Foucault, prefigures a dominant concern with standardisation. For instance, Marx’s analysis of capitalism analysed “the standardisation of conditions for economic activity in a capitalist market, as well as the spread of the commodity as a standard mode of economic exchange” (Marx 1867 [1977]; see also Busch 2000 quoted in Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 72)). Additionally, they suggest that “Marx’s depiction of the relentless growth of a world market pointed, as a global consequence, to an increasing homogeneity, both cultural and economic” (ibid: 72). According to Timmermans and Epstein (ibid: 72), Weber shared the Marxist concern with social homogenisation. In his work on bureaucracy, Weber explored “the levelling’ effect of the great bureaucratic machines of modern life (Weber 1946: 226), which emphasised ‘the abstract regularity of the execution of authority’ and rejected on principle the notion of doing business ‘from case to case’ (Weber 1946: 224)” (ibid: 72). Thus, according to Weber, bureaucracy promoted the rise of the mass as opposed to distinctive individuals. Moreover, for Weber, “bureaucracy both exemplified and promoted the broader processes of rationalisation that were manifested everywhere in modernity” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 72)\(^\text{10}\).

Foucauldian analyses of the emergence of disciplinary techniques in modern societies, which were written much later, are also considered by Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 73) as an account which aims to explain “unexpected uniformities across the range of institutions, practices, and knowledge systems”. They note that even though “Foucault’s term for the process that underlay the social control functions of such institutions was

\(^{10}\) Moreover, Weber’s analysis of rationalisation has been credited with pointing to such instances in the modern West as the emergence of standard forms of experimentation in science and bookkeeping (cf. Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 72).
normalisation\textsuperscript{11}, (...) many of his concrete examples of disciplinary techniques concern the formal standards of modern organisations” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 73)\textsuperscript{12}.

In summary, the Marxian, Weberian, and Foucauldian positions introduced here all acknowledge standardisation as a powerful means to regulate society. However, they also share a critical concern with standardisation and the “tendency within it to emphasise the link between standardisation and the homogenisation or flattening of social life in modernity” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 74). Marx and Weber, writing specifically about standardisation at workplaces, further worried that it may not only lead to homogenisation but also to deskill\textsuperscript{13} and dehumanisation. I have introduced these Marxian, Weberian, and Foucauldian theorisations of standardisation, as these are still very influential and form the basis of many current theorisations of standardisation in call centres, which I will explore in more detail in section 1.3.

While many of the usages of the standardisation from social theory referred to so far seem derogatory, the odd tensions seen with ‘standard’ and ‘standardisation’ appear to continue in some of the commonly cited definitions of standardisation, even though as these definitions appear more neutral. For instance, Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 71) draw on Bowker and Star (1991) to define standardisation “as a process of constructing

\textsuperscript{11} According to Durlauf and Blume (2010: 2): “Social norms have been defined as rules that a group uses for appropriate and inappropriate values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. These rules may be explicit or implicit. Failure to follow the rules can result in severe punishments, including exclusion from the group.” On the other hand, standards tend to be specified in highly formal ways. However, Timmermans and Epstein note that “there is a very fuzzy line separating the domain of standards form that of norms and convention”(2010: 71).

\textsuperscript{12} As already mentioned earlier, while in social theory the term ‘standardisation’ has not been used, the terms ‘standardisation’ emerged first in the context of manufacturing. It was not until Taylor’s system of scientific management (1911) that standardisation of manual work became widespread. Leidner (1993: 1) notes that as the first “systems for dividing and standardising work were conceived for manual labour, and were first widely implemented in manufacturing; most sociological work on standardisation has also been based on studies of this sector (e.g. Burawoy 1979; Sabel 1982)”. As an increasing number of people started working in clerical jobs, she argues “the principles of routinisation [standardisation] were applied to what has been considered ‘brain work’, transforming some clerical functions into rote manual tasks and reducing the scope of their work (e.g. Braverman (1974))” (Leidner 1993:1). Braverman’s influential Marxist account (1974: 148) of standardisation as a process of deskill\textsuperscript{13} deserves special note.

\textsuperscript{13} As Leidner (1993: 3) explains, standardisation has often been blamed for shifting away power from workers to employers and thereby deskill\textsuperscript{13}ing the workers.
uniformities across time and space, through the generation of agreed-upon rules”. On the other hand, de Vries suggests that:

“[a standard is] a document, established by consensus and approved by a recognised body, that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context” (1999: 14).

Finally, David and Steinmueller (1994) place more emphasis on the regulatory aspect of standardisation in their definition and define it as: “a set of technical specifications that can be adhered to by a producer, either tacitly, or in accord with some formal agreement, or in conformity with explicit regulatory authority” (1994: 218).

All three definitions stress the notion that standardisation, if it is to succeed, has to be agreed on and constructed together by all participants. However, there appears to be a difference in emphasis. David and Steinmueller’s and de Vries’s definitions highlight the importance of the regulatory authority to a degree that Bowker and Star’s definition does not. These definitions raise further questions, such as how far standardisation practices in call centres are dependent on ‘the generation of agreed-upon rule’, and what constitutes the ‘regulatory authority’ in the call centre.

Although in this thesis, I will use the term standardisation mostly in the sociological sense throughout this thesis, some authors such as Cameron who are writing from a linguistic tradition on call centres have combined the sociological theorisations of standardisation with that of linguistics. For this reason, in the following I will briefly address the sociolinguistic perspective of standardisation and the standardisation of talk.

1.1.2 A sociolinguistic view of standardisation

The sociological and sociolinguistic concepts of standardisation are in fact related, but I have chosen to differentiate them, as it is important to highlight their different respective traditions. While in sociology, debates about the sociological significance of standard-setting and standardisation may refer to any realm in society, i.e., in the service sector, manufacturing industry, or education, in sociolinguistics the discussion is usually tied to the rise of a ‘standard language’, its ideologies, function, and impact on a community or
society. The standardisation of language as such is not discussed in the sociological literature.

I will initiate my account of sociolinguistic perspectives on standardisation by discussing two related notions of linguistic standardisation. The first is that of the linguistic evolution of the formal aspects of phonology, morphology, and syntax, from a vernacular to a standard and codified language and its facilitation by what is known as “prescriptivism”, whilst the second relates to the wider function of a standard language in society. Subsequently, I will move beyond these notions, and explore how standard language ideologies may affect standardisation in call centres and how they compare with the sociological literature.

Good examples of the first notion of linguistic standardisation, the process in which a vernacular in a community becomes the standard language, can be found in a number of studies, for example, Haugen (1966); Joseph (1987); Wright (2000), which look at how a standard language emerges through the suppression of nonstandard variants. This process from a nonstandard to a standard variety involves “implicit elements of prestige (whereby the standard language is valued more highly than the other vernaculars), stability, and common usage” (Hall 2005: 1). Alternative variations in phonetics, syntax, or morphology are either eliminated or stigmatised. In that sense, standardisation becomes necessary when there are several phonetical or grammatical means of “saying the same thing” and one option thus becomes ‘correct’, whereas the others become ‘incorrect’ (cf. Cameron 2000a: 48). Milroy and Milroy (1995) refer to this ideology of correct and incorrect as the prescriptive language ideology. Generally, as Cameron suggests quoting the Milroys, standardisation in linguistics is therefore often thought of as the “suppression of optional variability” (2000a: 48). It also in this sense that one can understand Haugen’s definition of a standard language, who considers it as “minimal variation in form, maximal variation in functions” (1966:931).

Linguistic standardisation, according to Cooper (1989: 138), has tended to be more successful when it comes to written varieties than standardisation of spoken varieties and one reason for this he considers is that “the need for a single written standard variety is far greater than for a
single spoken variety” (1989: 138). Another is that it is easier to teach the written variety via school, and finally “writers can usually exercise more control over their writing than speakers can exert over their speech” (Cooper 1989: 138). Moreover, as Cooper notes: “written codification can influence speakers separated by time and space and is thus likely to promote the stability of the norm which it encodes” (1989: 145). But he further writes that “not all written codifications are accepted even as an ideal” (ibid) and an example of this he cites are the recommendations published by language academies which are often widely ignored.

The greater need for a standard written variety than for a spoken variety has further been attributed by political scientist Anderson (1985) and sociolinguists James and Leslie Milroy (1999) to the rise of ‘print capitalism’, the mechanical reproduction and ensuing commodification of print language in the 15th century. That is, with the arrival of print capitalism, language standardisation became bound to the “aim of the functional efficiency of language” (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 19).

This brings us to the second notion of linguistic standardisation. A standard written language has an important social function, as a medium of communication, where the desire is to make language as “uniform” as possible so that there will be a “minimum of misunderstandings and the maximum of efficiency” (Milroy and Milroy: 19), as well as enabling “speakers to transcend linguistic differences within the relevant community” (Cameron 2000a: 48). Despite standardisation’s many acknowledged merits, it is the uniformity aspect and suppression of linguistic variation that some sociolinguists (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2005; Trenz 2007) have criticised, as it may result in social exclusion (e.g. Bex and Watts 2000).
The two views discussed in this paragraph can be summarised using the table below:

**Table 1.1 Conceptualisations of linguistic standardisation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Pro-Standardisation</strong> (e.g. Anderson 1985)</th>
<th><strong>Critical of Standardisation</strong> (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic assumption</strong></td>
<td>Language as a medium of communication</td>
<td>Language as a medium of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception of standardisation</strong></td>
<td>A democratic medium ideal: Language as a neutral medium of social participation</td>
<td>Criticism: Standard language as a medium of social exclusion (e.g. Bex and Watts 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception of language variation</strong></td>
<td>Language variation as obstacle to emancipation</td>
<td>Language variation as expressing different identities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the linguistic standardisation in call centres is different from that of written varieties in the classic linguistic sense, as standardisation in call centres also by definition includes “spoken discourse performances” (Cameron 2000a: 48). Along this line, Cameron (2000a) suggests viewing standardisation beyond the objective of ultimate homogeneity. Instead, she argues following a widely accepted view in linguistics that:

“standardisation in the sense of ‘uniform performance’ is always an ideal rather than achieved reality; but the codification of linguistic standards does not necessarily succeed in changing people’s behaviour; it usually succeeds in altering their attitudes, so that they subscribe to what the Milroys dub the ‘ideology of standardisation’” (2000a: 49).

Cameron (2000a: 48) argues that it is this kind of language standardisation ideology that drives the standardisation of spoken discourse in workplaces, such as those of the service economy. This also includes the introduction of scripts in call centres, which is aimed at “the suppression of optional variability” (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 6). While some aspects of the standardisation practices in call centres do not appear very new, Cameron points out that “new linguistic demands on workers may in practice entail new (or at least newly intensified) forms of control over their linguistic behaviour, and thus a diminution of their agency as language users” for

---

14 See also Polzenhagen and Dirven (2008: 246).
instance through the introduction of calling scripts (2000b: 323). She further contends that this type of “top-down” (2000b: 326) linguistic regulation of call centre workers is increasing and that “there has been a significant intensification, both of the desire of organisations to control employees’ language use and of their ability to do so with some degree of effectiveness (in the case of call centres, by high-tech surveillance)” (Cameron 2000b: 341).

These recent developments raise questions as to the nature of standardisation practices of language, whether these are new or consistent with traditional ideologies of language and theories of language standardisation. In section 2.3.4, I will return to this issue and further discuss how standardisation in call centres has been theorised as ideologies of language.

Comparing the sociolinguistic and the sociological perspectives, the fact emerges that standardisation is acknowledged by both because of its important functions in regulating society and communication. Traditionally, the sociolinguistic concern seemed to lie more with how the standardisation process evolves, while sociology was more concerned with the outcomes of standardisation, such as the flattening of social life because of homogenisation or deskilling. More recently, however, standardisation has been theorised by, for instance, Cameron (2000a; 2000b; 2008) and the Milroys (1999), as ideologies of language that as an analytical category allow for analysing at a meta-level beliefs or conceptions people have about language. In fact, the question arises whether these more discourse focused theorisation of standardisation in sociolinguistics and analyses of specific realms of society such as the private sector or even call centres as is done in sociology represent the future of linguistic standardisation research. As pointed out earlier, the traditional approach in linguistics has focused more on the rise of a standard language within a nation state and its implementation via a school system. But as has been argued by various sociologists (e.g., Rose 1996) these sites of governance and regulation have become less important, because socialisation and regulation now increasingly takes places in much smaller locales such as workplaces.
1.1.3 Conclusion

In this section, I have briefly examined sociological and sociolinguistic accounts of standardisation. The relevant work on the phenomenon from social theory has tended to engage with it, as “grand narratives of homogenisation” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 74) and “totalising narratives of globalisation or dehumanisation” (ibid: 69), often in a derogatory sense. In sociolinguistics, the discussion is more tied to the rise of a ‘standard language’, its function, and impact on a community or society. More recently, the focus has turned to ideologies of language that underpin the standardisation practices. However, both share an understanding of standardisation as constructing uniformity across different realms of society.

The brief sociological discussion (Marx, Weber, Foucault) has shown that standardisation, though acknowledged as a powerful means for regulating society, is thought to lead to dehumanisation and deskilling, especially when applied to the workplace. This theorisation of standardisation forms the basis of discussion on standardisation in call centres in section 1.3. From the sociolinguistic theorisation, it has emerged that the standardisation of language is both perceived by linguists as important in its function, while also implicating a number of issues for non-standard users. However, following from Milroy and Milroy and Cameron, I have also argued that it is necessary to move beyond the conceptualisation of standardisation in the traditional linguistic sense, and to include the notion of ideologies of language. In section 1.3, I further explore how this notion has been adopted to call centres.

In the next section, I elaborate on theorisations of standardisation, but within the specific context of the new economy, and I explain how standardisation has become linked with the service economy.

1.2 The new economy

1.2.1 The origins of the new economy

Across the social sciences, the rise of the service economy is usually linked to the economic developments that have occurred in the West over the past sixty
years. These developments are thought have been initially based on purely economic transformations in developed countries, before spreading to other spheres of social life - political and educational. The most important of these changes was a shift from manufacturing to knowledge-based service industries after a long period of economic stagnation during the 1970s. Although industrial production for many highly industrialised countries nowadays is still important, it has either been made more efficient by operating with less manpower, thanks to new technology, or outsourced to developing countries with lower labour costs (e.g Watson 2006; Edgell 2012). The latter, in particular, has attracted great interest among industrial sociologists, leading to it being an active field of research. Many academics have, for instance, looked into outsourcing to developing countries, such as India, South Africa and the Philippines, in order to assess their economic impact on the country (Brenner 2005 on South Africa; Taylor and Bain 2004 on India) and the respective human resource management (Russell and Thite 2009), as well as the neo-imperialism (e.g. Taylor and Bain 2005: 278) they may experience as a consequence.

Even though the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based service economy was a purely economic transformation, at first, this change started affecting other spheres of life, whenever it was accompanied by other social transformations, such as “the globalisation of spaces, circulation of goods, and the spread of new technologies” (Duchêne 2009: 29). More importantly, each of these transformations was the cause for additional transformations by giving rise to new ideologies, such as post-Fordism and neo-liberalism. It is worth pointing out that while post-Fordism and neo-liberalism rarely get distinguished by the general public and are simply glossed over as neo-liberalism, there is quite an elaborate and complex distinction regarding them in industrial sociology. For the purpose of this thesis, these differences are not important, but it is worth pointing out that in industrial sociology, the differences between them are important. That is, on the one hand, post-Fordist organisation of working practices tends to be promoted and implemented by individual companies (cf. Kumar 1995 on post-Fordism in Italy), whereas neo-liberal ideology provides a distinctive framework for the organisation of markets for governments. On a more
general level, post-Fordism refers to a primarily economic transformation, which stresses the rise of the specialised, consumer focused and flexible service economy. Conversely, neo-liberalism suggests scaling down of bureaucracy, specific monetary policy, deregulation of finance, greater accountability of the public sector, liberalisation of trade and privatisation of public organisations amongst others features (cf. Williamson 1990).

The nature and impact of these transformations as well as the influence of post-Fordism and neo-liberalism on workplaces form a significant part of the new economy literature in social theory, but also a source of debate. A great amount of this literature is based on Great Britain, as successive British governments since the 1980s have promoted these transformations and ideologies and have been at the forefront of these changes. The de-industrialisation and privatisation of the economy started gaining pace under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and the process has continued to date, whereby it is now estimated that more than 80% of the workforce are employed in the service sector, with a substantial part being in London and the Southeast (Mayor of London-London Economy Today 2007).

1.2.2 The term ‘new economy’

Apart from post-Fordism and neo-liberalism, several closely related terms are in current use in social theory to summarise the transformations described above in the literature. These are ‘enterprise/business culture’ (Cameron 2000b), ‘post-industrial’ (Bell 1974; 1980; Ritzer 2007) ‘network society’ (Castells 2000), ‘knowledge economy’ (Duckner 1961), and ‘consumer society’ (e.g. Bauman 2007), amongst others. The terms differ in that they emphasise related but different aspects of the new global economy. However, they all indicate a rupture from previous dominant models, such as Fordism, as well as from an economy and society focused on production and industry, and the rise of a so-called ‘new economy’ with a ‘new work order’ (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996).

In a more general sense, the term ‘new economy’ in the industrial sociology literature is often used to refer to the growing service sector and the changes in the nature of work because of a widespread implementation of new technologies. In fact, it is this notion of the new economy that overlaps
with that of post-Fordism. Kumar (1995), in his chapter on “Fordism and post-Fordism”, suggests that the new economy implies a distinctive ideology. This encompasses the notion that businesses should focus on those areas of operation where they have a competitive advantage, such as products, brands and technical capabilities, which have become commodified, while more mundane business functions, such as customer service, back office, and manufacturing, can be outsourced to other companies or countries with lower labour costs (see also e.g. Watson 2006).

In the narrower sense, according to Huebner (2005), the term ‘new economy’ is usually used to describe the economies which have evolved around the innovations in information and communication technology, often digital technology, within the last fifteen years. These kinds of highly specialised economies compete in the new global markets by creating knowledge and innovative ideas, and distributing those using the latest high-end technology. Thus, unlike in the old economy, where production is based on physical goods, the new economy offers immaterial products, such as services and knowledge, e.g. Google’s search engine or Bloomberg’s terminals for accessing their database, which combines financial news and financial data with tools for analysing these.

1.2.3 The new economy’s characteristics

Many of these new economy aspects are still debated by social theorists. Nevertheless, among sociolinguistics and industrial sociologists there is a consensus on a number of key factors, which are thought to characterise it, with the main overarching themes being flexibility, specialisation, centrality of language, and standardisation15.

The new economy as a flexible economy

One of the main alleged characteristics of the new economy is flexibility and Webster (1995: 79) identifies this at many levels. For instance, there is a new flexibility among employees, whereby new economy workers are “those who

---

15 Even though flexibility and standardisation, at first sight, imply a potential conflict, in the subsection “the new economy as a standardised economy” I explain that in theory there is no conflict. However, in practice for call centre agents there is a lot of potential contradiction (cf. section 1.3.2).
neither hold to rigid job descriptions nor have the attitude that, once equipped for an occupation, they stay there for the rest of their working life” (Webster 1995: 80). Instead, Webster (1995) claims that “today, we have a new adaptability as a central quality, with ‘multi-skilling the norm’” (ibid: 80) and that we have adapted to the new job insecurity. A flexible personal orientation to the job and to training is only one aspect of this flexibility:

“since there is also wage flexibility (a trend towards paying individuals for what they do (...) rather than at a fixed rate), labour flexibility (to be prepared to change jobs every few years (...)), and time flexibility (part-time employment is growing fast, as is ‘flexi – time’ (...))” (ibid: 80)\(^\text{16}\).

With an overall decline in production in many Western countries, developed economies have become highly specialised, flexible service economies. This has meant that well-paid white collar occupations, such as those in banking, insurance, and business services have grown rapidly, offering different services according to demand. For instance, Webster (1995: 81) points out that in Britain, white collar occupations have doubled between 1971 and 1991. However, well-known studies, such as those by Sassen (1998) on global cities and the mobility of international capital, have also shown that the expansion of highly paid jobs, like those in financial services, have simultaneously led to a growth in low-paid service sector jobs, such as in the sales and call centre realms.

According to the OECD, the majority of these low-paid service sector jobs are carried out by women (Webster 1995: 47) and theorists across the social sciences have thus alleged that a feminisation of the workforce has taken place along with the rise of the service industry (ibid; Castells 2000). However, some studies (e.g. Mills 2005) in industrial sociology view this development critically, as they argue that the feminisation of the workforce has only occurred with regard to low paid jobs where managers prefer women, as they are willing to work for lower wages, often need more flexibility because of childcare and are less likely to join unions (cf. Mills

\(^{16}\) Similarly, there is a new kind of flexibility of production and consumption which also impacts workers. Information systems have allowed companies to develop flexible systems that offer cost-effective production such as just-in-time systems, which means that the factory will not manufacture before the order has been taken (cf. Webster 1995: 80). Advances in technologies have further led to factories having a greater variety of products to offer than was possible in the Fordist period.
2005), but that the revolution has not reached the better paid white collar jobs.

In sum, according to the literature reviewed here, the new economy and its workers are reflective of a society that is shaped by a consumption-oriented system rather than production. Consequently, a ‘blue-collar’ male industrial union-oriented worker, previously the typical employee in a Fordist economy, has become redundant and has been replaced by a more individualistic, often female worker or male ‘white-collar worker’. The research (e.g. Mills 2005) further suggests that the members of the younger generation of workers are less likely to be interested in unions or other class politics, and more likely to adhere to the low wages and the enforced new flexibility, because they accept governments and businesses’ view that this, at their expense, is essential, for businesses to remain competitive.

**The new economy as a specialised economy**

For Webster, “information necessarily takes on a greater role” in a consumer-oriented society and predominately service economy, “first of all as consumers must find out about what is available to consume, and second, because in the individualised present, they are keen on making individual statements about themselves through their consumption” (1995: 82). “Both factors promote information, the former as it involves advertising and the promotion of goods and services”, such as through call centres, and “the latter because it involves the symbolic dimension of consumption, people using objects” that are creating more information about themselves (ibid: 83). The flow of information is a requisite of a service economy, as it is specialised in its consumer-centeredness, that is supporting the latest individual interests of the consumer, but also for financial and service networks, which tie together and support dispersed and specialised activities. Kumar (1995: 14) further notes that new technology is required to produce, manage, and maintain the information intensity of many occupations. Thus, technology plays an integral part in most work practices nowadays.
The new economy as a linguistic economy

Another key factor of the new economy is the centrality of language. Even though rather marginal in the industrial sociology literature, it has been more fully considered by the very few sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Duchène 2009; Budach, Roy and Heller 2003; Gee et al. 1996; Roy 2003) that discuss the new economy on a theoretical level. Out of these, Duchène’s study (2009) of a tourist call centre in Switzerland and Roy (2003) of a bilingual call centre in Canada represent the only research on a multilingual call centre.

The key point made by sociolinguists is that in an economy which is not based on manual skills, but on communication between customers and service providers, language has become a work-related competence. This, as Duchène (2009: 29-30) observes, stands in stark contrast with the Fordist economy, in which language was either banned or at least marginal in employees’ work lives.

Sociolinguistic and industrial sociologists make three central claims about the role of language in the new economy:

- The first claim is related to post-Fordist ideology, suggesting the centrality of the customer and it has been alleged that as a result of this, there has been a redefinition of customer service interaction. Among others, Cameron (2000a: 103) claims that institutions and companies attempt to regulate customer service communication by introducing standardised conversation scripts and communication strategies making language a key managerial tool. To do this, however, companies have to make several kinds of possibly problematic assumptions about their target audience and their employees who will deliver the messages. Thus by default, as Leidner (1993: 11) points out, by using such scripts there is the presumption that people (and their clients) are on the whole interchangeable and perhaps that they can easily be hoodwinked. This assumption results in tension for service workers, because the rise of standardisation has equally been accompanied by customers demanding to be treated as individuals, whose special personal needs must be attended to, and companies promise to do so. Consequently, service workers have to always conceal the reality during communication with the
customer that this has been pre-scripted so that they are left unaware that they are being dealt with in a standardised way.

- The second claim, which is closely related to the first one, is concerned with the way a capitalist value system has affected the role of language. Heller argues that language is now increasingly thought of as “work-related competence”, either as a “measurable skill” or “talent” that can be sold as a commodity on the linguistic market (2005: 3). Language is thus regarded as linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1990) rather than an identity marker.

- The third claim is built on the second and suggests that, since language has become so important in the new economy, the two central pillars of the new economy, productivity, and flexibility, have become closely tied to language and “constitute the general framework in which language practices operate” (Duchêne 2009: 31). Duchêne (2009) explains that productivity in the new economy is valued “by the number of phone calls made and received, the number of words translated; the number of products sold; or the number of successful commercial interactions with clients” (2009: 54). Flexibility can be linked to multilingualism of employees or the number of activities they are involved in as part of their job (cf. Duchêne 2009: 30). Consequently, productivity and flexibility in the new economy are said to be measured in part in relation to language.

**The new economy as a standardised economy**

**The historical and ideological context**

Timmermans and Epstein (2010) argue that, even though the new economy and post-Fordism advocate flexibility and specialisation, economic activity is “thoroughly dependent on standards of various sorts”, such as “design standards and procedural standards” (2010: 74). More specifically, they explain that the idea of specialisation, i.e. of “niche marketing, presumes a more or less standardised specification of (...) niche groups”, who then will have a choice of standard products based on a limited menu (e.g. modern shopping mall food court offering a more or less standardised array of ethnic food restaurants) (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 74).
Moreover, while workers themselves have to be flexible, the work they perform will be pre-designed using scripts or guidelines outlining the language workers have to use. In addition, Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 73) have pointed out that the new flexibility in the job market also presupposes more standardisation practices in workplaces, since it is only in an economy that operates on standards that it is easy for workers to change jobs frequently.

According to Norwood (1990: 33) and Green (2001), the standardisation of interactive service work is not a new occurrence, as for instance, the work of telephone operators was standardised during the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. also Leidner 1993: 24). It is the historical and organisational continuity that call centre agents share with the telephone operators in the beginning of the century that makes call centres not only an “iconic example of the new economy” (Budach et al. 2003: 604), but also of a standardised workplace in it.

However, although the standardisation of service work was not unheard of in the past, it is the spread of standardisation within service economy that is new. Leidner (1993: 24) links this development to the fact that the cost and quality of interactive work have gained in importance in the new economy (cf. section 3.3.1). As a result, for Leidner, the principles of standardisation devised originally for the application in manufacturing work have become attractive to try out on human interaction, for they allow for lower labour costs because of the increasing repetitiveness of the job and managerial control (1993: 24). While for Leidner (1993) the standardisation in manufacturing is so as to “assure a uniform outcome and to make the organisation less dependent on the skills of individual workers”, she notes that in “interactive service work standardisation cannot be readily so accomplished (…)” (ibid: 24). For instance, quality control in interactive service jobs is “not a matter of standardising products but of standardising the workers themselves. This involves extending organisational control to aspects of the workers’ selves that are usually considered matters of personal choice or judgement” (Leidner 1993: 25). Therefore, this new nature of service work also raises questions whether standardisation is morally and psychologically justifiable. According to Leidner (1993) this question arises
not only in respect to service workers but also to service recipients. She writes that “a major feature distinguishing routinised interactive service work from other kinds of routinised work is the requirement that the behaviour of nonemployees be standardised to some extent” (Leidner 1993:6). It is, however, not only the nature of standardisation in the service work that has been criticised. It is also the fact that resistance for post-Fordist employees has been much riskier than for Fordist workers (cf. Sennett 1998). This is because in post-Fordism the risk has been shifted from the employer to the employee by employing workers on flexible short-term contracts and breaking the power of trade unions, meaning that if workers resist standardisation practices they may find themselves immediately without a job.

**Studies on the standardised new economy**

While the literature discussed in this section explains the historical and ideological context, which has led to the rise of the service economy as well as its characteristics, these accounts have been criticised by, for instance, Littler (1990) and Leidner (1993: 22), for their lack of consideration of workers’ subjectivity. Leidner (1993) notes that:

> “some classical accounts of standardisation such as that by Braverman (1974) omit the topic altogether, while others have addressed it only in terms of class-consciousness and contest or resistance to oppressive structure of work, e.g. Burawoy (1979) and Thompson (1989)” (1993: 22).

As a result, it is possible to conclude that the subjectivity and the perceptions of workers towards standardisation have not been addressed in great detail by the industrial sociologists, with the exception of Hochschild (2003) and Leidner (1993). Their studies show that it is not possible to analyse

---

17 Hochschild’s (2003) [1983] study on emotional labour in her book the Managed Heart shows that standardisation in the service economy is at a deeper level than in manufacturing. Following Goffman, she perceives social life as a series of interactions, in which actors learn, often unconsciously, to manage their emotions in line with specific “feeling rules” and rituals that prescribe what is regarded as suitable behaviour in any given situation (cf. Payne 2006: 8). Hochschild transfers this insight to the capitalist labour process where emotional labour is now remunerated. Firstly, she argues that “the worker is placed in a position of deference and subordination to the customer” (Payne 2006: 7). Secondly, managements will impose standardised scripts and rules to control and standardise service interactions. According to her critical Marxist theorisation, emotional labour, moreover, often entails the commodification of private feelings and all relationships becoming subordinated to commercialisation.
standardisation practices on their own. Instead, subjectivities and work practices have become inseparable, as workers’ language and identities are actively managed by employers (cf. Leidner 1993: 23). However, even theorisations such as those by Hochschild (2003) assume that all workers must be discontented in view of the standardisation practices. More problematically, Leidner (1993: 5) notes that academics with this view laud workers who resist, insist on maintaining their style and refuse to smile despite standardisation attempts. As she (1993) explains, “workers who support standardisation are a theoretical embarrassment to critics of standardisation” (ibid: 5). For this study, I will take Leidner’s (1993: 5) position that it is important to address the perception of workers of standardisation practices, as this would allow for a more subtle conceptualisation of standardisation beyond the dominant pessimist view of this concept.

1.2.4 Conclusion

In this section, using the framework of the new economy, I have described the historical background that led to the rise of the new economy as well as its ideological foundations. My account has highlighted the central role of standardisation in this framework and its close connection with the other tenets of the new economy: flexibility, specialisation, language, and standardisation.

The characteristics of the new economy are summarised in the following table:

**Table 1.2 The new economy – current theorisations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Flexibility** | - Time flexibility  
- Wage flexibility  
- Labour flexibility  
- Flexible marketing  
- Flexible production | - Job insecurity  
- Many semi-skilled/standardised jobs  
- ‘feminisation of the workforce’ |
| **Specialisation** | - specialised services  
- specialised economies  
- specialised consumption | - consumer oriented society and service economy  
- increased importance of the flow of information  
- importance of new technology |
| **Language** | - language as a skill  
- language as a commodity, sold on the linguistic market (‘linguistic scripting and regulation of conversations between customers and agents)  
- language as a key managerial tool | - scripting and regulation of conversations between customers and agents  
- language as a key managerial tool |
In the last part of the section, I have examined critically how studies by Leidner (1993), Littler (1990) and Hochschild (2003) have discussed standardisation practices in the new economy as well as their methodology. There were several problematic aspects of their approach which are significant for this study:

i) the labour process approach does not address subjectivities of workers towards standardisation, although these are linked with standardisation practices in the new economy

ii) workers are expected to resist openly against standardisation

iii) all workers must be discontented by standardisation as they are oppressed

iv) discontented workers are overlooked

Writing more generally on studies of workplace resistance, Mumby (2005) provides an interesting explanation for the shortcomings of these studies and links them to a wider issue in these theorisations. He argues that “despite the relatively wide epistemological divide between neo-Marxist and more recent Foucauldian studies” on workplaces, both succumb to what he calls “the dualistic approach to the study of control and resistance” (Mumby 2005: 26). That is, he criticises the framing of resistance for being within the duality of control and resistance and rarely going beyond. In particular, he contends that “much of this research fails to adequately theorise the possibilities for human agency at the level of everyday organising” (ibid: 28). In fact, Giddens’ (1979) conceptualisation of agency “as the ability to act otherwise” (Tucker 1993) is almost entirely lacking from these works. Mumby (2005) writes that:

“Heavily influenced by Braverman’s (1974) classic Marxist analysis of the structural conditions of 20th-century monopoly capitalism, and Burawoy’s (1979) critical ethnography of the subjective experience of work at the point of production, critical researchers have examined extensively how employee identities are constructed in ways that reproduce the managerially defined organisational culture.”
and ideology (e.g. Rosen 1985, 1988; Steinem 1999; Willmott, 1993; Witten 1993). Similarly, Foucauldian-inspired critical research has taken seriously his [Foucault’s] (1979) claim that factories are similar to prisons in which disciplinary mechanisms operate in the modern organisation to produce docile employees (e.g., Holmer Nadesan, 1997; Townley 1993). Although Foucauldian studies ascribe large amounts of agency to managerial forms of control, there is relatively little to the employees who struggle with them everyday. However, what distinguishes this work from neo-Marxist–inspired analyses (apart from the conceptual differences) is the focus on larger managerial discourses of surveillance and normalisation” (Mumby 2005: 26-27).

Mumby (2005) concludes that although employee resistance features to some degree “in both forms of analysis, it is usually read as subsumed within, and reproductive of, these control mechanisms” (2005: 26). In addition, all the resistance, if there is any, in the studies is individual often even guerrilla like, but never collective.

In the subsequent section, I explore the sociolinguistic and sociological literature briefly discussed above in more detail addressing, how standardisation practices in call centres and managers’ and workers’ attitudes towards them have been addressed by academics, revealing the important gap in both literatures that this study aims to fill.

1.3 Theorisations of standardisation in call centres

Building on the previous section, in this part, I describe how academics have come to focus primarily on the negative aspects of call centre work when addressing their standardisation practices. In order to understand the processes that led to these theorisations, I refer to sociolinguistic and sociological discussions and studies of call centre standardisation practices. These discussions focus on the issues of deskilling, monitoring, rationalisation, and ideologies by drawing on critiques of standardisation from social theory by Weber and Marx.

Initially, however, it is necessary to provide some background information on the call centre context.
1.3.1 Background - general features of call centres

According to Richardson and Bell (2001: 73), the origins of call centres in Europe lie in the 1990s when the phenomenon began to penetrate the consciousness of economic developers. They claim that the growth could not have happened before, as their emergence across the UK, in particular, depended on a combination of a number of factors, such as the introduction of information technologies, telecommunication advances combined with the construction of intelligent networks providing toll-free and local rate services.

These factors lead us to the definition of a call centre and the various definitions tend to stress either aims, function or organisations of call centres. In this study the following definition by McPhail (2002) is used as it is very comprehensive, combining different definitions.

“A call centre is a specialised office, where agents spend all their working days primarily on the phone. On the phone, they may remotely provide information, deliver services and/or conduct sales, using some combination of integrated telephone and information technologies, typically with an aim of enhancing customer service while reducing organisational costs” (McPhail 2002: 10).

Usually, a distinction related to this definition is made, between different types of call centres: outbound and inbound. McPhail (2002: 14) considers an inbound call centre one “that is designed to receive incoming calls from customers and prospective customers, with the goal of providing information, technical support or services”. For Houlihan, “inbound activity in the field of banking, insurance, order processing, sales, help lines and customer services” are “the dominant activities of the call centre industry” (2000: 229). Conversely, agents in outbound call centres who only make outbound calls may carry out a range of functions: fund-raising, survey research, telemarketing, and telesales. These kinds of activities are not so much services but more sales-oriented (McPhail 2002: 14).

As already mentioned earlier, London and the South-East are the locations where the majority of these inbound and outbound call centres in the UK are based. In fact, a study by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) shows that half of the 5,320 call centres in the UK are located in London and the South-East. Moreover, call centres in the South-East are comparatively small as contact centres tend to be situated within the
premises of their head office building (many companies have their main operations in London and the Home Counties). As soon as the call centre becomes so big that enlarging it is no longer a possibility, the business will seek to relocate to those regions with lower cost bases (DTI 2004: 42).

We know relatively little about the **workforce composition**, as studies are rare and seldom comprehensive, and most are based on estimates, such as *Datamonitor*'s. Some studies, such as Taylor and Bain’s (1999: 114), suggest that the workforce is relatively young, between 20 and 29 years. Another widely quoted assumption is that the majority of call centre workers (70%) are female (*Datamonitor* quoted in Belt et al. 2000: 366). Studies so far have not focused on other aspects of workers’ backgrounds apart from age and gender, such as qualifications, educational background and migration.

Another key aspect of call centres is their reliance on standardisation. As Holtgrewe et al. (2002) note, “call centres are the area of front-line information work, which most closely approximates the model of regimented or Taylorised service work organisation (Frenkel, Tam, Korczynski and Shire 1999; Taylor and Bain 1999)” (2002: 1). The theorisation of call centre work in terms of standardisation forms the basis of discussion in the subsequent subsection.

**1.3.2 Theorisations of call centre work and standardisation**

In this section, I explore how standardisation processes in call centres and staff’s attitudes towards these processes have been addressed by academics. As observed in section 1.2, some of the main issues with regards to the new economy have been its origins, social transformations and its impact on workers. Drawing on the previous section, I address the theorisation of call centres using similar questions, which are:

i) What are the alleged motivations for introducing standardisation practices in call centres?

---

18 This is an assumption rather than a fact because call centres have a very high turnover hence it is difficult to account for all the employees.
ii) What are the observed consequences of introducing standardisation practices in call centres?

iii) Which impact of standardisation practices on agents was observed?

More specifically, I explore some of the issues surrounding standardisation in call centres using the main themes of: deskilling, control, stress, rationalisation, and ideologies. I start by discussing briefly which practices in call centres are considered standardised by industrial sociologists and sociolinguists.

**Standardisation practices in call centres**

Belt et al. (2002) consider call centres as “designed to be environments in which work can be standardised to create relatively uniform and repetitious activities so as to achieve economies of scale and consistent quality of customer service” (2002: 28). In some of the industrial sociology literature, standardisation thus tends to be related to the arrangement of the call centre and its organisation.

As already mentioned in subsection 1.1.2, Cameron (2000a; 2000b, 2008) argues that standardisation in call centres extends from organisational aspects to controlling employees by regulating the agent-client conversations through scripting conversations (‘the codification of spoken discourses’). Overall, Cameron (2000b) distinguishes between three degrees of standardisation practices in call centres: The first case is where call centres introduce scripting. This is “where there is a specification by the operator for every word the agent has to utter” (Cameron 2000b: 330). In this case, agents are no longer authors of their talk, but only ‘animators’ (Goffman 1981). On the other hand, some call centres just make use of “a prompt sheet which specifies what interactional moves the agent should make in what order, but do not prescribe a standard form of words” (Cameron 2000b: 330). Finally, “some call centres do not go that far and provide only general guidelines for each ‘staging’ of a transaction, leaving the exact number of moves in each stage to the operator’s discretion” (ibid).

Cameron further argues that achieving a standard in the call centre context is not only referring to what agents say, but more importantly how
they say it (2000b: 325). She refers to this as ‘styling’. Stylistic choices and styling in Bell’s audience theory tend to be based on “the speaker’s assessment of the effect certain ways of speaking” will have on a specific addressee’s way of speaking (Cameron 2000b: ibid). In the call centre context, however, Cameron (2000b) alleges that the managers or consultants make the stylistic choices for the agents which are then imposed top-down along with a script. More precisely, attention is given to suprasegmental phenomena such as voice quality and intonation and secondly, on various aspects of the management of interactive spoken discourse. Using high-tech surveillance available and ‘standardised’ check-lists and criteria, supervisors can not only monitor agents’ performance statistics but with ‘silent listening’ and recording of calls assess qualitatively in standardised form whether the agents’ verbal performance and bodily performance is compliant with the standard set out by the management (2000b: 326).

In her article, Cameron (2000b) explores the element of control that standardisation implies, whereas in her book Good to Talk (Cameron 2000a), she stresses more the repetitive aspect that standardisation entails and how this is related to the organisational principles of call centres (2000a: 93). In fact, she likens the organisation to the standardised production line of work and points out the following:

“one resemblance between production line work and call centre work is that both are extremely repetitive. (...) Call centre employees spend their working hours performing exactly the same task in exactly the same way, over and over again. Along with this repetition goes a factory-like regimentation of time” (Cameron 2000a: 93).

In summary, the views of standardisation practices in call centres presented in this paragraph above suggest that standardisation in call centres is at a general level thought of as related to the organisational principles of call centres, with the main pillars being control and repetitiveness. More specifically, standardisation practices involve, regulating conversations between customers and agents by introducing scripts, guidelines (for stylisation), and monitoring\(^\text{19}\). In the following subsections, I discuss

\(^{19}\) Due to the lack of sociolinguistic research on call centres, I only differentiate occasionally between standardisation practices inclusive of linguistic standardisation and exclusive of them.
motivations, consequences and impact of standardisation practices on workers, and I also look at how staff’s (agents’ and managers’) perspectives towards standardisation practices have been addressed.

**Standardisation as a rationalising process**

Standardisation in call centres has also been viewed by Korczynski (2001; 2002) and Frenkel et al. (1998) as part of a larger attempt to rationalise these facilities. Drawing on Weber and Ritzer’s models of rationalisation, they show how call centres resemble standardised customer-oriented bureaucracies and as these authors’ perspective are essential to understanding this line of theorisation, it is worth sketching them out briefly.

Max Weber’s well-known theory examines the rise of rationality and bureaucratic organisation in Western societies. In his work, “rationalisation” stands for “the use of abstract rules and precise calculations to organise social action to meet given ends” (Leidner 1993: 2). Weber describes how the modern Western countries have evolved to be more rational, that is, governed by calculability, efficiency, predictability, and non-human technologies which are geared towards controlling people. For Weber, bureaucracy is the epitome of rationalisation, as it diverges from earlier methods of work organisation owing to its formal structure, which is driven mainly by the aim for greater efficiency (cf. e.g. Ritzer 2004; 2009).

Ritzer (2004) updates Weber’s work to the new interactive service context of the new economy, arguing that the increasing pervasiveness of rationalisation can be best conceptualised in terms of McDonaldisation. Although McDonald’s is the epitome (Ritzer 2004: 42), the process of McDonaldisation applies to many spheres of life other than the fast food chain. Ritzer’s account further stresses how many different forms of

---

20 Despite the advantages it offers, there are many problems associated with bureaucracy. According to Ritzer, “a bureaucracy can be a dehumanising place in which to work and by which to be serviced” (Ritzer 2004: 25). As opposed to maintaining their high level of efficiency, bureaucracies can also become increasingly ineffective often as a result of red tape. The stress on quantification can also result in large quantities of poor-quality work. Ritzer further writes that: “Although Weber was concerned about the irrationalities of formally rationalised systems, he was even more animated by what he called ‘the (or steel) iron cage’ of rationality. In Weber’s view, bureaucracies are cages in the sense that people are trapped in them, their basic humanity denied” (Ritzer 2011: 27). Weber was concerned foremost that bureaucracies would become increasingly rational and that “rational principles would come to govern an accelerating number of realms in society” (Ritzer 2004: 28).
standardisation processes have become complicit in rationalisation attempts. Following Weber, Ritzer identifies four components in McDonaldisation, these being:

Efficiency: In a time-pressured society, McDonaldisation services are desired because they are fast.

Calculability: McDonaldisation services are quantified; the customer’s burger and fries are an exact size, and are delivered within a specific time amount of time. Quality is redefined as quantity.

Predictability: McDonaldisation products and services are standardised at all times and everywhere, that is, they are the same wherever you are.

Control: Wherever possible, technology replaces human labour. McDonaldised services and goods become automated.

(Adapted from Aldridge 2003: 111)

Industrial sociologist Korczynski (2002) has adopted Weber’s and Ritzer’s rationalising model to call centres, arguing that the division of labour in them is reminiscent of that in a bureaucracy. They also share the emphasis on ‘efficiency’, ‘predictability’, ‘calculability’, and the reliance on non-human technologies that ‘control’ individuals. However, he also points out that there are two conflicting logics in such an environment, the consumer-oriented and the bureaucratic. As a result, workers may be caught between the demands of either the customer or those of the management (ibid: 76). These conflicting logics can represent a source of stress, but also “provide workers with a language to justify the spaces they have created” (Korczynski 2002: 78). For instance, if challenged by angry customers, they can try to find a way to protect themselves by giving precedence to standardised and bureaucratic rules and procedures (ibid: 78)\(^{21}\). Reviewing a number of studies on service work (e.g. Benson 1986; Leidner 1993), Korczynski concludes that service workers appear to welcome the ambiguity that the dual logic of the consumer-oriented bureaucracy implies (ibid: 79). However, while these studies suggest a positive attitude of managers and workers towards the customer-oriented bureaucracy and standardisation practices, none of them

\(^{21}\)In Korczynski’s view, the contradiction of the consumer orientated democracy is further reflected in another domain: “Workers must give the appearance to the customer that it is the customer who is in control of the interaction. At the same time, however, they have the bureaucratic imperative of dealing with the customer efficiently in as short time as possible” (2002: 79).
were on call centre workers or had as a specific research focus of call centre workers’ attitudes towards the “consumer-oriented bureaucracy” with its advantages and disadvantages or institutional discourses.

Cameron (2000a) also suggests that a main motivation of standardising interaction is the companies’ desire to implement rationalisation with its four rationalising characteristics: ‘efficiency’, ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’ and ‘control’. As she (2000a) points out:

“(…) standardised interactional routines are intended to ensure that information is elicited in the order the computer software needs it to be input, that ongoing checks are made for accuracy, that the exchange is conducted with due regards to the customer’s expectations of appropriate service, and that talking time is not wasted on inessentials. (…) The behaviour of employees in service encounters is regulated in an attempt to make it as predictable and invariant as a packet of cereal” (2000a: 99-100).

In interviews with her call centre agents about their experience of their work, her informants tend to have a negative attitude towards standardisation practices (Cameron’s 2000a: 117). Regarding this, Ritzer (1996: 82-84) lists an advantage of interactional scripts as “employees can (…) protect themselves from the insults and indignities that are frequently heaped upon them (…) with the view that (…) hostility is aimed at the scripts and those who created them”. This opinion, however, does not seem to be shared by Cameron’s call centre informants, for she (Cameron 2000a: 111) reports that the operators experience the rational nature of the job as very stressful, especially the pressure that results from performance targets. While Cameron’s discussion touches on several aspects of standardisation, her main theme of the discussion is workers’ negative attitude towards call centre work and although she points out that, “(…) all my informants could find something to say about the advantages of call centre work” (Cameron 2000a: 111), she never expands on this. She does acknowledge that her sample was very small22 and thus not very representative. Moreover, she does not attend in great detail to the individual responses of agents but only briefly summarises them.

To conclude, in this section I have considered how the motivation for standardisation in call centres has been attributed to a company’s desire to

22 She interviewed four call centre managers and six agents (cf. Cameron 2000a: 195).
rationalise, following the perspectives on rationalisation by Weber and Ritzer (1996). Although both Korczynski and Cameron agree that call centre standardisation is motivated by four rationalising aspects ‘efficiency’, ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’ and ‘control’, their evaluation takes two different forms:

i) Korczynski (2002) suggests a more positive conceptualisation of call centre standardisation as a consumer-oriented bureaucracy, operating according to two often contradicting logics: the consumer and bureaucratic. This creates stress for agents, but it also implies there are advantages for them, such as being able to better protect themselves from insults. However, Korczynski does not refer to empirical studies that have investigated how agents perceive these practices or the institutional discourse surrounding them.

ii) Cameron (2000a) views standardisation practices in call centres more critically, in line with Ritzer’s McDonaldisation rationalising characteristics. Based on her short interviews with agents, she contends that the main motivation for standardisation is to promote the interests of the management and consumers. Consequently, according to her, these kind of rationalising measures are perceived by agents only in terms of stress.

Despite their differences, both researchers assess the motivation for standardisation and rationalisation only in relation to the management’s (e.g. bureaucratic logic) and not the agents’ perceptions despite the apparent impact of them on the latter. It also notable that the management’s motivations for introducing standardisation practices and their respective disadvantages and advantages are only covered briefly. Therefore, such an analysis could provide new insights beyond the frequently pessimistic accounts.

Having discussed the motivations for standardisation based on rationalisation, I now turn to other ideologies, which according to other theorisations, have promoted standardisation practices of call centres’ work, using the notion of ideologies of language. Initially, I explain how the notion
of ideologies of language has been used and subsequently explore how the
study of ideologies of language has been adopted to the call centre context.

**Standardisation processes as ideologies of language**

Ideologies of language as an area of research originates in linguistic
anthropology, but has now developed into a separate diverse field of study,
combining insights from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and linguistic
anthropology. The study of language ideologies has contributed to examining
the relationship between language and society, culture, identities and other

Scholarship in ideologies of language focuses on diverse areas: whilst
some research concentrates on the relationship between power and ideology
and how ideologies of language are used for certain groups’ interests, others
look at the relationship between language use and social structure (Woolard
1998). Ideologies of language are usually understood as definitions, ideas,
beliefs and conceptions that people have about language, and which function
as organising principles in people’s cultural and social experiences. Researchers have employed the concept of ‘language ideologies’ and ‘ideologies of language’ to explore, for instance, sociolinguistic situations of
standardisation, language multilingualism, folk language ideologies, language
revitalisation and the role of language in nation building processes.

Cameron’s (2000a) work represents a good example of the study of
ideologies of language in call centres. Although she does not use the term
‘ideologies’, a great deal of her research analyses how scripts and guidelines
in the service industry and call centres reflect larger ideologies. For her, one
of the key characteristics that makes standardisation practices surrounding
‘communication’ so prominent in modern societies is what Giddens (1991)
calls an ‘expert system’: “modes of technical knowledge which have validity
independent of the practitioners and clients who makes use of them (1991:
18)”. She notes that modernity’s modes of technical knowledge do not only
include medicine and engineering, but equally exist for communication. She
(2000a) concludes that “(...) spoken interaction comes increasingly to be

---

23 Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms “language ideologies” and “ideologies of
language” interchangeably.
treated as a set of ‘skills’, and colonised by expert systems with their decontextualised, transferable procedures (...)” (Cameron 2000a: 7).

Cameron further points out that the “colonisation of spoken interaction by expert systems” (2000a: 7) has been often glossed over as ‘enterprise culture’. As examined above in section 1.2, this “new work order” (Gee et al. 1996) has brought about “new (‘post-Fordist’) ways of working”, thus creating “new demands on the linguistic abilities of workers” (Cameron 2000b: 323). Nowadays, employees’ verbal behaviours and other traits of their self-presentation are regarded as a commodity, a feature of “what businesses are selling to their customers”, a component of “their corporate image” and “branding” (Cameron 2000b: 324). As both Heller (2003; 2010) and Cameron (2000b: 342) argue, call centre agents take it now for granted that language is a skill and commodity rather than a marker of identity, and that the scripting of interaction is normal and desirable.

As already indicated in the section above, Cameron (2000b) suggests that contemporary corporate verbal regulation practices may be examined “as part of a strategic attempt by organisations” to maximise their gains in a hyper-competitive globalised economy, that is more and more dictated by the provision of services (2000b: 341). Analysing the scripts and guidelines she collected for her fieldwork in some call centres, she (Cameron 2000b) argues:

“(…) that regulation and commodification of language in service workplaces has resulted in the valorisation of a speech style whose characteristics include expressiveness, caring, empathy, and sincerity - characteristics popularly associated with the speech of women (...)” (2000b: 342).

For Cameron, scripts in service environments can be said to draw on ideologies of language of female speech, making the language and stylisation of scripts a gendered female language.

She chose to only interview male call centre workers in her research, because she wanted to elicit how the ‘feminisation’ and the particular ideologies of language affect male workers. However, none of her male call centre informants considered gender an issue, even though call centres are often portrayed as feminised workplaces. Cameron (2000b) concludes:
“where they were critical of the call centre regime, the main issue, for them as for female operators, was the artificiality, inauthenticity, and in some cases extreme subservience, of the persona imposed on them by scripts and styling rules” (2000b: 340).

Although Cameron asked agents about the attitudes towards ideologies of language, her discussion does not take into account the call centre management’s position. The question is left unanswered whether this imposition of gendered language is consistent with management’s motivation for doing so.

In this section, I have explored the ideologies and discourse such as the ‘enterprise culture’ and new importance of expert systems that according to Cameron (2000a) have also promoted the ‘codification’ of communication and standardisation of call centre interaction as well as the commodification of language.

Having discussed the background with regards to the implementation of standardisation practices, in the next part I will examine the closely related issues of what the general consequences of standardisation for call centre are and their alleged impact on workers.

**Standardisation as deskilling**

As examined in subsection 1.1.1, standardisation has been often linked to the deskilling of workers and the same can be said with regards to standardisation in call centres. The debate consists of three related issues: a) whether call centre work is semi-skilled labour, b) whether standardisation practices in call centres result in deskilling, and c) whether call centre work results in deskilling.

For Russell (2008: 198), the cliché of deskilling forms part of a larger ideology about call centres. This ideology proposes that call centre workers, the so-called ‘semi-skilled service workers’, have learnt everything for their job after a few days or weeks’ training and receive little further training for possible advancement. Several researchers agree with this notion of the

---

24 The latter may also often be the case as Belt et al. (2002) found in their research because of the high turnover rate of staff, staff coming via agencies and agents being temporary. The managers they interviewed saw little point in investing in future training for the workers as they were temporary staff anyway (see also Stanworth 2000).

Conversely, others like Belt et al. (2000), Muller (1999) and Houlihan (2003) dispute the claim that call centre work is unskilled or semi-skilled despite agents performing a narrow range of tasks in a standardised environment. For instance, Belt et al. (2000: 375) contend that a particular set of skills is needed to perform call centre work effectively. They further point out that there is often a joint desire among agents, supervisors and call centre managers to fight the mythologisation of call centre work as being unskilled, simple, and routine (ibid: 374). In a similar vein, Muller (1999: 31) claims that a substantial amount of the “knowledge work” carried out by these operatives is devalued and goes unrecognised, as it is “invisible” to managers (and by extension the larger public, including researchers) owing to their misguided assumptions about what agents’ work involves (cf. McPhail 2002: 33). As a result, according to Belt et al. (2002: 381) even the so-called communication skills so sought after in the call centre industry are not valued adequately outside this context, being often degraded25.

Some academics, like Stanworth (1997; 2000) argue that standardisation practices common in call centres result in deskilling. Several accounts linking standardisation to deskilling draw on Ritzer’s account of McDonaldisation and therefore, it is worth exploring this issue briefly. Ritzer (1998) has argued that “the service sector, especially at its lower end, is producing an enormous number of jobs, most of require little or no skill” as they tend to be standardised (Ritzer 1998: 60). In such a general sphere of work, Ritzer (1998) suggests that McDonaldisation leads to the worker becoming akin to a “human robot” (1998: 60) in a standardised system. There are also distinctive aspects to the control of service workers in McDonaldised jobs. Standardisation is therefore said to oppress workers, as it may reduce their opportunity to develop their capacity to make decisions on their own or solve problems (cf. Korczynski 2002: 43; Ritzer 1998: 64).

25 Belt et al. (2002) and Cameron (2000b) link this degrading of communications skills to their association with gender. Women are assumed to have inborn superior communication skills which are needed in the service industry. See Sassen (1998) for further discussion on the link between the devaluation of a growing range of jobs and the feminisation of the service industry.
Although Cameron (2000a: 124) does not specifically mention the issue of deskilling in her account on call centres, she appears to suggest that they are “deskilling” workplaces. In fact, she likens the work of call centre operators to that of standardised machines, writing: “much of the work that people do in most call centres could in principle be done by a machine” (Cameron 2000a: 94). Similarly, Cameron highlights how “the control over workers’ performance” limits the agents’ “own autonomy” (2000a: 98). For her, it appears that call centres represent an overly codified and regulated environment with a high staff turnover where there is little room for the development of any skills. Her view seems to be reflected in Belt et al.’s (2002) statement, which suggests that by definition, “the nature of work organisation used in call centres acts to constrain skill development” (2002: 28).

To conclude, while the literature examined in this subsection appears to suggest that call centre work is deskilling, it is less clear whether standardisation practices applied in call centres themselves are deskilling and result in a semi-skilled labour force. As already noted in section 1.2, a common problem with the industrial literature’s theoretical approach is its tendency not to address the subjectivities of workers but to focus only on institutional discourses and in this subsection, we can observe the same insufficiency again. In this brief discussion of deskilling and standardisation, none of the authors referred to interviews with managers’ or agents’, which asked whether their work is indeed deskilling or semi-skilled. This is in spite of the fact that their positions could be crucial in finding a middle ground in the debate and providing a better understanding of the issue.

In the subsequent subsection, I will look at what impact standardisation practices have been described as having on staff. More specifically, I will examine the perceived impact of standardisation in terms of control.

**Standardisation and control in call centres**

Monitoring and the role of technology in enforcing standardisation represents the most widely discussed issue in the critical literature. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that it is the presence of monitoring
combined with information and communication technologies (ICT) which makes call centres such a unique and revolutionary workplace. In fact, the extent of monitoring and standardisation observed in many call centres today is only possible because of the progress in technology. For Houlihan (2000), “databases, transaction terminals, unified communication and automatic call distribution system (ACD) are the technologies which allow monitoring and controlling performances in far-reaching ways whilst reducing costs, increasing responsiveness and flexibility” (2000: 22). Equally, Callaghan and Thompson regard ICT as the means for managers to monitor their agents easily, quantitatively and qualitatively “through the potential of storing many thousands of calls and the facility of remote listening and statistics” (2001: 23). When it comes to monitoring, most researchers (e.g. McPhail 2002) distinguish between two different kinds. The first is ‘quantitative monitoring’, which draws on the statistical information the computer software produces, such as the call volume of the caller or the calls handled, amongst others forms (2002: 68). Most of the time, agents are said to have to hit standard targets of calls handled or made, otherwise they will lose their jobs. The second is ‘qualitative monitoring’, which refers to the supervisors’ capacity to record or listen in and assess calls in terms of whether agents stick to the standards provided by the companies and the scripts (ibid: 68).

For McPhail (2002), the “predominant metaphor used for surveillance and management control is that of Foucault’s panopticon” (2002: 43). As McPhail (2002) points out that, “although it has been used previously in literature on electronic workplace surveillance which discusses call centres (e.g. Botan 1996; Clement 1992), Fernie and Metcalf’s (1998) controversial paper denouncing call centre work helped this image to attract the attention of the mainstream press” (McPhail 2002: 43). She claims that Fernie and Metcalf’s study has become so ubiquitous that it is “referred to at least in passing in almost all academic call centre studies, whether the authors agree or disagree with the premise” (ibid: 43). In line with her statement, Bain and Taylor (2000) quote a call centre union organiser who laments that whenever

---

26 Fernie and Metcalf (1998) write “we shall show that, for call centres, Bentham’s Panopticon was truly the vision of the future and these organisations are the very epitome of what Foucault had in mind” (1998:2)
the press interview him, it takes the first twenty minutes of the interview persuading them that they are not prisons:

“"I have tangled with this (the Fernie and Metcalf thesis) on the radio and television on a number or (sic) occasions. It is a ludicrous proposition, borne of academics who have no experience of the real world” (Bain and Taylor 2000: 3)\(^\text{27}\) (cf. McPhail 2002).

Connected to the discussion of call centres as a panopticon, is some researchers’ concern to assess how monitoring affects workers and their well-being. According to McPhail (2002), one way to assess the impact and success of the control measures has been to analyse resistance of workers (2002: 44). Fernie and Metcalf (1998), for instance, argue that the panoptic control achieved through technological advances denies any space for resistance expressed collectively and very little, if any, for the individual. As already discussed above, traditionally, industrial sociologists have preferred to focus on open resistance, with a major concern in industrial sociology being how workers are set to lose their agency rather than how they might adjust themselves to an oppressive environment reclaiming their agency. As a result, less focus has been given to the more subtle resistance that call centre workers might commit. Moreover, industrial sociologists have tended to rely on surveys and the use of questionnaires rather than ethnography. According to McPhail (2002), Bain and Taylor’s (2000) study is a rare exception, as the authors painstakingly identify moments in which call centre agents “beat the system” in some way by hanging up on customers to get breaks or by taking sick leave (2002: 42). Nevertheless, to ‘beat the system’ in Bain and Taylor’s study does not include non-compliance with scripting procedures.

There were only two studies I could find which explicitly address and quote agents’ perceptions of monitoring and control. The first one is by Lankshear, Cook, Mason and Button (2001), who were surprised to find that monitoring, especially qualitative monitoring, was widely supported by agents and even perceived to be in their interest (2001: 600). The other was by Cameron (2000a) who likewise notes:

---

\(^{27}\) While some researchers like Taylor and Bain (2001) support how stressed-out agents are subjected to tightly controlled surveillance regimes, other academics such as Mason et al. (2002), Korczynski et al. (1999) object to the description of monitoring as a primary concern.
“I expected operators to mention surveillance as a source of stress, but in fact few operators expressed concern about monitoring of their linguistic behaviour carried out by supervisors, team leaders or market researchers, because of their experience that monitoring procedures were less rigorous in practice than on paper. The main reason they gave for this was that supervisors had too little time to monitor (...). If you could figure out which were important things and do those things by the book you could often get away with ignoring the rest of the book. Thus my informants reported taking liberties with their scripts and ignoring instructions to smile (...)” Cameron 2000a: 113).

A similar point made to the one by Cameron’s informants comes from Mason, Button, Lankshear and Coates (2002: 143), who argue that just because call centres have the availability to monitor this does not mean that they make use of this resource continuously (see also Lankshear et al. 2001). Therefore, there seems to be a mismatch between academic representations of call centre control and agents’ perceptions, with academics appearing to overstate the significance of control and monitoring for agents.

The inconsistencies that appear to exist in the studies discussed so far highlight the need for interviewing call centre agents with regards to their perception of standardisation practices, especially in relation to scripting, and to observe how standardisation practices occur on a day-to-day basis. It is also necessary to compare how institutional discourses of standardisation practices match with the everyday practices. This is important since strong claims about the nature of call centres and their similarity to an electronic panopticon, such as those made by Fernie and Metcalf (1998), are based on evidence of strong institutional discourses, and are not backed by interviews or fieldwork. Since no employees were interviewed, they could not make comparisons of how institutional discourses compare with staff’s perception towards standardisation practices and how institutional practices are implemented in everyday context.

To conclude, I have addressed the different theorisations of call centre standardisation practices. They are summarised in the following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives on the nature of standardisation practices in call centres</th>
<th>Motivations for standardisation practice</th>
<th>Implication of standardisation practices and their effect on call centre agents</th>
<th>Reported staffs’ perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationalisation</strong> (Ritzer-McDonaldisation) (Korczynski 2001, 2002; Frenkel et al. 1998, Cameron 2000a)</td>
<td>- four rationalising aspects: predictability, calculability, control and efficiency - promotes interests of the management and consumers over agents</td>
<td>a) creates ambiguity for agents: provides agents with some means of protection but also stress b) makes jobs more stressful c) deskilling of workers d) deference and subordination of workers e) limiting of agents’ agency f) imposition of control</td>
<td>- agents: rational nature of the jobs makes work stressful as constant pressure exists with targets and control - agents: in the service sector some agents have described standardisation as helpful - managers: their position is not discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marxist theorisations of Commodification</strong> (e.g. Heller 2003; Cameron 2000b) and theories of ideologies of language (Cameron 2000a; 2000b)</td>
<td>- importance of ‘expert systems’ in modernity - rise of enterprise culture + new perspective on language</td>
<td>a) commodification of workers’ language and identity b) language perceived as a skill and commodity by workers c) regulation of spoken interaction on the phone d) imposition and valorisation of specific speech styles e.g. ‘women’s language’</td>
<td>- agents: critical of the call centre regime because of the artificiality, inauthenticity, and in extreme subservience - agents: not critical of gendered language - agents: said to accept that language is a commodity and a skill - managers: their position is not discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marxist labour process theory</strong> (Belt et al. 2000; Stanworth 2000; Fernie and Metcalf 1998; Russell 2008; Taylor and Bain 1999; Callaghan and Thompson 2001)</td>
<td>- goal of uniformity of service - lower labour costs - increase managerial control - transfer of power from workers to managers</td>
<td>a) deskilling of workforce or ‘ideology of deskilling’ b) increase in managerial control over workforce c) greater oppression of workforce d) feminisation of the workforce e) some researchers allege that no resistance is possible</td>
<td>- agents: monitoring is not a major concern as it is too time-consuming - agents: support monitoring as agents say it is in their best interest to be monitored - managers: not discussed in detail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

28 I have aligned sometimes non-canonically.
In the following, I will summarise the main findings of the discussion, relate them back to the studies discussed throughout this review, and develop the research questions.

### 1.3.3 Current research on standardisation practices

In the past fifteen years, there have been several studies on standardisation practices in call centres, but they do not come from a sociolinguistic perspective, even though call centre work is essentially ‘language work’ (Heller 2005: 2). As Heller (2005) notes:

> "Most sociolinguistic work on contemporary social change focuses on language rights (in the face of putative spread of English) or on language learning; very little focuses on where language fits in the daily experiences of people working and living in the shifting conditions of the new economy" (2005: 2).

Instead, as we have seen in this chapter, the most relevant studies have come from industrial sociology. They are not primarily concerned with the perceptions and perspectives of agents with regards to standardisation practices such as scripting but for instance with:

(i) labour processes such as the study by Callaghan and Thompson’s (2001) on control and resistance in call centres drawing on traditional labour process theories by Edwards (1979) and by Fernie and Metcalf (1998);

(ii) feminisation of workplaces - such as studies by Buchanan and Koch-Schulte (2000) and Belt et al. (2000) on female operators’ perception of call centre work and their aspirations.

The table below once more summarises the relevant studies, and their methods and participants in industrial sociology that I have referred to throughout this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Call centre types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belt, Richardson and Webster (2000)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Semi-structured interviews Individual and group interviews <strong>Quantitative</strong> Surveys</td>
<td>Manager, female teams leaders, agents (key themes: skills involved in call centre work, women’s experiences of training, women’s attitudes to their employers and careers)</td>
<td>Financial services Computer services Third party centres (outsourced) (UK, Netherlands, Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchanan and Koch-Schulte (2000)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Semi-structured Interviews <strong>Quantitative</strong> Surveys</td>
<td>Agents, current and former (53 female employees) (key themes: how they came to work in call centres, stress, achievements, frustrations and aspirations)</td>
<td>Canada outbound and inbound (does not specify industry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callaghan and Thompson (2001)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Semi-structured interviews <strong>Quantitative</strong> Survey</td>
<td>CSRs (Customer Service Representatives)</td>
<td>Inbound Financial Services (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernie and Metcalf (1998)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Interviews Observation (it appears not to have been observation of agents) Documents <strong>Quantitative</strong> Survey</td>
<td>Do not specify or quote whom they interviewed or what about do not quote from interviews</td>
<td>Technical help Public service Newspaper (ad sales) (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houlihan (2000, 2001)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Participant ethnography</td>
<td>(2000) does not specify whom she observed (2001) team leaders, managers</td>
<td>Inbound Insurance (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knights and McCabe (1998)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Semi-structure interviews (‘offer analytical insights rather than statistical’)</td>
<td>Agents, team leaders, CSRs, senior managers (25 interviews) key themes: (employee-manager relations, management styles, employee</td>
<td>Inbound Financial services (UK)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar table can be found in McPhail (2002: 87).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Call centre types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norling (2001)</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong></td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Sweden no further information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undefined and unspecified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson, Belt &amp; Marshall (2000)</td>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td>Telephone survey, Interviews (case studies)</td>
<td>Inbound Mixed (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Semi-structured interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor and Bain (2001)</td>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Inbound Financial services (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor and Bain (1999)</td>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td>Survey (telephone)</td>
<td>Inbound Mixed (UK-Scotland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong> Semi-structured Interviews Focus group</td>
<td>Observation was in financial services sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation (not possible) / interviews / questionnaires</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As becomes clear from the table, there is a preference in industrial sociology to use questionnaires and surveys over qualitative methods. Moreover, a few studies (e.g. Belt et al. 2000; Taylor and Bain 1999) touch on workers’ perception towards standardisation practices using interviews and questionnaires. However, even these studies do this within the framework of the Marxist labour process theory. As already seen in section 1.2.4, the labour process theory has a specific history of critically investigating standardisation practices in manufacturing or the service economy and has been criticised for the following theoretical and methodological issues:

(i) the labour process theory does not tend to address subjectivities towards standardisation (workers’ perspectives), although
subjectivities are linked with standardisation practices in the new economy,

(ii) workers are expected to resist standardisation openly as it is assumed that they all must be discontented with it and are oppressed,

(iii) methodological preference for questionnaires, survey and interviews rather than participant observation and ethnography,

(iv) little research has been conducted on subtle resistance against standardisation or linguistic aspects of call centre work.

In general, according to Belt (2002: 126), most industrial sociological studies have described call centres negatively. Negative industrial metaphors have included, for instance, Fernie and Metcalf’s “new sweatshops” (1998:1). Other academic authors have emphasised the similarities between call centres and factory environments (e.g. Cameron 2000a: 91), while Taylor and Bain (1999) argue that call centres represent a significant development in the intensification and “Taylorisation of white-collar work” (1999: 109). That is, they assert that the constant flow of work in call centres means that agents experience the labour process as an “assembly line in the head” (ibid: 109).

As a result of the circulation of these images, Holman and Fernie (2000) have noted that call centres “conjure up an image of oppressive, stifling working conditions, constant surveillance, poor job satisfaction” (2000: 1). The fact that call centres are being intrinsically linked to standardisation, as I have argued throughout this chapter, has further contributed to their negative image. As seen in section 2.1. and throughout this chapter, standardisation at workplaces has been addressed with similar negative imagery, and less pessimistic perceptions of standardisation are likely to have been overlooked. Leidner (1993), who finds this derogative perspective of standardisation very problematic, has thus called for more subtle accounts towards standardisation practices that do not overstate the employer’s success in imposing such routines and assume that these practices necessarily serve the goals management intended (Leidner 1993: 23).
On the whole, it appears as if there is also a widespread lack of ethnographic accounts\textsuperscript{30} on call centres, their standardisation practices as well as detailed analysis of staff’s attitudes towards such practices. Cameron (2000a) provides a convincing account of why researchers do not tend to conduct observational studies in call centres or interview agents, referring to the problem of access to their workers and the shop floor:

“At the time of my research there had recently been a number of critical press reports about working conditions in British call centres, and some managers were wary of my approaches. Often they were eager to show me their centres which they felt had been unfairly criticised, but reluctant to let me talk to their staff unchaperoned, and insistent on approving what I wrote in advance of publication (...)” (2000a: 184).

Similarly, Taylor and Bain (2000) note that they found it difficult to observe people during their work routines or to interview the management. They (2000) write that, “given sensitivities regarding the issues of conflict which emerged, it proved impossible both to conduct formal interviews with management or to gain access to the organisation for the purpose of observation” (2000: 8). As this brief review has revealed, there has only been limited research that is based on ethnography combined with linguistic analysis, in order to examine situated language standardisation practices in call centres.

My thesis is written in response to this lack of sociolinguistic and ethnographic research and focuses on the standardisation practices in call centres generally as well as from the agent’s perspective. Employing methods from ethnographic sociolinguistics as well as in depth interviews, the study aims to examine how standardisation practices operate in call centres beyond the negative imagery that has been widely used by academics.

The research questions this thesis will seek to address are the following:

(i) To what extent are standardisation practices common and implemented in call centre work?

(ii) What are the agents’ and team leaders’ perceptions, perspectives, and strategies towards standardisation practices?

\textsuperscript{30} Exception to this are Houlihan’s unpublished PhD thesis (2003) and Brannan’s (2005) ethnographic accounts of call centre work to which I will return in chapter 2.
(iii) What are the managers’ perceptions, perspectives, and strategies towards standardisation practices?

(iv) How adequate are previous accounts in the sociological and sociolinguistics literature?

My methodological orientation will be discussed further in the following chapter, where I explain the way that ethnography and linguistic analysis will be used in this study of standardisation practices in call centres.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the historical and ideological context within which standardisation practices in call centres have been addressed so far in the literatures from sociology and sociolinguistics. The chapter began with the consideration of the sociological tradition that is still influential today. In social theory, standardisation has often been described as a powerful means to regulate society but also in a derogatory sense as a narrative of homogenisation or dehumanisation of society, especially when applied to workplaces. In sociolinguistics, the discussion appears to be more tied to the rise of a ‘standard language’, its function, ideologies, and impact on a society.

In section 1.2, I have linked standardisation to the new economy. Using frameworks from industrial sociology, I argued that standardisation has become a pervasive but problematic characteristic of the service economy, and by extension of call centres. The introduction of standardisation to the service economy is said to have introduced and increased the linguistic regulation promoted by the ideological premises of post-Fordism. We have further seen how several studies of standardisation in the service economy written from a labour process perspective suffer from methodological and theoretical shortcomings. Most importantly, this fails to address the subjectivities of workers. As seen in subsection 1.2.3, subjectivities are closely linked with standardisation practices, therefore this approach appears unsatisfactory for addressing such practices in the service economy.
In addition to describing the historical and ideological context within which standardisation practices have emerged, the chapter also looked specifically at how these in call centres have been described by academics. The focus was especially on three theorisations a) Rationalisation (McDonaldisation) b) Marxist theorisations of commodification and ideologies of language and c) Marxist labour process theory, which theorisations share a critical concern for:

i) standardisation practices
ii) influence of enterprise culture on language practices
iii) rising levels of stress for staff
iv) increase in control of managerial staff
v) deskilling of the workforce.

My review of the recent research on call centre standardisation practices further revealed that few studies have used ethnography or a sociolinguistic approach. Even though call centre work is language work, few works have analysed how standardisation practices and institutional discourse are manifested in interactions on the phone and in other talk at work, as well as the staff’s perceptions and reaction towards these. Instead, in sociological studies, standardisation practices have been assessed so far using questionnaires, interviews, and surveys. Duchêne’s (2009) study on a multilingual Swiss call centre also represents the only study so far on a call centre that is multilingual. The next chapter will provide an account of how this thesis seeks to respond to this gap by drawing on linguistic data and interviews combined with long-term participant observation, and thus contribute to sociolinguistic research on standardisation in call centres.
Chapter 2

Methods and Methodology

2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have contextualised language and standardisation practices in call centres by examining the historical and ideological context in which they have been addressed so far, and the methodological shortcomings that have become apparent in present research. Some of the limitations of previous studies on call centres were the lack of an ethnographic perspective. As a result, they provide little insight into call centres as organisations or call centre work and nor do they address how agents and managers perceive or deal with language and standardisation practices on an everyday basis. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how I plan to address these gaps empirically.

In this chapter, I:

i) describe the assumptions underlining this case study and guiding my methodological decisions by providing some background on previous ethnographic studies on workplaces and call centres (section 2.1);

ii) explain how this project is designed (section 2.2.) by giving an account of the methods of data collection, choice of the particular fieldsite, and field strategies;

iii) reflect on my problematic role as a call centre worker and researcher in the field and the implications in terms of ethics and reflexivity (section 2.3).

2.1 Guiding assumptions

In this section, I give an account of assumptions underlying my study, and discuss how they fit with the methodological apparatus chosen for undertaking this research project. This study is also informed by post-modern critiques of traditional ethnography, in particular, regarding the
notion of ‘the field’. That is, my study draws on frameworks which allow reconceptualising key ethnographic concepts for workplaces like call centres.

2.1.1 Ethnography

In the previous chapter, I examined the historical and ideological background which has led to the rise of the service economy and by extension to call centres, and how these have widely become associated with standardisation. I further outlined how standardisation has been addressed by sociolinguistic and sociological studies, and pointed out the lack of ethnographic studies. In this section, I discuss why and how (a) ethnography can contribute to studies of standardisation in call centres, and (b) how I intend to position this study in relation to the debates on ethnography. Many sociological studies concerned with standardisation have applied surveys using questionnaires (Likert scales) for examining how standardisation affects agents. Taylor and Bain’s (2001) survey of 345 participants regarding the causes of stress in call centres represents a good example of this. Below is a table listing the sources of stress most frequently mentioned by agents in this study.

Table 2.1 The causes of stress at work

“To what extent do the following contribute to the pressures of your job?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Job</th>
<th>A great deal (%)</th>
<th>To some extent (%)</th>
<th>Combined (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targets</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time between calls</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult customers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitiveness of calls made/taken</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaks not long enough</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too few breaks</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to talk to colleagues</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from a supervisor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having my calls taped</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always having to ‘smile down the phone’</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotony of the job</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to keep to a script</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer monitoring</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to make bonus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not given enough information to do the job</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though this survey provides some insights into the key stressors, the problem with the data is that it was obtained using a questionnaire with Likert scales. This means that all categories are based on preconceptions of what could represent a key stressor as determined by the researchers, thus showing how agents respond to the researchers’ categories, not what the agents regard as their key concerns. This is in line with the point I made in the previous chapter that industrial sociologists have tended to overlook staff subjectivities. Although surveys using questionnaires can give an overall idea of some of the issues related to standardisation, they do not explain the wider complexities, such as the often contradicting perceptions of standardisation among staff members, with some supporting it while others do not (cf. chapter 1: 38). Moreover, there might also be the problem that agents may feel the need to reproduce a stronger negative discourse condemning standardisation given the public’s perception of it, while in daily practice this process may be more complex and hence, less clear cut beyond the negative and positive view of standardisation. Therefore, it is considered here that ethnographic methodology can be a more helpful means of enquiry, as it produces in-depth accounts that allow the researcher to “establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena which were previously ineluctable” (Mitchell 1984: 239). An ethnographic approach is also in line with Heller’s (2005) call for more detailed sociolinguistic accounts of the new economy focusing “on where language fits in the daily experiences of people working and living in the shifting conditions of the new economy” (Heller 2005: 2).

Green and Bloome (1997: 183) have identified three approaches towards ethnography:

(a) doing an ethnography, which supposes a comprehensive, long-term study involving daily participant-observation or significant immersion in the culture studied;

(b) adopting an ethnographic perspective, which allows for a study that is more focused and less wide-ranging, but which still relies on theories of culture and inquiry derived from anthropology and sociology;

(c) using ethnographic tools, which involves only the use of methods linked to fieldwork.
For Green and Bloome (1997), “the ethnographic perspective” appears to be the middle ground between position a) and c). Although my study does not meet all the criteria for being a traditional ethnography based in anthropology, i.e. I did not study a culture in a distant village, I still maintain in the following that it is closer to category a), an ethnography, as it was a long-term and comprehensive study of a workplace involving daily participant observation spanning several years.

Green and Bloome’s category (a) has been deeply influenced by Malinowski’s pioneering ethnographies in the beginning of the last century, for in his introduction to the monograph *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, now widely regarded as one of the most influential discussions of anthropological data collection, he highlights the need for participant observations, which entail long exhaustive fieldwork to obtain reliable data. Malinowski (1922: 25) presents the objectives of ethnography in the following way:

> “the final goal [...] is to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world. We have to study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is the hold which life has on him [...] perhaps through realising human nature in a shape very distant and foreign to us, we shall have some lights on our own” (Malinowski 1922: 25).

More recently, Keesing (1981) explains ethnography in the following way:

> “most essentially, it [ethnography] entails a deep immersion into the life of people. Instead of studying large samples of people, the anthropologist enters as fully as possible into the everyday life of a community, neighbourhood or group. These people become a microcosm of the whole. One learns their language and tries to learn the mode of life. One learns by participant observation, by living as well as viewing the new patterns of life (Keesing 1981: 6)”

As pointed out above, this current study is different from a traditional ethnography and this because it took place in the UK and I was not an outsider. Nevertheless, as the well-known urban ethnographies by the Chicago school (e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki 1927) from the 1920s showed, research taking an insider perspective can also be very insightful. That is, this school’s studies were significant, as these researchers investigated “face-to-face interaction in everyday settings, and produced descriptive narratives of social worlds” (O’Reilly 2009: 31). More specifically, according to Deegan (2001: 20), “[these] ethnographers often lived in the settings studied, walked
the streets, collected qualitative and quantitative data, worked for local agencies, and had autobiographical experiences emerging from these locals or locals like them.” O’Reilly (2009) further notes that “the ethnographers of the Chicago school not only got out into the streets in their own cities and communities, but they were in many cases personally involved in the lives and lifestyles of those they studied” (2009: 110). The Chicago sociologists’ work was therefore important, as it did not follow the ‘outsider paradigm’ often taken for granted in previous ethnographic studies. For O’Reilly (2009), these “insider” studies also benefited from the fact:

“that insiders blend in more, gain more rapport, participate more easily, having more linguistic competence with which they can ask subtle questions on more complex issues, and are better at reading non-verbal communications. (...) They get beyond the ideal to the real, daily lived, and back-stage experiences. Rather than describing the conscious grammar of the community, their ethnographies are expressions of it, the result of a superior insider knowledge gained through primary socialisation” (2009: 114).

However, the insider position can also bring problems with it, and thus, it is as important for the insider ethnographer to acknowledge his/her impact by being just as reflexive as the outsider ethnographer is. As Aguilar (1981:24) argues: “the outsider must to some extent get into the natives’ heads, skins, shoes, whereas the insider must get out of his own.”

Overall, drawing on the discussion from anthropology (Malinowski 1922; Keesing 1981, Green and Bloom 1997) and sociology (O’Reilly (2009); Hammersley and Atkinson (2007)) it is possible to conclude that the term ‘ethnography’ has been employed in a number of ways and it is the different understandings of the term which show that it is not the particular techniques employed that are regarded ethnographic. Instead, “the interactive nature of the data collection is, with the researcher participating, at least to some degree, in the construction as well as the collection of data” (Brannan 2005: 423). In this sense, the term “ethnography” is utilised here to designate a particular attention to what Willis and Trondman (2000) call the “irreducibility of human experience” - obtained via “direct and sustained social contact with agents” (2000: 5) instead of the employment of any specific technique of data collection (cf. Brannan 2005). This view of ethnography is also compatible with the previous discussion of Green and
Bloom’s (1997) approaches (a) and (b) towards ethnography, which similarly stress the interactive nature of the data collection over specific techniques.

In summary, even though my study does not meet the traditional criteria for being a classic ethnography as I was not an outsider to the location, I have posited that it is still an ethnography according to Green and Bloome’s category (a) since it is a comprehensive case study of a call centre that draws on both long term and almost daily participant observation.

**Post-modern critiques of ethnography and reconceptualisations**

This research is further influenced by post-modern critiques of ethnography. Unlike in modernism, in postmodernity, concepts like ‘the field’, ‘identity’ and ‘modernity’ are understood to be fragmented, less stable, and ‘liquid’ (Bauman 2000), setting a number of challenges for traditional ethnography. Initially, I discuss what the postmodern critique of ethnography entails, before outlining what these shifts imply for my fieldwork.

The postmodern critiques have identified four main problems for ethnography, which are “its representation of the field, the value it places on ‘thick description’, the reliability and validity of its data, and the construction of the ethnographic text” (Brewer 2000: 25). In key texts, such as *Writing Culture* (1988), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986) and *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), ethnographers, such as Clifford, Fischer, and Marcus, contest “the claim that ethnography can produce universally valid knowledge by accurately capturing or representing the nature of the social world” (Brewer 2000: 24). Instead, they contend that ethnographic writing can no longer be considered neutral, but only “fiction”, because it is constructed and contains only “partial truths” (Clifford 1986: 7), whilst modernist ethnographies are accused of producing “totalising” accounts (Clifford 1986: 19). According to Brewer (2000),

> “the notion that ethnographic descriptions are partial, selective, and even autobiographical in that they are tied to the particular ethnographer, and the contingency under which the data were collected, also makes the traditional criteria for evaluating ethnography (validity, reliability, generalisability) become problematic” (2000: 24).
This has resulted, in what has been termed the ‘crisis of representation’ (Brewer 2000: 24), which has had deep impact on and implications for ethnography and for an ethnographer’s voice, authority, written text, representation, self-representation, and the field (cf. Nugent 2003: 444).

Accordingly, as ethnographic accounts only present ‘partial truths’, the claims ethnographers can make about their accounts, such as constituting “a privileged description of the social world from the inside (what Geertz once called a ‘thick description’ in order to emphasise its richness and depth)” are deemed no longer valid either (Brewer 2000: 25). Moreover, Brewer (2000: 25) argues that:

“ethnographers should no longer make foolish authority claims in order to validate the account as an accurate representation of reality, but be ‘reflexive’, in which they reflect on the contingencies which bore upon and help to ‘create’ the data as a partial account” (2000: 25).

Being reflexive also implies acknowledging the role of the researcher in constructing the ethnographic account and the various conventions according to which he/she produces the text. For instance, for Hammersley (1992: 13), this means the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, which often influence her/his description, should also be made explicit. Furthermore, any description is a conscious choice of the ethnographer of what not to include, and thus a causal explanation for excluding facts has to be provided.

Equally, Rampton (2006: 386) highlights the fact that no researcher enters the field or analyses the data as a ‘tabula rasa’, and consequently, the data cannot have a meaning ‘sui generis’:

“Data cannot speak for itself, and descriptions are never inference - and interpretation- free. The ideas, models and assumptions that inform ethnographic data interpretation may vary substantially in their elaboration, cohesiveness, and grounding in evidence elsewhere (and they may be woven seamlessly into the description of everyday worlds in ways that make them very hard to spot). But whether we class them as scientific or ‘folk’ theories, the very act of reporting itself introduces a set of rationales, values and assumptions that are extrinsic to the site being described” (Rampton 2006: 386).

It is therefore the state of being reflexive that can add validity and reliability to the data. Moreover, being reflexive is also meant to compensate for the fact that all ethnographic writing is thought of as constructed fiction. While in the
eighties, many anthropologists experimented with new ways of writing\textsuperscript{31} to represent ‘reflexivity’, ‘polyphony’, and dialogue as the core values of anthropology’s self-deconstruction, the postmodern and reflexive turns are still important to the discipline despite the subsequent excesses and criticisms (e.g. Sangren 1988).

In addition to the challenges of post-modern critiques, reconceptualisations of many traditional concepts in ethnography have also become common, because of the social transformations associated with postmodernity, such as globalisation and post-Fordism (cf. chapter 1 section 1.2). As a brief reminder of the discussion in the previous chapter, it is helpful to refer to the anthropologist Henrietta Moore’s (2004) list of reasons for these social changes. She specifies them as

“post-Fordism, the enormous growth in service industries, the relative decline of factory industrialism\textsuperscript{32}, the importance of knowledge as a form of wealth creation, flexible accumulation and the enormous increase in the speed and volume of capital flows; mass migration, feminisation and ethnicisation of the labour force; and the growth of mass media and consumerism” (2004: 77).

We also saw in the previous chapter how many of these factors, such as deindustrialisation together with the rise of the service economy, have been attributed to the rise and then boom of call centres in the mid-1990s. With these being workplaces of both the new and service economy, and often having a high number of female and immigrant employees, they are often thought of as exemplifying these changes (cf. chapter 1 section 1.2).

Perhaps more importantly, all of these developments have added further weight to the postmodern reconceptualisations of traditional ethnographic notions, such as ‘the field’. Whereas in modernism, ‘the field’ was conceptualised as a stable, isolated, unified entity, the advent of postmodern critiques, and further advances in technology have led to a reconceptualisation of the ‘fieldsite’ as being open, fluid, less homogeneous, and fragmented. Since, as Moore (2004: 72) notes, “a notion of the global is now part of most people’s imagined and experienced worlds”, the global

\textsuperscript{31} and is ethical compared to the monological narrative of the classic monograph, because it privileges multi-vocality, complexity and rhetorical diversity.

\textsuperscript{32} I take this as de-industrialisation and it was discussed in the first chapter with regards to the economic development in Britain in the 1980s.
aspect of a fieldsite has also become difficult to ignore for ethnographers. In the past ten years, by developing frameworks of a multi-sited ethnography (cf. Marcus (1995), Kearney (1995), Appadurai (1996), and Hannerz (1996)), ethnographers have attempted to face the challenge of how ethnography, which is always thought of as ‘local’, can include simultaneously a ‘local’ and a ‘global’ perspective. Related to the reconceptualisation of the field, as Kearney (1995: 552) points out, is “a concern with how the production, consumption, communities, politics, and identities have become detached from local places”. Gupta and Ferguson explain the reconceptualisation of ‘space’ in postmodernity in the following way:

“In the pulverised space of postmodernity, space has not become irrelevant: it has been reterritorialised in a way that does not conform to the experiences of space that characterise the era of high modernity. It is this that forces us to reconceptualise fundamentally the politics of community, solidarity, identity, and cultural difference” (1992: 9).

While in this study I did not conduct a multi-sited ethnography, this brief theoretical discussion of the notion of ‘field’ is meant to highlight, reflexively, the potential problems and choices I faced when undertaking fieldwork in my fieldsite, the call centre. The problematic notion of the field is very acute with call centres as, according to Sharma and Gupta (2006: 2), call centres have become “a symbol of economic globalisation”, and occupy a central place in debates with regards to deterritorialisation. In the following, I contend that the call centre where I conducted my fieldwork is very ‘fluid’ and ‘open’ and I have responded to this challenge methodologically.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the call centres’ rise is directly connected to the emergence of postmodernity (e.g. post-Fordism (ideological)) and advances in technology. Therefore their existence is based on the idea of deterritorialisation and standardisation. More specifically, nowadays, customer interaction does not have to occur in person in the local branch anymore, but can happen in another, often distant location, over the phone, whereby enquiries are being reterritorialised, thus making service encounters: cheaper, centralised, and more efficient. Call centres further symbolise deterritorialisation, because they often have systems which allow

33 ‘Deterritorialisation’ as a term has been developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1972).
rerouting calls from all over the world to a specific location in different countries. It can thus happen that a caller may not be aware of the fact that the person she/he calls or is called by is not located in the same country, challenging the notion of borders and local. The global/local aspect of the call centre further manifests itself in another way, for the one that is the focus of this research is located in London, a global city. That is, it employs many migrants, who are often hired as ‘native speakers’ to call people in their ‘native’ countries on the phone thereby appearing ‘local’ to the customers, even though their location, London, is physically outside the borders of their native countries.

Similarly, in traditional ethnographies, the ethnographer went to the fieldsite to acquire the ‘local’ language of the people he was studying. However, in the case of my fieldsite, this proves difficult, as agents make calls across the globe in languages as diverse as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Farsi, and Swedish. Among the agents, though, the lingua franca is often English. Sometimes, groups of agents with the same nationality or from the same language group would speak their own language among themselves. In view of this, I, as a researcher sometimes had to make conscious choices between which agents and in which languages I observed them speaking. The choices were based on the languages I have a command of, these being French, German, English, Italian, and Portuguese. Yet, these choices also limited the generalising claims I could make about the fieldsite and my participant observations. The local/global aspect of this call centre was apparent in another dimension in that it forms part of a larger American multinational media corporation operating eight others across the globe. These call centres often rely on each other in number of ways, facilitated by such changes as the IT infrastructure having been reterritorialised from London to Singapore. This means that, if there is a problem with the network, computers or telephones, the call centre managers in London have to contact the Singapore branch to have it fixed.

When it comes to addressing the global/local aspects of ethnography, Marcus’s (1995) review article on “Multi-Sited Ethnography” lists a number

\[34\] cf. the discussion with regards to Saskia Sassen’s discussion of the global city - chapter 1.
of modes of constructing multi-sited spaces of investigation for ethnographers. On the whole, Marcus (1995: 105) suggests that such research is devised “around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations, following the flow of people, objects, metaphors, conflicts etc.”. However, referring to Willis’s (1977) classic study of English working class boys at school, he further points out that “some ethnography may not move around literally, but may nonetheless be embedded in a multi-sited context” (Marcus 1995: 110). I would claim that the same is true for the multi-lingual call centre in London, for even though I only visited one fieldsite, my ethnography was nevertheless embedded in a multi-sited context because of the organisational nature of the call centre. In section 2.2, I will return to the issues mentioned here, and explain in more detail my choices and field strategies I used to handle the problems raised throughout this discussion. In the following subsection, I explore specific examples of how ethnography has been applied to workplace studies.

2.1.2 Ethnography in organisations

In this section, I briefly explore (a) the relevant theoretical perspectives on ethnography and research design and (b) what examples of organisational ethnographies suggest methodologically. This is followed by a discussion on the studies of call centres that have used ethnography and taken an ethnographic perspective (subsection 2.1.3) in researching them.

Approaches to organisational ethnography and research design

In a review of organisational ethnography and research design, Schwartzman (1993) points out that ethnographers are increasingly interested in studying the culture of corporations and organisations. She provides the following reasons:

“Researchers both within and outside the discipline of anthropology have begun to recognise that ethnography is a particularly valuable method of research because it problematises the ways that individuals and groups constitute and interpret organisations and societies on a daily interactional basis” (1993: 3).
As becomes apparent in this quote, she stresses an interactional and practice-oriented approach\textsuperscript{35}, when researching the culture of corporations. According to Sarangi and Roberts (1999),

“(...) mainstream workplace ethnographies are centrally concerned with two issues: ‘the making strange’ of taken for granted phenomenon and the question of context. The problematising of what is seen as common sense and taken for granted reasoning in workplace settings involves the ethnographer examining, for example, whether the life of the long distant truck driver is as free-wheeling as it is represented as being (Agar 1986) or whether the female factory worker is as controlled as the stereotype portrays her (Westwood and Bhachu 1988)” (1999: 27).

For Sarangi and Roberts (1999: 27), the majority of these studies, like traditional ethnography, focus on the \textit{ethnographic gaze} rather than the \textit{ethnographic voice}\textsuperscript{36} (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Two notable exceptions are represented by Schwartzman’s ethnography of communication of workplace meetings (Schwartzman 1989) and Spradley and Mann’s (1975) semantic analysis of informants’ interviews in a study of cocktail waitresses (cf. Sarangi and Roberts 1999: 27). In fact, Schwartzman (1993) advises ethnographers to draw on linguistic frameworks for analysing everyday routines (e.g. events, meetings, stories) and organisational culture therein. As an example, she refers to Hymes’ (1964) framework of the ethnography of speaking (or communication), which is closely connected to traditional mainstream ethnography, but focuses on speech events and acts. That is, the relationship between the larger culture and the speech event is examined through ethnographic methods, such as participant observation (Duranti 1997: 288; Schneider 2012: 134)\textsuperscript{37}.

Unlike in mainstream ethnography, however, Bauman and Sherzer (1975) note that the focus is on language itself: “its subject matter is speaking, the use of language in the conduct of social life (1975: 96)”. The notion of the

\textsuperscript{35} This is exemplified by Giddens’s theory of structuration and Giddens (1984: 36) suggests in his theory that “all social systems, no matter how grand or far-flung, both express and are expressed in the routines of daily social life”.

\textsuperscript{36} This refers to the process of making informants auditable, e.g. by including informants’ interview comments in the ethnographic commentary instead of only drawing on the researchers’ own fieldnotes.

\textsuperscript{37} More specifically, Duranti (1997) writes that Hymes’ (1964) approach consisted of “three building blocks (i) ethnographic methods ii) a study of the communicative events that constitute the social life of a community iii) a model of the different components of the events” (Duranti 1997: 288).
speech event is central to its analysis, for as Bauman and Sherzer (1975) further observe:

"The description of means of speaking and their availability to speakers is important to the ethnography of speaking as a way of beginning to specify how speaking is patterned in particular communities. For the actual performance of speaking, however, as it is embedded within and instrumental to the conduct of social life, the frame of reference and unit of analysis is the event or scene, the point at which speakers and means come together in use. From the very first, the analysis of speech events has been central to the ethnography of speaking as empirical contexts within which speech activity is situated and acquires meaning" (Bauman and Sherzer 1975: 108-109).

A speech event can be thus understood as an event or activity with social significance where participants arrive in some conventional way at an outcome and examples are a lecture or a job interview. In an ethnography of speaking, once the ethnographer has identified a speech event it can be then analysed using the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G mnemonic: Situation, Participant, Ends, Act, Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, Genre (e.g. Duranti 1997). Rather than viewing it as “some kind of recipe” (Cameron 2001: 75), Cameron (ibid) and Hymes himself (cf. Duranti 1997: 289) have advocated to use this grid as a heuristic device. Overall, this framework has been very influential and has often been married with other approaches (e.g. interactional analysis, linguistic ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics, literacy, institutional ethnography) for researching institutions and workplaces.

Another specific research tradition investigating ethnography in organisations is Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography (IE). She developed this as a critique to traditional sociology and to examine “the empirical investigation of linkages among local settings of everyday life, organisations and translocal processes of administration and governance” (Devault and McCoy 2002: 751). I will draw on several aspects of this approach, such as the recognition that text-based forms of knowledge and discursive practices are central to large-scale organisations and relations of ruling in contemporary society. As part of the ensuing discussion at times I go into detail concerning her theories and the main reason for this is that her

38 Hymes’s notion of a communicative (speech) event also gave rise to the notion of a literacy event (Hull and Schultz 2001).
theories drive her methodology. More specifically, IE is particularly useful for this current study for two reasons.

First, Smith shows how texts provide “the standardised recognisability of people’s doings as organisational or institutional as well as for their co-ordination across multiple local settings and times” (Smith 2001: 160). Smith (1996) argues that texts play a key role in making standardisation possible. In her article “The relations of ruling: A Feminist Inquiry”, she traces the emergence of standardisation in science experiments and workplaces. A key contribution is said to have been made by Robert Boyle, whose detailed instructions of the technology of the air pump made it supposedly possible to replicate the experimental machine and experimental procedure, which thus “standardised events at different times and in different places” (Smith 1996: 181). Although Boyle’s experiment of identical replication was not entirely successful, Smith (1996) writes that it created the conditions for subsequent standardisation in science and at work:

"Experimenters at work in settings far apart could recognise, in going from text to machine, the same events as those the text describes. The correspondence of text and machine processes created the conditions under which experiments done at different sights could be considered as of the same as of the same phenomena and as comparable to one another. A standardised and standardising technology and work organisation in the laboratory produce the conditions of correspondence between events and texts. Such standardisation of events-to-texts has been technologically elaborated to constitute a universe of locally occurring events iterable trans-situationally to co-ordinate with the ubiquity of the printed text. Reproducibility constitutes a ‘reality’ corresponding to the circulation of the (printed) text" (Smith 1996: 181).

Moreover, Smith notes that in the early twentieth century accounting and accountancy began to emerge as the “actual organiser of the relations articulating people’s work, particularly the processes of production and sales and management (...)” (1996: 182), which also coincided with the rise of stock markets. The local order of the shop floor thus became increasingly regulated by material/accounting technology that according to Smith created (for management) and imposed (on workers) “a local order of accountability fully compatible with and interpretable in terms of the corporate system of accounting” (ibid: 183). In addition, Smith highlights that even Taylorism produced “a standardisation of work practices that will correspond to the systematics of the accounting text” (1996: 184). That is, apart from factories
in which new lean production had been introduced, under these circumstances, usually, “the workers themselves produce the standardisation of the relationship between the textual order and the local settings of production through their performance” (Smith 1996: 184) and it was often according to their work speed (i.e. how many items of clothing they produce per hour) that their pay varied. Thus, in today’s globalised economy texts are essential for the objectification of organisations and as such: regulate, mediate, and authorise them. Moreover, the material text also creates “the join” (Smith 1996: 176) in today’s global workforce between workers and institutions or, as Smith writes “a join between the local and particular and the generalising and generalised organisation of the relations of ruling” (1996: 176).

Secondly, Smith notes that the study of institutional texts is important because “from a particular text it is possible to trace sequences of actions through the institutional paths identifying where and how the institutional texts produces the standardised controls of everyday work activities” (2001: 160). That is, following a text trajectory across an organisation allows for studying ruling relations and standardisation within an organisation. In fact, as Devault and McCoy (2002: 34) note: “Much institutional ethnographic research has focused on standardised texts used in professional or bureaucratic settings (...)”. Farrell (2009: 190) further adds that in today’s new economy monitoring, control (and standardisation) is primarily text-based. For example, many of today’s firms take advantage of textual aspects of work to monitor their employees by using new technology that records every key stroke they enter into their computers. She also notes that “the coercive effect of call centre operators being required to read their screen, and follow a script without deviating, even where this involves assuming a different cultural identity (either implicitly or explicitly) is now well documented (e.g. Mirchandani 2004)” (Farrell 2009: 190).

Smith and institutional ethnography are, however, not alone in investigating trajectories of texts across institutions. More recently, anthropologists and literacy theorists have started following the trajectories of texts and have made some important contributions. In line with postmodern theorisations of ‘culture’, the ‘field’ and ‘multi-sited’, unlike
institutional ethnography, these theorisations do not consider texts as static but as mobile and follow their ‘flows’ or ‘chains’. More specifically, this research on ‘textual chains’ (Agha 2005) or ‘text trajectories’ (Silverstein and Urban 1996) focuses on processes in which cross contexts and the ‘entextualisation’ \(^{39}\) and ‘recontextualisation’ \(^{40}\) that occurs with each crossing. This notion of text travelling originally stems from anthropology and folklore, where it has been combined with a Hymesian study of speech events or activities (e.g. Silverstein and Urban 1996; Agha and Wortham 2005). An example of this approach is also Blommaert’s (2001) study of procedure of an asylum seeker application, where the subject is interviewed by an official who records the story about why he is applying. As part of the textual trajectory, this story travels across the various levels of bureaucracy, being considered as part of several events by various people, who then formulate new reports and make recommendations. All of these contribute to the final status of the individual’s application either being accepted or rejected (cf. Kell 2009: 83).

Remarkably, although management studies often comment on the importance of texts and ‘textualisation’ for monitoring and standardisation of workers’ actions in the new economy, according to Farrell (2009: 190), this has not been extensively examined in this field. Exceptions to this include Rock’s (2013) study of texts in legal/police settings, and van Hout and Macgilchrist’s (2010) work on journalism. In chapter 4, I will return to this framework, working with concepts such as ‘entextualisation’ and ‘recontextualisation’. I will not only explain these concepts in more detail, but also justify their relevance in this study and how they have been incorporated. Having discussed some frameworks combined with ethnography that I used for collecting and analysing my data, the next part is more practical, containing a review of concrete examples of organisational ethnography.

\(^{39}\) According to Bauman and Briggs (1990: 73) ‘entextualisation’ “is the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting”.

\(^{40}\) Linell (1998: 54) defines ‘recontextualisation’ as “the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context ... to another”. 

87
A discussion of examples of organisational ethnography and their implications for the research design

According to Brannan (2005: 424), “the ethnographic investigation into both the experience and organisation of work has a long history, [...] and in part attempts to gain access to what Hodson refers to as ‘the emergent subtle life of organisations’” (2001: 52). For Burawoy (2003), the first ethnographies of workplaces were the classic accounts by the second Chicago school, such as those by Hughes (1958) and his student Roy (1952; 1953) of industrialisation after World War II. Following this tradition, there have been several studies in anthropology and sociology on workplaces, such as factories and service sector environments, with ethnographers often taking an active participating role. Anthropologists and sociologists have taken roles as diverse as machine operators (Burawoy 1979), waiters (Spradley and Mann 1975), and McDonald’s crew members (Leidner 1993) (cf. Smith 2005). In the following, I discuss a number of key ethnographies of workplaces, including those of: Roy (1953), Burawoy (1979), Spradley and Mann (1975), Kondo (1990), Leidner (1993), Collinson (1992), and Freeman (2000). These studies share a number of features with my own work and the purpose and relevance of this discussion is to identify how these researchers gained access to their respective fieldsites, collected data, and the ethical and methodological issues their endeavours raise.

In the tradition of the Chicago school to be fully “involved in lives and lifestyles of those they studied (Deegan 2001)” (O’Reilly 2009: 29) and to gain access to the fieldsite (cf. discussion section 2.1), Roy took on the role as a machine operator during his fieldwork at Greer Company in the mid-forties (Burawoy 2003: 650). Similarly, about thirty years later, Burawoy (1979) in his classic study Manufacturing Consent also conducted his fieldwork working as a machine operator at the same company where Roy had carried out his research (Burawoy 2003: 650). Burawoy (1979) notes that his double role often surprised his fellow workers, but also gained him trust, writing that:

---

41 Working and conducting participant observation is not necessarily the norm as well-known British ethnographies of workplaces, such as those by Benyon (1973) and Westwood (1984), did not involve working at the sites they studied.
“Although I frequently explained why I was there, they regarded my enterprise with a mixture of disbelief and amusement. Some couldn’t understand why there wasn’t an easier way of obtaining a degree than by working in a factory for a year (...) From time to time people would come up to me with a juicy story and say, ‘you, put that in your book’” (Burawoy 1979: xv).

Equally, Kondo’s (1990) ethnography on work identities of female part-time workers in a Japanese candy factory describes how useful her participation as a co-worker was for her data collection, and how it enabled her to listen to her co-workers’ stories, which were often told while working. She notes that, “my co-workers narratives of work were really snatches of conversation caught as we wrapped, cleaned, filled and decorated sweets” (Kondo 1990: 260). Along this line, Leidner’s (1993) reflexive account of her fieldwork experiences at McDonald’s and Combined Insurance, researching standardisation practices in service work, indicates that by doing the job oneself one often learns more than just by observing. Leidner (1993) acknowledges that she “learned far more about relations between customers and workers by doing the job than by asking questions” (Leidner 1993: 238) and she also adds that “informal interaction with workers provided a good means of judging the adequacy of the interview data - it was not uncommon, for instance to hear complaints that had not been mentioned in response to my formal questioning” (ibid: 328).

While these accounts are helpful in that they highlight the benefits of being a researcher and worker, they do not encompass the nature of the power of the relationships that arise when conducting fieldwork in a workplace as a researcher and possibly as an employee. Collinson’s (1992) ethnography of masculinity in a lorry-making factory in the north west of England is more detailed in this respect in that he explores not only the issue of power, but also: access, trust, confidentiality, ethics, class, and insider/outsider issues. However, Collinson did not work at the factory himself, but only conducted participant observation there and this makes his fieldwork different from the workplace studies discussed so far. From the start, he faced a number of notable difficulties, for even though the personnel managers had agreed to his research, he reports that “shopfloor workers received no written introduction concerning this research project” (1992: 15). Nevertheless, he acknowledges “this was useful because it helped to
differentiate me from the management in the men’s eyes. It is very important when conducting research’ to avoid being perceived as a boss’s man (Willis 1975: 15)” (1992: 15).

Nevertheless, his account continues by stressing that his presence often provoked negative rumours and therefore, the workers “kept their distance” (Collinson 1992: 16). Similarly, foremen and inspectors “played it safe” by distancing themselves from him, regarding him as part of a “yankee trick” and a “spy for management” (ibid). Even when he asked workers and informants to sign a confidentiality agreement assuring them confidentiality from the management, they remained suspicious of him (ibid). In addition, he writes that the workers held a grudge against him for “not producing anything” [not working himself as a machine operator] (Collinson 1992: 16). Similarly, another criticism he faced was that informants argued that, “I [Collinson] would inevitably have class-based perceptions that would distort my analysis of the findings” (ibid: 16). For Collinson, the class issue extended to the degree that “for many interviewees the ‘threat’ of my asking questions intended to expose their beliefs was problematic because they were neither familiar nor comfortable with talking about themselves or about organisational problems (ibid: 16).”

With respect to this, he quotes one informant who says: “I’ve never thought about these questions you are asking me” (ibid: 16). Collinson (1992: 17) suggests that in the long run, he overcame these initial problems by focusing on individuals as key informants rather than whole groups. On the whole, his description of the reaction of workers validates the post-modern demand for reflexivity in ethnography, as the ethnographer operates in a system of power structures, and as such is never invisible even as an observer, always having some effect on the workplace.

Regarding how to cope best with ‘cultural practices’, Freeman’s (2000: 34) reflexive account of her fieldwork42 in Barbados proves to be helpful. She researched the feminisation of the workforce in the new economy of several multinational companies on that island. However, in her case, most issues related to cultural practices appear to have been the result of bureaucratic

---

42 Initially she volunteered to work too, but in the event only observed people at work.
difficulties and misunderstandings she faced while conducting fieldwork. Additionally, her ethnography also makes a note of the difficulty of being both an ethnographer and observer. For instance, she describes how she was often not allowed to interview workers on site and as a result, she was forced to meet with those willing to participate offsite. This situation was aggravated further when the American head office ordered the site in Barbados to temporarily not let her continue her fieldwork (Freeman 2000: 13). Like Collinson (1992), she was also perceived as a spy leading to one employee resigning when she asked her whether she could interview her.

By and large, these ethnographies not also remind us of the need for reflexivity in ethnographic writing, but also how problematic the role of an ethnographer can be, as a participant or just as an observer. The discussion has focused on the selection of these ethnographies as not only are these are often quoted as classic workplace studies, but the authors also conducted fieldwork in manufacturing, covering both the service sector and provided details in an appendix about their role as an ethnographer. These insights are summarised in the following table:

Table 2.2  Summary of insights from some workplace ethnographies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Workplace</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Methodological Issues and Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burawoy (1979)</td>
<td>Factory in Chicago</td>
<td>- 12-months fieldwork work simultaneously as a machine operator &lt;br&gt; - took on the double role to gain trust</td>
<td>Ethical and moral issues: &lt;br&gt; - ethical and moral issue of both being an employee and researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kondo (1990)</td>
<td>Candy factory in Japan</td>
<td>- conducted fieldwork at a variety of factories &lt;br&gt; - worked in those factories herself</td>
<td>The issue of access and data collection: &lt;br&gt; - learned more from working alongside the workers than when interviewing them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In section 2.3, I will return to the discussion of the role of the ethnographer when conducting fieldwork. Having explored general methodological issues with regards to workplace ethnography, such as gaining access, field relations, trust, ethics, and possible research foci, in the next section, I examine more specifically the few studies on call centres that have taken an ethnographic perspective, or have used ethnography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Fieldwork Details</th>
<th>Methodological Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leidner</td>
<td>McDonald’s and Insurance Company in U.S.</td>
<td>- fieldwork at McDonalds&lt;br&gt;- worked behind the counter herself&lt;br&gt;- before she went to their Hamburger University&lt;br&gt;- followed a course at an insurance company, but could not obtain permission to work as an actual customer advisor</td>
<td>- argues that by doing the job oneself one often learns more than just by observing and interviewing&lt;br&gt;- helped judging the adequacy of the interview data and subsequently added useful information not obtained during interviews (similar to Kondo 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collinson</td>
<td>Factory in U.S.</td>
<td>Conducted fieldwork in a factory (did not work himself)</td>
<td><strong>Issues of access, power, and trust:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- was thought of as a management spy&lt;br&gt;- workers had trouble positioning him&lt;br&gt;- even when asked to sign a confidentiality agreement workers remained suspicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeman</td>
<td>Data entry in Barbados</td>
<td>Fieldwork in several sites of the new economy in Barbados&lt;br&gt;- did not work there herself</td>
<td><strong>Issues of access:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- red tape and headquarters (in the US) interfered with her research&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Solution:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- solved the problem by interviewing some workers offsite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.3 Ethnography and call centres

*Previous research on call centres using ethnography or taking an ethnographic approach*

In this section, I discuss how the few ethnographic studies on call centres have used ethnographic methodology, and what else is revealed about their: research design, problems encountered, and implications for this study. As indicated earlier, the majority of call centre studies are not ethnographic, often relying on surveys and interviews. The problem, as discussed earlier and documented by Bain and Taylor (2000) as well as by Cameron (2000a: 344), is that researchers often struggle to gain access to the field when wanting to carry out participant observation. In both Taylor and Bain and Cameron’s cases this was because the management was not in favour of research being conducted in the workplace. As a result, there have been very few call centres studies involving participant observation and all of these were undertaken in inbound call centres. Moreover, there have only been two studies which involved long-term participation, those by Houlihan (2003, 2006) and Brannan (2005), as considered below. In addition, I further discuss Duchène’s (2009) study, for although he only spent 10 days at a call centre, he is one of the few researchers who has addressed some methodological implications and considerations of using participant observation in such a setting.

Houlihan\(^43\) (2003; 2006) overcame the access research problem by taking on the role of Customer Service Representative, similar to the ethnographies discussed above. Her ethnographic study also gets very close to meeting the criteria of a traditional ethnographic study in anthropology. Houlihan (2003; 2002; 2006) divides her fieldwork into two stages. The first comprised “a two-year participant ethnography during which she worked as a Customer Service Representative at an insurance call centre. This involved one year of undisclosed participation (20 hours per week)\(^44\) and one year of

\(^{43}\) Houlihan’s articles from 2002 and 2006 are based on her unpublished thesis (Houlihan 2003).

\(^{44}\) undisclosed in the sense of covert research.
disclosed participation (eight hours per week)” (Houlihan 2002: 72).

Outlining why she chose participant ethnography, Houlihan (2002) writes:

“Participant observation was adopted in order to engage with the nuances of call centre work, specifically from the perspective of Customer Service Representatives and team leaders. This enabled full involvement in the work processes of the call centre and the relationships among CSRs, team leaders, customers and managers; ongoing dialogue with all these parties, and participation in induction, training, team meetings and performance coaching” (2002: 72).

The second phase involved a period of data collection drawing on traditional case investigation where only the managers were interviewed. Houlihan concludes, “this casework was then supplemented with limited non-participant observation, attendance at induction and training sessions, and dialogue with 12 Customer Service Representatives (in this case selected by management)” (2002: 72).

From Houlihan’s account, the issue of access emerges again, which in her case was overcome by becoming a call centre worker herself. Her description of the study’s research methodology is unfortunately not very detailed, but her research design highlights her emphasis, and the implied need, to observe call centre workers in a variety of settings, such as: induction, training, during work, and when undertaking performance coaching. This is an aspect I also attended to in this study. Nevertheless, long-term participation in a variety of settings as conducted by Houlihan (2002; 2003; 2006) brings about practical choices and a brief account by Duchêne (2009: 34) about his ten-day long fieldwork in a call centre in Zurich equally reveals this:

“I collected interactional data, mostly telephone interactions [...]. I sat next to the employee during the phone interactions and recorded them so that I could take notes on the specific activities the agent was doing while interacting with customers. [...] I was following the employees individually during their shifts. [...] I was simultaneously recording customer-employee in situ interactions, workers’ discourse about themselves and their jobs were recorded at the same time and with their permission” (Duchêne 2009: 34).

Comparing Houlihan (2002; 2003; 2006) and Duchêne’s (2009) research design, shows that participant observation partly, because of the nature of call centres, can take different forms depending on the focus of the researcher and his/her role and possible settings, such as the following scenarios:
1) While agents are working ‘on the phone’, the researcher has the following choices to make in order to conduct participant observation:

   a) **informants**: choose informants of a specific language group(s) or projects to observe what is affecting their routines, meetings, briefings and timetables

   b) **spatial position**:
      
      i) sit next to the chosen agent and plug in a headset so as to be able to observe his/her shift as well as the interaction with fellow agents and workers during this period

      ii) sit away from informants and perform silent monitoring of those chosen, while also recording all their customer calls using the inbuilt technology.

2) When it comes to being ‘off the phone’, the researcher also has a number of choices:

   b) **informants**: choose a particular language group to follow or an individual person (provide them with radio microphones) to record interaction as they may sit together during breaks or whilst having lunch

   c) **spatial position**: sit at the front of the call centre (possible association with the management), at the back of the call centre or in an extra room

   d) **social participation**: participating in break activities, such as playing pool

Brannan’s (2005) article on his 13-month fieldwork in a call centre in the West Midlands is additionally useful in this respect, as it not only illustrates many of the issues discussed so far with regards to ethnography, but also the choices he made to gain access on ethical terms and how he dealt with power-related issues. He, as “the researcher gained full-time employment at the case-study call centre for 13 months by applying for an advertised post of ‘Customer Service Analyst’ and undergoing the standard selection process” (Brannan 2005: 425). He further explains that “for ethical consistency, and following the British Sociological Association’s guidelines on informed
consent, the research agenda was known to the management and co-workers of CallCentreCo.” (Brannan 2005: 425). Even though his project’s focus was on sexuality within internal team dynamics and the management was aware of that, he originally told the informants that the research was about the daily routines of CallCentreCo. He thought the danger could arise that his study could be misinterpreted by his co-workers “as an official investigation of CSR misbehaviour” (ibid: 425). Like Collinson (1992) above, he was also keen on distancing himself from the management and records that he even re-entered the field to conduct follow-up interviews to confirm his status as a researcher. Brannan’s (2005) rationale for this was “it is highly unusual for employees who had left the call centre to return and therefore the researcher’s return was a clear indication of the continuance of the research project” (2005: 426).

The challenges for him did not end here. Brannan explains the particular strategies he used not to gain special attention but still be able to observe and take notes. He writes:

“ethnographic observations were recorded in an extensive fieldwork journal, which took the form of a Microsoft Word document that was accessed and updated during quiet periods of the working day. As call centre-workers were frequently required to use Microsoft Word, the researcher was able to record entries without attracting unwanted attention” (Brannan 2005: 425).

Yet the fact that Brannan became a CSR45 in order to conduct sociological inquiry, resulted for him in “the construction of an asymmetrical relationship” (2000: 426). Consequently, he felt the need constantly to remind his fellow team members for ethical reasons of their anonymity, possible harm, dangers, and his research agenda. He recognises, however, that “despite the desire to seek informed consent, the duration of the ethnography meant that the establishment of the status of the researcher might have become blurred” (Brannan 2005: 426). Notwithstanding these ethical dilemmas, he asserts that surprisingly “in view of a number of high-profile stories of the poor conditions in call centres had broken in the national news media” (ibid: 425), managerial consent was quickly obtained without any problems. In discussions with managers it became clear that

45 Customer Service Representative.
their motivation for doing so was to “reveal another side of call-centre work” (ibid), indicating that ethnographic research in workplaces can also benefit the wider organisation and management and not just the ethnographer.

The moral, ethical, and methodological issues that have emerged from this discussion are related to the role the researcher takes as a participant or as an observer. More generally, they are also related to conducting research at a workplace. In the section on research design and the role of the researcher, I elaborate on these issues, and how I chose to address them for this study. In conclusion, these insights gained from these ethnographic studies are summarised in the following table:

**Table 2.3 Ethnographic studies on workplaces and implications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houlihan (2003; 2006)</td>
<td>- fieldwork - long term participant observation</td>
<td>Two phases a) disclosed (one year) and undisclosed observation (one year) b) interviewed managers</td>
<td>Access problems: -worked as a call centre agent to gain access -the need to observe agents in various settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duchêne (2009)</td>
<td>- fieldwork - participant observation (10 days)</td>
<td>a) followed individual workers during shifts, took notes b) recorded other exchanges which took place at the same time</td>
<td>Choices are being made about the manner in which data is collected, e.g. by following individual agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brannan (2005)</td>
<td>- interviews - participant observation</td>
<td>Two phases a) observed agents while working as a CSA for 12 months b) returned after his participant observation was completed to conduct interviews as a researcher</td>
<td>- mentions the asymmetrical power relationship - ethical and moral dilemmas because of the research topic/confidentiality - possibly problematic association with management modified what he told agents about the research agenda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having described the assumptions that underpin this case study that is ethnography as interpretative and practice-oriented, in the next section, I will describe the design of my study, data collection, and the methods I plan to use.
2.2 Research design

In this section, I provide an account of the approach to data collection, my field strategies for dealing with the various issues discussed so far, and explain my rationale for choosing the particular sites. Moreover, I explain the various methods I used, including interviewing, participant observation, and discourse analyses of the natural language as part of the recorded role plays I conducted with some of the informants during the interviews.

2.2.1 Approach to data collection

Following the issues that have emerged from the discussion of workplace ethnographies and call centre studies, this subsection elaborates on matters with respect to fieldwork that “need to be thought about carefully in an ethnographic research design” (Brewer 2000: 82). These pertain to the issues raised in the previous section in relation to: negotiating access, developing and maintaining a role in the field, establishing trust, recording data unobtrusively, the question of identities that have to be handled in the field and ensuring ethical practice in the field. In the following paragraphs, I therefore examine these issues briefly before exploring them in more detail with regards to my fieldsite.

The previously discussed accounts of call centres (e.g. Taylor and Bain 2005, Houlihan 2006) have shown access to be a problem. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 49) confirm that “‘private’ settings where boundaries are clearly marked, are not easily penetrated, and may be policed by ‘gatekeepers’”. In the studies explored so far, these were often the call centre managers who policed the marked boundaries of the workplace. Access, as seen with Houlihan’s (2006) and Brannan’s (2005) ethnographic research, may depend on the role of the researcher and an ethnographer has the choice of various roles when in the field (cf. Brewer 2000: 83). The best typology of these roles, according to Brewer (2000), is presented in Gold’s account (1958), which outlines “three levels of participation in the field: complete participant (participating as a normal group member); participant-as-observer (participation in the field is limited and the role of researcher is to the fore); and complete observer (no participation in the field)” (ibid: 84).
In all of this, **trust**, as Brewer (2000) and Fetterman (1998) assert, is crucial for both sides (ethnographer and participants) “for a chance of getting close to the multiple realities in the field” (Brewer 2000: 85). Closely related to the issue of trust are the recording of data and the ethical conduct of researchers. For instance, Brewer (2000: 98) argues that “researchers have responsibilities to their subjects” and in line with the postmodern drift, ethnographers should be reflexive about their: method, biography, identity, and experiences (see section 2.1.2). More importantly, **being explicit about identities** and interpersonal relationships not only serves as an important ethical consideration, but also helps to avoid possible bias.

On a more general level, as “ethnographers undertaking ‘the art of fieldwork’ struggle with questions of validity, reliability, and replicability” (Wolcott 1995: 44), and in view of the “accepted view that all ethnographic research is inherently interpretive, subjective, and partial (Wolcott 1995: 43)”, Heath and Street (2008) suggest researchers follow some decision rules to guide their work. In the following, I seek to outline my decision rules in line with their questions (2008: 47) which are those covered in the next subsection spread out throughout the text:

1. Who or what is the phenomenon of central focus? (conceptual)
2. What are the salient features?
3. Who am I with respect to these individuals, the group, or the sites?
4. What will the times and space of data collecting be?
5. What will I consistently be able to tell others about who I am and what I will be doing here?
6. How will I protect the identity and interests of those whose lives I propose to examine?

In the subsequent paragraphs, I will try to address these questions with regards to my fieldwork.

---

46 Such as obtaining informed consent, and granting anonymisation to all participants.

47 As Wolcott (1995:165) argues: “Bias requires us to identify the perspective we bring to our studies as insiders and/or outsiders and to anticipate how that may affect what we report.”
**The fieldsite for data collection**

**CallCentral**

i) General information

The fieldsite of this study is a multilingual call centre (CallCentral) in central London. I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork here as this is also the call centre where I had worked for two years and hence, I had various contacts among agents and managers that facilitated access. CallCentral is an outbound business to business call centre, which means that agents can only make outbound calls and cannot receive any incoming ones. The call centre clients are international companies from the new economy. Agents are tasked with contacting IT departments across the world from randomly generated lists on behalf of the client, offering products and carrying out research, sales, customer services, and marketing. According to a survey by the Department of Trade & Industry, there are about 398 other call centres like CallCentral in the UK (cf. DTI 2004: 38). The survey also suggests that the call centre (64 workstations) is relatively large in comparison to the average call centre (10-15 workstations). A call centre with 10-15 workstations and managers in the same office would possibly not only compromise agents’ anonymity, but also my position as a discreet researcher and worker, making it difficult to observe their behaviour, or to talk them given that their managers would most likely be in the close vicinity. Conversely, a very large call centre (above 100), although not posing the same issues when it comes to safeguarding anonymity, is also problematic. First of all regarding this, a large call centre as a fieldsite would not make it representative of the average call centre in the UK, and secondly its organisation would most likely also be significantly different from a call centre with 30 agents. My fieldsite’s medium size, therefore, makes it a useful place for observation and research, because it allows both anonymity and confidentiality to agents, whilst still allowing for a full view of the call centre room and other agents. Another advantage of the fieldsite is the fact that it includes a kitchen and a break area, which means that I not only had the opportunity to observe agents ‘on the phone’, but also

---

48 CallCentral is a pseudonym I chose to protect the anonymity of the call centre.
‘off the phone’, as Houlihan (2002; 2003) recommends. Finally, CallCentral’s international multilingual workforce with varying backgrounds and experiences also fits in well with the notion of the call centre as a ‘globalised workplace’.

ii) Access

I have become familiar with CallCentral as a result of my own working experiences. As described in the preface, I have worked in several call centres before, but was struck by the fact that the managers here prided themselves on being different from the stereotypical sweatshop like call centre with over 100 workstations often popularised in the press (cf. chapter 1 section 1.2). When I asked the management whether I could undertake fieldwork at the call centre, having already worked there for two years, they were happy to let me go ahead, considering it an opportunity to improve the general work climate. As explained above, one advantage of choosing this call centre was that I already had a network of contacts there. Thus, I had easy access and could also draw on the benefit of full participation as a researcher similar to that experienced by Houlihan (2003). After one year of fieldwork, I was also promoted from being a normal agent to a qualitative team leader/trainer, which provided me not only with a different view, but also meant that I spent a lot of time with new agents. My position was, in fact, newly created since there was an awareness from the management that agents should have someone they can approach if they have any work-related or personal problems as the call centre managers do not have the time to talk to them or do individual training sessions. Thus, it was decided that a qualitative team leader, an experienced agent, was required to fill this gap. In my role, I was allocated time to work with individual agents if they were struggling or felt they had any issues. Moreover, it was felt by the management that this new position would not only help the individual agents but also improve the work climate and in the long run benefit the company and their profit margins. During the training, agents were told explicitly by the other team leaders that if they had any issues or questions they should approach me. Did this create ethical issues?
Whenever I trained new agents I told them about my research and that I could feed back any concerns to the management. However, if people talked about private issues, these are not mentioned in this thesis and I did not pass those on unless the agent wished this. Moreover, when I approached agents for interviews I reminded them about the purpose of my research by providing them with information sheet on my research and subsequently with an ethical consent form approved by King’s College Ethics committee. All my informants have signed the ethical consent form

On another level, I chose CallCentral because it pursues an elaborate system of standardisation practices, as discussed in chapter 1, an important criterion for call centre work. For instance, all agents are required to work from a script, are provided with extensive briefs and guidelines for the calls, and are silently monitored. Considering the degree of access and the intensity of my employment there, I decided against contacting other potential call centres but to do a detailed long-term ethnographic case study of CallCentral.

Overall, I worked at the call centre for three days a week during which I also observed workers. Spending five days a week at the call centre would possibly have meant becoming too absorbed in the fieldsite as a participant. As Todorov (1988) suggests, it is important to realise the ‘full axis’ by immersing oneself into the ‘culture’, but also distancing oneself by staying away from the fieldsite. Moreover, aiming to provide a thorough account of the call centre and the wider context, the focus of study is not be limited to the work ‘on the phone’, but also includes agents’ ‘time off the phone’ such as during breaks, lunch times in the break area, and the other rooms in the call centre. Although I recorded several phone conversations in multiple languages, I decided in my analysis to focus on the ‘off the phone’ activities, as they have been more marginal in previous research.

iii) Sampling

For Fetterman (1998), an important step is to decide “how to sample members of the target population” (1998: 32) and he proposes two ways to do

49 Furthermore, boards can be found across the call centre revealing how agents have fared individually in comparison to other agents every day.
so. The first is the process of elimination, as “the decision is not who shall we admit but rather who must we reject - given that all the people who qualify”. The second approach is to “select who and what to study- that is, the sources that will most help to understand life in a given community” (1998: 32). For this study, the second method appeared to be more appropriate and therefore, in order to combine different perspectives and gather a rich account of an IT outbound B2B call centre and the standardisation processes that occur within it, I chose different groups of informants representing different aspects of these entities: members of the management, agents, and team leaders. Given the high turnover, the negative reputation of call centres, and the focus of this study on standardisation, I thought it also helpful to interview not only current agents, but also new and former agents since they could hold different views and experiences with regards to call centre work and standardisation practices. Moreover, given that the management role is crucial in imposing standardisation practices, it was deemed likely to prove insightful to interview and observe managers and trainers about their practices, views, and perceptions on these and call centre work in general. A substantial number were identified, approached, and recruited through my already existing network of contacts at the call centre. My data collection therefore involved six types of informants:

(i) Male and female call centre agents, who had worked longer than a month at the outbound call centre
(ii) Formerly employed call centre agents of the call centre
(iii) New agents
(iv) Members of the management team
(v) Trainers (team leaders).

iv) Rapport and trust

Given my long involvement as a call centre employee, I had established a good relationship with many of my fellow workers. However, considering the problematic nature of being an employee and a researcher at the same time and also a participant, I was aware that other issues related to power, trust,

---

50 Business to Business.
ethics, class, gender and my different field roles as discussed in the first two sections could arise.

I distributed information and consent forms, which explained to participants the research agenda and informed them about the opportunities to withdraw at any time during the study without any explanation, and the information that everything they told me would remain anonymous. Given that I was a full participant and a normal agent before the fieldwork, I thought that it was less likely that my informants would identify me with the management, than Brannan (2005) or Collinson (1992) during their research. After having conducted participant observation and interviews with former, current, and new call centre agents regarding their experiences of call centre work, I was able to provide some careful, anonymous, and constructive feedback to the management on improvements that might be needed both work-wise as well as for the call centre as a whole. By improving the working environment as well as offering agents some useful advice on how to be more successful on the phone from my own professional experience, I was also able to offer reciprocity to some of my informants.

2.2.2 Methods and techniques

i) Participant observation

In this study, participant observation was used as an instrument of data collection to complement interview data. The participant observation lasted four years in total, out of which two years was prior to fieldwork but I already had research in mind. I observed agents ‘on the phone’ and ‘off the phone’, aiming to “maintain a balance between ‘insider and outsider’ status” (Brewer 2000: 60), which is necessary for successful participant observation. Being myself an insider and ‘one of them’ meant that the agents were more likely to behave normally despite being observed, which hopefully helped to overcome the so-called ‘observer paradox’ (Duranti 1997: 118). This refers to the goal of ethnography to collect ‘natural’ data on how people behave or use language when they are not being observed, but the term also includes a continuing need for reflexivity.
Overall, there are four types of interaction that I observed:

a) Interaction on the phone between agents and clients
b) Interaction off the phone with colleagues sitting next to the agent
c) Interaction during breaks and lunch times
d) Interaction during meetings, training, and briefings.

These different types of observation helped in addressing the research questions with regards to how standardisation works and how it is implemented.

ii) Interviews

Another source of data collection was interviews, which I conducted with six groups of participants:

a) current call centre workers (27 interviews)
   b) members of the management (4 interviews)
   c) former call centre agents (15 interviews)
   d) new call centre agents (8 interviews)
   e) team leaders (6 interviews)

Of the proposed interview types, I chose semi-structured and retrospective types of interviews. According to Wolcott (1995: 112), semi-structured interviewing is “the sort of [data collection] virtually all field research employs”, though some aspects of it may vary according to the situation. He recommends, for instance, planning interviews around a few big issues “as successful interviews return again and again to develop dimensions of an issue, rather than detailing myriad little questions to ask” (1995: 112). Similarly, he suggests that “formal taped sessions can provide opportunity for a different kind of exchange, one in which the person being interviewed is clearly ‘in the know’, and the researcher is the person who wants to find out” (1995: 113). For the participants (agents, former agents and managers) whom I had known for a long time I decided that a casual conversation that happened to be recorded was therefore the most appropriate means for

51 Agar (1980: 69) describes this as the “one down position, with the fieldworker assuming a subordinate role as learner”.
interviewing them. Using a very loose structure, I interviewed them about the following main topics relating to my research questions:

- their perception of standardisation
- how standardisation works the in the call centre
- their perception of call centre work in general.

At times, it was necessary to interview agents indirectly about notions, such as standardisation practices, as this is an abstract concept. That is, although agents were likely to experience standardisation on a daily basis, to make it clear what I was referring to I interviewed them also specifically about using the scripts and guidelines imposed by the management.

On the other hand, interviewing new agents required different strategies than those used with informants I had known for a while, as they got to know me as a senior call centre agent, and may have felt as if they were being further assessed by the management. Therefore, I used a formal setting with simple standardised questions they had seen in advance. On the information sheet with the questions, there was also a reminder that the interview was in no way connected to their assessment as a call centre worker or to the management. I conducted the majority of the interviews in a meeting room in the same building, but not inside the call centre, or at the participants’ chosen venue (e.g. their home or cafe) in order to make them as comfortable as possible. Furthermore, I conducted semi-structured interviews with former call centre agents. Regarding these, according to Fetterman, “the ethnographer uses retrospective interviews to reconstruct the past” (Fetterman 1998: 49).

After having transcribed all the interviews, I coded them manually for emergent themes, which ranged from ‘talking about scripts’, ‘targets’, ‘human vs. machine’, to ‘gender’ using NVivo. In addition, during the process of analysing my interview scripts, I drew on ‘domain analysis’ (Spradley 1979) although I did not apply this in full, but rather, used it to obtain a better understanding of my data, structure it, and to develop new codes. By so doing, unexpected topics of relevance became visible. However, the organising principle of my analysis is the trajectory of a script and not the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews. It was only at a later
stage of my analysis after having identified and described the important events and activities in the trajectory of a script, that the codes became useful. At that point, I returned to this initial interview analysis and coding, and used them to complement my analysis of how managers, team leaders and agents talked about the script’s trajectory, its different stages and their perceptions of these.

During the interviews, I further asked the agents and team leaders to do an oral performance guided by the script. I do not analyse telephone conversations for several reasons. Firstly, as mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, there have been very few long-term ethnographic studies of call centres and the few sociolinguistic studies that exist look at customer-agent interactions. Secondly, as emerges from my research question, the focus of this thesis is on the background of what happens in the call centre before and during agents’ talk to people on the phone. Thirdly, despite the amount of access I had to the call centre, telephone calls are not usually recorded in the call centre because of an EU regulation and it would have been difficult to record the telephone calls for the specific scripts I discuss as part of a model campaign later on.

In the following, I will discuss the other methods I used for data collection to complement my observations.

**iii) Fieldnotes**

Fieldnote taking is viewed as an important aspect in ethnography for recording observational and interview data. Heath and Street suggest that “the history of social, cultural and linguistic anthropology resides largely in fieldnotes of individual ethnographers” (Heath and Street 2008: 76). Hammersley and Atkinson further note that “the ideal would be to make notes during the actual participant observation. But this is not always possible, and even when it is possible the opportunities may be very limited” (2007: 142).

Additionally, they argue that “fieldnotes are always selective: it is not possible to capture everything” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 142). Taking this into account, I tried to take as many notes as possible during the work day on how agents worked with the guidelines, briefs and scripts, and routines, stories, patterns, and other occurrences. I noted down bullet points
as the day proceeded, writing them up afterwards. I often did this on the note pad, which everyone in the call centre is always required to have in front of them to take down information during the calls or take notes during meetings.

iv) Corporate information, texts, scripts and briefs
As in this thesis I aim to address standardisation practices, collecting and analysing any corporate information, such as scripts, text, briefs and guidelines turned out to be very valuable. I further interviewed members of management about the compilation of the scripts and I observed and interviewed how agents worked with the individual corporate texts on the phone. That is, comparisons were made between the management’s intention regarding these scripts and the actual reality of agents working on the phones delivering these. Finally, I asked all my informants except for the managers to act out a particular script for me during an interview role play to understand how they were working with it.

2.3 Role of the researcher
After having discussed my research design, next, I provide an account of how I interpreted what Brewer (2000) terms ‘the different roles of a researcher’. The first subsection deals with my two roles as an employee and researcher, while the others more specifically deal with the practical choices I made.

2.3.1 Being reflexive
As mentioned earlier, after the publication of key texts like Writing Culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and Anthropology as Cultural Critique (1986), reflexivity has become a standard practice in ethnography. However, according to O’Reilly (2009), what constitutes reflexivity is more controversial. She points out that “for some it is the postmodern presentation of experimental prose” (2009: 173). Conversely, she argues that “for others it means no longer seeing cultures as homogeneous, isolated groups but acknowledging broader influences” (ibid: 173). She concludes by noting that:
“overall, there is more responsibility for the consequences of ways of representing [...]. The result of a moderate response is rich, ethnographies that are open about their limitation and partiality; ethnographies that acknowledge the complexities of the social world, and thus the difficulty of rendering it clear and coherent without simplifying it” (ibid: 173).

The limitations of any ethnographic study are thus addressed through reflexivity. Foley asserts, “to make ethnography at least quasi-objective all researchers need to be reflective about all ethnographic practices - from field relations and interpretative practices to producing texts” (2002: 473). He acknowledges that reflexivity is a “slippery term” and then goes on to differentiate between the different types: confessional, theoretical, intertextual and deconstructive, which ethnographers should acknowledge (2002: 473). Heath and Street (2008: 123) explain Foley’s (2002) four different types of reflexivity in the following way:

a) **Confessional** - a range of perspectives that situate the ethnographer including autoethnography and how this has affected the framing, data collection and findings

b) **Theoretical** - making theoretical assumptions explicit

c) **Intertextual** - taking into account different representations such as ‘ethnographic present’ and ‘ethnographic past’

d) **Deconstructive** – the critique and question of foundations of the research paradigm (any claims of knowledge).

Throughout these two chapters, I have outlined the confessional and theoretical, but also deconstructive dimensions of this study. For instance, in Chapter 1, I explained how I became interested in this study and attempted to situate myself (confessional), whereas in this chapter, I have been deconstructive in my critical reflections on ethnography from a postmodern perspective. Throughout this chapter, I have also highlighted how and why I have made several methodological choices. Moreover, reflexive regarding the issues that emerged from the discussion of previous workplace studies and the post-modern critique, I have explained why the extended case method is a relevant framework for this study (theoretical).

---

The ‘Ethnographic present’ represented a convention of presenting ethnographic research in the present tense. This was criticised in the 1980s and now has been largely abandoned in favour of more historical explicit representations.
Nevertheless, the interpersonal reflexivity of this study was deemed more appropriate for discussion after having completed fieldwork and the writing up. In view of my position as a researcher and a senior call centre agent and trainer, it is necessary to further outline the confessional reflexivity for this study.

As seen with Burawoy (1979) and Brannan’s (2005) works, power, position, personal background and trust arose as concerns as a result of a dual role of me being a participant and researcher. On the up side, it provided easier access to informants, whereas on the down side it raised issues of how power relationships work. Agents may have, for instance, felt the need to have to participate in my research as I was their trainer, but I trust I overcame this problem by applying several strategies. One was to provide them with information, recruitment sheets and consent forms\(^{53}\), which outlined the aims of my research following the BAAL\(^{54}\) ethical guidelines and highlighted that they were not obliged to participate in my research. Moreover, by choosing some informants that had a similar status to mine and new agents, who had not been trained by me or who worked in different fields of the call centre than I did, I hoped to have minimised the potential impact of an asymmetrical relationship. Finally, as pointed out above, I strived to offer the agents help and advice from my experience as a call centre agent so that they could benefit from our interaction.

### 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described and examined some of the principles which underpin my research and methodological choices. I have discussed post-modern theories and previous organisational and ethnographic research on call centres, which have informed my ethnographic research. By conducting long term participant observation, I hope to contribute to the few sociolinguistic studies on call centres and qualitative studies, more generally, by moving beyond the extant quantitative oriented surveys. Moreover, this

\(^{53}\) This study was approved by the King’s College Ethics Research Panel (Ref. REP (EM)/09/10-19).

\(^{54}\) British Association of Applied Linguists.
chapter has featured an extensive discussion on ethnographic methodology and frameworks and how I have drawn on these. Having examined postmodern critiques of ethnography, I have endeavoured to respond to calls for an ethnography of the workplace in the new economy, which is reflexive about many aspects of fieldwork and the field. That is, by taking a reflexive stance, within the bounds of an ethnographic case study, and drawing upon postmodern and linguistic perspectives, this work represents a novel step forward in research of call centres.
Chapter 3

Standardisation in the call centre
– a first encounter

3.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 examined how the public and academics have consistently linked call centres with standardisation, which thus emerged as a key aspect of call centre work. In particular, the script is often evoked as a symbol of standardisation and so called ‘scripted Taylorism’ (cf. Mirchandani 2004). This chapter, on the whole, is a descriptive background chapter, the main purpose of which is to provide an introduction to the CallCentral call centre, the fieldsite and its employees and how standardisation is a feature in the agents’ workplace and of the organisation. Despite its overall descriptive nature there will, however, be several threads running through this chapter that relate to this general theory and impressions of call centres as sites of standardisation (see chapter 1 section 1.3.2), which will be shown to be only partially successful as means of control to the unpredictable elements of the organisation and how it is run. Key to the attempts of standardisation in the fieldsite is the calling script that allows the management to regain some control over some of the unpredictable factors, thereby making them manageable. Nonetheless, we will further see that there are some elements of the call centre where flexibility and strategies that seem to avoid standardisation are condoned and even at times encouraged. That is, these elements are not ‘unpredictable’ but stand in contrast to standardisation.

In this chapter two methods will be used: i) a description of the first day of a typical new agent in the call centre (section 3.1. and 3.2) based on my fieldnotes and ii) interviews with actual agents and team leaders (section 3.3). While the first serves as a commentary on the mix of standardisation, unpredictability, and relaxation, the second shows how individuals articulate these tensions. In the conclusion, I raise some implications that the description and interview comments raise for the subsequent analytical chapters. Across the three sections, I further seek to address the following
guidance questions about the organisation and its employees. I explore them in the same order that I have listed them and they set the background for the later ethnographic chapters, 4, 5, and 6.

i) What is an agents’ workday like? (section 3.1)

ii) What does working as a call centre agent entail? (section 3.1)

iii) What are the different roles within the call centre and who are the key people? (section 3.2)

iv) How are agents recruited to call centre work? (section 3.2)

v) Who are the agents? (section 3.3)

vi) Why do the agents join the call centre? (section 3.3)

vii) How do they describe the organisation? (section 3)

3.1 An introduction to the call centre and the organisation of a workday

3.1.1 A brief account of a new agent’s first day

The call centre is based on the second floor of a converted loft warehouse in central London and it is the only office on that floor. The entrance is very simple without any reception or company logo to flag it, being marked by two doors and a sign that reads “press buzzer for call centre”. On their first day, agents have to buzz to enter their new place of employment, as the call centre doors remain closed at all times. The call centre supervisor or a team leader will greet them and ask them to wait in the break out area, where they can fill out the necessary paperwork, until everyone has arrived and their induction training can begin. This will be the new agent’s first time in the call centre, as any previous contact and interviews were over the phone. As all agents are hired as temporary workers, they will have to fill out the required paper work\(^{\text{55}}\) including their temporary contract. The latter will state their pay and other terms of their contract, e.g. not being paid if they are sick and that they can be laid off without any prior notice. Most of the time, agents are hired

---

\(^{\text{55}}\) They also need to bring along their passports to prove that they have the right to work in the UK.
through an agency for two weeks in which case they will not have to fill out paperwork as it has already been done by the agency. If agents were hired via an agency, the call centre will only have been informed the day before that the agent will come and work and which language(s) their new employee speaks and has been tested on, as they tend to be hired based on their language skills. It is unlikely that anyone from the call centre will have seen the new agents’ actual CV or know much else about their background.

The breakout area, where they are waiting for the training to begin, is an open space with a few chairs, tables and a pool table. From there, they can also see the call centre, an open floor office with sixty seats. To shorten the wait and make them feel welcome, a team leader may show them the kitchen, where they can make themselves a complimentary drink. Once the training starts, they will all go to a meeting room commonly referred to as ‘Taipei’. In Taipei, they will be introduced to the parent company behind the call centre and be ‘systems trained’. Systems training is an induction as to how to use the company’s internal software, an integral part of the call centre work. This session usually lasts three hours followed by an hour lunch break. After lunch, they are divided into groups for their campaign training. During the latter, they will be given their respective scripts and briefs including the targets they have to meet. The campaign training will last around 30 minutes and will take place either in the breakout area, in Taipei, or in the meeting room which is known as the ‘panic room’. The particularity of the panic room is that it is the only meeting room visible from the call centre itself allowing agents to observe what happens inside.

Once all agents have received their campaign training, a team leader will teach them so-called soft skills during the objection handling session. The 30-minute session, an introduction to tips and tricks on the phone and objection handling, constitutes the final unit before they hit the floor. Afterwards, they will be assigned a seat, start making their first calls and familiarise themselves with the system and script. At 5pm, everyone is shown by the team leader how to log out of the company’s internal computer software and sign off their timesheet. This will state that their training began

---

56 This is the synonym and not the real name of the meeting room to protect the identity of the company.
at 09:00, they had an hour unpaid lunch break and finished at 17:00. Agents will also have been told their starting time for the next morning, as this depends on which country they are calling.

From this short account of an agent’s first day, many questions emerge about call centre work such as:

• Is there a seating order and what is the layout of the call centre? (subsection 3.1.1)
• What are the hours of work? (subsection 3.1.2)
• What are timesheets and how are agents monitored electronically? (subsection 3.1.3)
• What is systems training? (subsection 3.1.4)
• What is campaign training? (subsection 3.1.5)
• What are the objection handling sessions? (subsection 3.1.6)
• How are non-work related activities managed during the work day? (subsection 3.1.7)
• How are these issues linked to standardisation and issues of control? (management policy) (subsection 3.1.8)
• Who are the people in the call centre? (section 3.2)

I go through these different aspects of call centre work in the same order as agents learn about them. That is, I start with the seating order and the layout of the call centre.

3.1.2 The seating order and layout of the call centre

Although the seating order in the call centre is not fixed and there is a first come first served policy, there are some general factors many of them unknown to the agents that determine where they can sit. These tend to be linked to the organisation’s desire to monitor agents (electronically), because of their i) newness as agents ii) (poor) reputation as an individual agent and therefore ensure that they do not sit on a workstation that has full internet access or that cannot be call monitored. Additionally, agents themselves have seating preferences and may for instance prefer sitting next to their peers and far away from the management. So after their initial first day, when the new
agents come in again in the morning and want to sit on their seat from the first day, they will realise that there is no fixed seating order, as someone might already be sitting in their ‘assigned seat’ from the previous day. In that case, a team leader will find them a new one, where they can sit for that day. After a while, new agents will understand that out of all the seats, only fifteen, those with full internet access, are assigned. These are reserved for team leaders, trusted agents who have been at the call centre for a long time and often work on research-based campaigns thus requiring this full access.

Another factor, which influences the seating order, is that out of the sixty seats only about twenty cannot be call monitored, a fact, which is not publicly known. According to the management, new agents and agents with a bad reputation should preferably not sit in these. The exception to this rule form the four so-called ‘naughty seats’ ⁵⁷ (Diagram 4.1, seats 37-40), where the management puts agents as an act of punishment, i.e. agents who have cheated or are considered lazy. Even though these seats cannot be call monitored, these agents are under constant observation, as they are sitting so close to the management that they not only can hear what they say on the phone but also see what they do on their screens.

⁵⁷ This is the management’s label.
Diagram 3.1 The layout of the call centre:

Key:

Seats (seats 41-48; 51-55) in bold / yellow = those computers have internet access

Seats (21-40) in italics / orange = they cannot be monitored

Back of the call centre

But there are other reasons unrelated to technology, why there is no set seating order.

Experienced agents who have not been assigned a workstation are used to sitting at a seat of their choice, although they are aware that they should not sit on seats with full Internet access, unless no others are available. It is also these agents who tend to complain if they are moved to
another seat and separated from their peers. Their unhappiness to do so becomes especially apparent to team leaders, who need to re-sit agents, when from time to time the management unexpectedly makes an effort to sit together agents who are working on the same campaign and/or same country. But this seating order does not usually last long. Since agents are moved onto different campaigns every day, it is too much hassle to constantly move everybody around. Moreover, as already mentioned, the policy is that new agents should sit neither at the back of the call centre nor where seats cannot be call monitored. If new agents start, other, often more trusted ones, are moved to the back and as a result, any previous seating order is jeopardised. Another hindrance for a potentially set seating order is that the majority of agents work part-time or for a short period, such as two weeks or even less\footnote{There are two reasons for this. The first is that the language(s) the agent calls in can determine the length of employment with certain languages being more in demand than others. Secondly, it can depend on the length of the campaign itself.}, which makes it difficult to integrate them into a permanent seating arrangement. Furthermore, occasionally, when the call centre operates at full capacity the management deliberately calls in more agents than there are seats. The assumption is that, similar to a booked flight, many people will not show up on the day, so most of the time, there will be enough seats for everyone and it is ensured that the call centre operates on full capacity every day. However, it can happen that at peak time more agents turn up than there are seats. With the first come first serve policy, for those who come late, when there are no seats, they will be sent back home unpaid.

Apart from these aspects controlled by the management, agents themselves also have seating preferences. For instance, some prefer sitting on the right hand of the call centre, because it is quieter with fewer rows and seats. Conversely, others favour the left side at the very back, to be the furthest possible away from the management. Headsets can also matter in their choice of seats, with many agents preferring workstations with older headsets over the newer ones. Regarding this, there have been complaints that the new ones are so thick that one cannot really chat anymore with one’s neighbour, since understanding them with the headsets on becomes difficult.
In summary, we have seen that even though the management uses strategies, many of them unknown to the agents, to manage the seating order to their liking, overall the seating order is far from being fixed and the following aspects affect the seating order:

- Newness of agents
- Reputation of agents
- Internet access
- Headphones
- Location of the seat (at the back or the right hand side) or next to the management
- Sitting next to peers
- Experience of agents
- Seats which can be call monitored
- First come, first served policy

Throughout the discussion, it has also emerged that the layout of the call centre seems to have an impact on the seating arrangement, such as sitting closer to the management or at the back. In the following, I will therefore explain the layout of the call centre in more detail. As shown on the floor plan above (diagram 3.1), it consists out of a large open plan office, a break out area, three meeting rooms, a kitchen and two toilets, all across one floor. Out of the three meeting rooms, strictly speaking only one is still used solely for this purpose: ‘the panic room’[^59], which is very small and does not have computers. It is also the only meeting room visible from the open plan office. Agents are often called in there for debriefs, which are carried out by team leaders if managers are concerned with the agents’ performance on a particular campaign. They thus tend to signal the particular manager’s ‘state of panic’ and this is probably the origin of the name. It can be a very calculated move for managers to call individual agents into the panic room or to have any kinds of meeting in there, as this is very visible for everyone and as a result, rumours often spread about why this happened.

[^59]: This is the managers’ term.
The other two meeting rooms ‘Taipei’ and ‘the bubble’\textsuperscript{60} have come to be used for other purposes over time. For instance, Taipei, the largest of the meeting rooms, has many computers and is, as explained above, mostly used for training. If the call centre has to operate at full capacity, it often happens that new or old agents sit in there to call. Conversely, the other much smaller meeting room next to Taipei, ‘the bubble’, is more exclusive. For instance, newer agents would never be allowed to sit in there, as these seats cannot be call monitored, all computers have full internet access and the management cannot see what is going on in the closed room far away and invisible from their seating rows. As a result, that room is reserved for the call monitor and a few trusted agents.

The break out area, which is right in front of these two meeting rooms, where new agents take a seat on their first day, is important for the socialisation between agents and while some callers sit there for lunch, others play pool there. Both activities offer opportunities to meet fellow callers. Although new agents are not obliged to lunch in the break out area and can sit in front of their workstations, the management encourages them to eat there to ensure their integration and socialisation into the call centre as a whole\textsuperscript{61}. Despite this policy, the issue is that there are only twenty seats in the break out area, but usually sixty agents. Therefore, managers split agents’ lunch break times depending on the region they are calling to ensure that this area does not get congested. In fact, in the next subsection, I explore how agents’ workdays including different lunch breaks, are organised and supervised.

\textbf{3.1.3 The hours of work}

As part of their systems training, agents will have been told that the call centre, on behalf of its external clients, offers project-based work. The latter entails contacting IT and business decision makers worldwide for marketing, customer service and sales purposes, with agents only calling businesses,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{60} The room is referred to as ‘bubble’, because when in there one is far away from the noise and stress of the open plan call centre, hence like in a bubble.

\textsuperscript{61} The call centre management encourages agents to identify with the call centre. For instance, it has its own Facebook page and arranges end of quarter parties.
\end{footnotesize}
never private households. As mentioned above, the working hours of the call centre are thus directed by the business working hours of the respective countries. Moreover, all call centre work is temporary and campaign/project based. None of the agents, including the team leaders, has a contract, but everyone is paid on an hourly basis, inclusive of holiday pay. Their hourly rate depends on their experience, how many languages they speak and whether they were recruited through an agency, ranging from £7.50 to £11.00 per hour plus incentives\(^{62}\). Agents will also have been informed that their working hours depend on which country they are calling and the month of the year.

The month of the year is important for the organisation of the call centre, as some periods of the year are busier than others and the busiest are usually what is known as the end of the quarter. From a business point of view, the calendar year is divided into four quarters (each quarter has three months, e.g. 1 Jan-31 March). A quarter functions as the time period within which campaigns have to be delivered by, out of an allocated quarterly budget. So at the end of the quarter, the call centre is very busy and agents are usually asked to work longer hours, as all campaigns must have been completed by the last day of the quarter. The other two factors that are decisive for agents’ hours of work is the country they are calling and the time zone within which that country is located. I explain below how this works out in practice. The normal working hours for the UK (GMT) are 09:00 - 17:00 Monday-Thursdays and 09:00 - 16:00 Friday, with the lunch break being an hour from 12:30 - 13:30. For agents calling for instance Germany, France or Italy, countries one hour ahead to the UK, the normal work hours would be Mondays - Thursdays 08:30 - 16:30 and Fridays 08:30-16:00, with a lunch hour from 12:00 - 13:00. In table 3.1 below I have summarised how the different time zones\(^{63}\), the month of the quarter along with the day can affect

\(^{62}\) Incentives may range from £1 a lead to £250, depending on the difficulty of the campaign.
\(^{63}\) Even though countries like Sweden, Spain and the Benelux countries are in the same time zone as Germany and France, each of them have a local particularity, which affects the calling hours, such as the siesta in Spain. In Scandinavia and Benelux, the office hours tend to be shorter, thus the calling time is also shorter.
the agents’ working hours\textsuperscript{64}. Generally, however, all agents should work seven hours a day, with an unpaid lunch break of 30 minutes to an hour and 20 minutes paid break, 10 minutes each morning and afternoon.

Table 3.1 Hours of work for agents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country and timezone</th>
<th>UK, Ireland, Portugal (GMT)</th>
<th>Germany, France, Italy (+1 hour)</th>
<th>Scandinavia and Benelux (+1 hour)</th>
<th>Spain (+1 hour)</th>
<th>Middle East +4 hours</th>
<th>Russia-Europe (+5 hours)</th>
<th>USA East Coast +6 hours</th>
<th>USA West Coast +8 hours</th>
<th>Turkey +2 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start</strong></td>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>08:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start time (end of quarter)</td>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>08:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Break time</strong></td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Time</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>12:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>12:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>12:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>12:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>12:30 - 13:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(end of quarter 30min)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Afternoon break time</strong></td>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finish</strong></td>
<td>17:00</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish time (end of quarter)</td>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finish time on Friday</strong></td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish time on Friday (end of quarter)</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the complications of the particular markets and time zones, let us see how the management monitors what times agents are working and where they are calling.

3.1.4 Monitoring agents electronically

There are three key ways that the management monitor agents electronically: electronic timesheets, statistics, and call outcomes.

\textsuperscript{64} Considering the ‘odd hours’ and early finishing times of some regions in this schedule, it is common for agents to switch between countries. For instance, if an agent calls Switzerland, which has a countrywide lunch break from 11:00-12:30 (GMT), they might be asked to call Germany or France during the lunch period in Switzerland. This ensures that the contact rate for agents does not drop from 12-12:30 (GMT), when it is difficult to get hold of anyone, as most companies in the target country, in this case Switzerland will be shut. Similarly, agents calling the Middle East may move to calling the UK after 15:30. Those calling the USA should start dialling after lunch and because of the time difference, tend to work on a UK campaign before lunch.
Electronic timesheets

Any information, such as at what time agents started and finished, the length of their lunch break, which campaigns they worked on that day, and which country they were calling is logged manually electronically in the form of timesheets by agents. For both the call centre as well as the agent this information is essential, as agents will be paid based on this information. With many taking advantage of their right to flexible hours, they may call to take time off the same day without prior notice. It might also occur that a client unexpectedly pulls a campaign, meaning that an agent will be transferred onto another campaign or market or even has to go home. Therefore, it is important for the call centre to keep a daily record of when the agent works and on which campaign.

Dial reports and statistics

During their training, agents will be told that they are expected to make at least 30 dials/hour and between 200-250/day. They will also be shown how to open a company record and then press the dial button (diagram 2.3), which allows them to dial the phone number displayed on the screen. This type of dialling is called “dialling through the system” as opposed to manual dialling that would involve typing each number individually on the keyboard.

Diagram 3.2 Dialling through the system

However, what they are not told is that whenever they press ‘dial’, there is an electronic record of this call. This information will be collected on a minute basis and then be available for the management in the form of statistics. These statistics such as the ‘dial sheet report’ show the management what the

65 This means that if an agent starts at 08:30 in the morning, by lunch they should have made at least 120 dials.
productivity is for each agent in terms of dials for each day. The screenshot (diagram 3.3) below for instance, provides an example of a dial sheet and it shows how agents dialled on 08.04.2010. The first agent made only 61 dials but got 7 leads, the concept of which is explained in the next section in more detail. For now, it should be sufficient to take it as an indicator of success that the agent managed to contact the right person seven times within a particular company and that person agreed to answer all the required questions for it to be a lead. If an agent does not hit the expected number of leads, they have to make this up in the number of their dials. So, for example, according to the diagram 3.3, the agent who dialled the hardest, with 122 calls, only made 3 leads.

**Diagram 3.3 Dial/lead statistics**

Even though agents are not told about this during the training, there are set times they are expected to be on the phone. Most new agents will ask their team leader after a day on the phone, how many seconds they should wait until they hang up to ensure that they hit the target. The management, nevertheless, will know how long they wait every time, because whenever the agent presses the dial button on the system, there will be a record of every call they make, the length of the conversation, and the phone number. The statistics are checked continuously for whether the agents’ times on the phone are the right ones. That is, for every call outcome, there is a standard
time agents should be on the phone. For instance, if they do not manage to get through to anyone, the call should be around 20-30 seconds long, whereas if they manage to reach the required person, calls should be around two to three minutes long minimum. If the ‘dial report’ shows that some calls have lasted less than 5 seconds, they are considered dummy calls. Similarly, if they claim to have had a lead but the call lasted less than two minutes, it will be considered a fake lead or at least be questioned. In fact, any assumptions about how long the call should last are estimated on the lengths of the script, with the belief that verbatim readings of any last at least two to three minutes and hence that any calls shorter than this must be a fake lead.

The statistics are also often used as an indicator whether it is necessary to monitor an individual’s calls. With only one call monitor and at peak times almost eighty people, it is impossible for the call monitor to listen to every single person. Thus, if an abnormality is spotted in the dial report, this person is asked to find out what is said on the phone. In this case, the call monitor listens to the individuals to ‘spot their mistakes’ and gives them tips as to how they can improve. In order to offer this kind of support, the management and call monitor need another kind of information that all new agents are taught to produce as part of the systems training, the ‘call outcomes’.

*Call outcomes*

Every time agents make a call, they are required to log the outcome of the call. There are different kinds of outcomes usually modelled on the campaign script, and they may vary accordingly. However, the following taken from a handout is used as a reference during the systems training.

---

66 ‘Dummy calls’ is a term used to refer to calls that agents make which show up on the system, but were not really calls. They may have pressed dial on the system just to make sure that the call did go through and it shows up in the overall stats and dial report. However, they did not speak to anyone and hung up after a few seconds before anyone could answer. Any call that is between one and five seconds long will usually be considered a dummy call and the exception to this is if they have dialled an invalid number.
Logging call outcomes correctly is essential for the call centre for two reasons, with the first being for the monitoring and supervision of agents. When managers access individual statistics, they look at the duration of the call and the outcome providing them with an idea of what happened on the phone, what kind of conversation it was and with whom they spoke in the company. In this sense, it is a tool for the management to see where problems might stem from, how agents are working and the quality of the data\footnote{For instance, whether agents require a new and fresh data list targeting different companies, industries or with contact names}. Since call outcomes are always logged in English, it also makes it possible to monitor calls and campaigns quickly per market, even if the campaign manager or team leader does not understand the language in which the call was conducted. Secondly, all the data accumulated in the dial report is then summarised, analysed, and sent back to the clients. They will take it as an indicator of how the specific product/service/event that agents are pitching is perceived by their target audience. This kind of information, collated for the client, will be based on a statistic: the ‘dial report’.

Table 3.2 Call outcomes explained:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call Outcome</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>When the contact agrees to all the questions on the script and his/her company matches the campaign criteria for the lead definition they must also agree to speak to the client after our initial call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Data</td>
<td>When the company details are incorrect or a duplicate company has been identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Back</td>
<td>You should only use this option when you speak to the contact directly. Call is used only when the contact him/herself asks you to call back another time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Outsourced</td>
<td>When the company does not have an IT Department or anyone else who makes IT decisions. Normally option is also valid when the company uses an external company to handle their IT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not contacted</td>
<td>This outcome can be used for all those various reasons when you do not get through to the contact. When a receptionist, colleague, or the PA of the contact asks you to call back that is considered as a Not Contacted, not Call Back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>This option should only be used when you speak to the correct contact (one of the target audience) and he/she refuses your offer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen out</td>
<td>When a company does not match the campaign criteria. (e.g. if employee size is out of range; the contact spoken to is not one of the Target Audience; etc.) no less than 100+ in UK- or NOT and IT Manager.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unfortunately, this particular agent has not always saved a call outcome after every call. However, it becomes clear from the report, that they only spoke once in that timeframe recorded to a target person and this call is logged as a ‘call back’. The other calls are identifiable as ‘Not-Contacted-Other’ from the length and from the logged call outcome. In this one case, no one picked up the phone from the switchboard, the target contact was on voicemail/out of the office, or the gatekeeper would not put the agent through. What, however, would be apparent for every manager and team leader from this dial report, is that all her calls are of the required length. The next step would be for the call monitor to understand from the conversations why she has not made a lead yet, whether it is a data problem or what she says or she has just been unlucky. Even though the detailed dial report is available for all the managers to look at, it is more common for them to rely on a shorter overview of all the statistics (diagram 3.5 and diagram 3.6). This shorter kind of statistical display provides not only an overview of all the agents’ results in the call centre, it is also quicker to access than the individual dial report. This tool
thus makes it possible to monitor individual agents and entire campaign performances on a minute-by-minute basis, both in terms of numbers of dials and contents, with the statistics appearing in the following format.

Diagram 3.5 Overview of dials and leads per agent 1
Both the dial report and the overview of the statistics are generated over the web browser, as the entire call centre software and the backup process is internet based. Therefore, managers and team leaders only need to press the refresh button on the Internet Explorer in order to reload the website with the overview and an update every minute. It is worth noting that since everything is generated and saved over the internet, it is a slow process to open any kind of statistics from the system and on days when the speed of the internet (bandwidth) is slow, this takes even longer. Out of all the statistics, the general overview (diagram 3.5) is the quickest, thus it is the most frequently used by the management and team leaders. On the other hand, it may take almost three minutes to open the individual dial report with all the outcomes for the entire day and consequently, it is less often accessed by the management. Nonetheless, team leaders and the call monitor will have to look at both since it is also their job to find out if agents are struggling and why as well as reporting this back to the campaign manager. If, despite the team leaders and call monitor’s support, the agents’ performance does not improve after a few days, they are likely to be laid off.
However, agents are not left in the dark about how many dials and leads they are making. This information is available in limited form to them. During systems training, they are shown how they can check their own statistics in terms of dials and leads and those of other people on their campaign. In effect, they are advised to check their dials so that they can regulate themselves as to whether they need to work harder or are on track. So far, I have mentioned some important bits that new agents will have been taught as part of their systems training on the first day. In the next subsection, I explore the remaining aspects on which they will be trained.

### 3.1.5 Systems training

I have already explained some parts of the systems training, such as how to log on (electronic timesheets), how to dial, the need to save a call outcome after every dial and also how to access one's own statistics. The other part of the systems training is about how to process electronically all the information agents obtain over the phone, for there is a particular way information needs to be entered into the call centre’s database or that of the client. As agents call up companies, they often come across completely new information or that which needs to be amended, such as contacts listed in the database having left the company or being listed incorrectly. For instance, Silvio Berlusconi was listed in the Italian database as an IT Manager which is most likely wrong. Therefore, they are required to add new names, email or mailing addresses to the database as well as to update the existing ones. In the brief given to agents, there is a small section (document 3.1) outlining the call centre's policy of updating and adding records.

**Document 3.1 Adding and updating records**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adding and updating records:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ensure you keep the integrity of the database and update any fields that may require updating (e.g. new address, new contact, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When adding new information select a new line NEVER delete old information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New agents will be shown how to create a new record as part of the systems training or how to log that a person does not work at that company anymore.
They will further be warned not to delete any old information as there are logs to which information is added every time so that it can be traced back to the agent who made those changes. It will be made clear that no field should ever be blank and for every contact, they have to obtain the person’s first name, surname, job title, email address and the company’s address.

According to the management, it is important to spend considerable time on training new agents on data entry as they are more likely to meet their targets with better data on their database.

In summary, we have seen how instances of call centre work are controlled and able to be monitored. As part of this effort, agents are taught data entry and log call outcomes so that statistics can be produced and the standardisation in these cases serves different purposes. One is to ensure the numerical side is met, because agents have to hit a specific number of dials and leads per day, which were sold to the client. Secondly, the accuracy of the information entered by the agent, such as that regarding call outcomes or updating of the database, needs to follow a standardised procedure to guarantee the quality of the leads and information sent to the client. Thirdly, many agents will not have been hired directly through the call centre but through an agency (see section 3.1.1.) and thus are unpredictable not necessarily reliable strangers, who can come from anywhere in the world and often call in languages no one from the management speaks. A system is thus needed to monitor them and make the information they elicit and enter intelligible for everyone. In the next subsection, I explore the kinds of targets, they have to meet and what is meant to be achieved through the agents’ calls. Both will be taught as part of their campaign training, which follows the systems training.

3.1.6 Campaign training

On behalf of a variety of different clients, often well-known multinational blue chip companies, the call centre offers project based work to agents to contact IT and business decision makers of businesses in countries across the globe for: marketing, customer and sales purpose(s). These processes usually

---

68 The data entry process tends to be controlled and checked by quality control since this information will be exported directly from the database into Excel and sent to the client.
involve the IT or business decision maker agreeing to receive an email offering clients’ complimentary reports, webinars or details about events. If an IT or business decision maker has been identified as interested in the product, answers all the questions on the script, which is signed off by the client, and agrees to be called back by them, this is logged as a ‘lead’. The agents contact IT and business decision makers through a variety of calling types. One of these is ‘cold calling’, by which the agent contacts organisations randomly from the call centre or the clients’ database. The call centre also uses ‘warm data’, which means that the client provides the call centre with a list of companies, which may already be customers or have expressed an interest in certain products by registering online or through magazines. This interest is then ‘nurtured’ by the call centre until the moment, if successful, that it reaches the sales point when it is passed to the client.

When considering the ‘sales funnel’ as shown in diagram 3.6, most opportunities identified by the agent are at the top of and thus represent the very early stages that can potentially lead to a sale for the client. This interest tends to be generated if a person in the company agrees to receive an email about a certain product. The call centre also offers campaigns, which are further down the funnel and thus also more expensive for the client such as ‘BANT campaigns’ and ‘nurturing’.

---

69 The sales funnel is a term used by the management. A graphic demonstration of the sales tunnel is often printed on briefs, when agents are explained nurturing campaigns and the difference between: BANT, Engagement, and Nurturing leads.
A BANT (Budget, Authority, Need, Timeframe) campaign is different from an Engagement campaign as the agent is looking for companies, which have specific needs thus allowing the call centre’s client to sell his products. That is, for a BANT lead, the agent needs to talk to a decision maker who has a certain type of project within a certain timeframe with a budget. Nurturing is then the next step from a BANT, which involves nurturing those leads over longer periods of time by providing them trials and exclusive information to maintain their interest and engage them until they are ready to buy. At that point, the lead is passed back to the client. Apart from explaining to agents the processes that occur behind lead generation, during the campaign training they will also be provided with a script (document 3.2), which contains a text/message that the client wants the agents to read verbatim to a targeted person. This has an introduction to the contact, introduction of the client and the pitch itself, with latter being the key part of that message. In chapter 4, 5, and 6, I will return to this specific script and discuss how the management have written it as well as how it is then used and interpreted by the team leaders and agents.
As all agents use the same pitch, it is also easier to monitor and assess them in terms of targets and performance. In fact, their calls tend to be call monitored to ensure that they ask all the required questions outlined in the pitch and provide all the content written on the script. In the next subsection, I look at the final part of the training, which is about ‘objection handling’ and is designed to equip agents with what the management calls ‘soft skills’ for working on the phone.

### 3.1.7 Objection handling session

The management is aware that call centre work is language work and that the agents’ wording is important as it can influence the flow of a conversation and the outcome. One word in some cases can change everything. For that reason, for BANT, Engagement and Nurturing campaigns agents are taught strategies, phrases, words, and ways of talking they should either use or avoid.

Generally, the purpose of objection handling training is to provide agents with tips and tricks to ensure that the conversation ends in their favour, including how to get past the gatekeeper. Moreover, they may learn about strategies for engaging IT Managers into a natural conversation off a standardised script and getting answers to questions, thus revealing that they are eliciting information. To this end, they will be given examples of certain phrases that they can integrate into their standardised campaign script to

---

70 The calls themselves are only sometimes recorded.
71 They are told, for instance, to avoid closed questions.
personalise it. For every country, there are further different additional strategies, key words, and phrases that are thought to work and are summarised for agents on special hand-outs. So far, I have described how agents’ workdays are organised, what their job entails and how their work performance is monitored. But what about non-work activities? Are agents allowed to pursue non-work activities during the working hours and is this monitored? This will be the focus in the next subsection.

3.1.8 Regulation and non-regulation of non-work activities during working hours

While agents are working on the phone, there are plenty of instances, when their work may not take up all their concentration and they can do something else at the same time. For example, when they are on hold waiting to be connected they may get bored. Some of the unrelated work activities allowed during the working hours will be covered during training, others will be found out by observing peers. In general, the policy in this respect is relatively relaxed. As long as it does not affect their work performance and productivity, agents are free to talk to their peers while they are working, read newspapers or books, play with their smartphones or eat\textsuperscript{72}.

\textsuperscript{72} They can also always get up whenever they want to make themselves a coffee or go to the toilet.
In spite of this relaxed policy, many agents choose to chat with their colleagues without being audible. With almost sixty people, sitting closely together in a small space talking simultaneously, noise is a constant issue and nuisance for agents. Sometimes, the call centre is so noisy that they struggle to understand the other person on the line\(^\text{73}\). Consequently, they prefer chatting via text or hand-written notes using the paper notepad that everyone is required to have in front of them. The notes can then be exchanged in between calls. Since most agents possess a smartphone, they may also text or message each other using Facebook or Blackberry IMS. While agents are allowed to surf on the internet through their smartphones at any time, as aforementioned, there is no full-internet access during working hours on their computers. For example, YouTube is blocked, but they often find a way around this\(^\text{74}\). The management is aware of this, and is why, unknown to them, they recently introduced software for viewing agents’ screens remotely, but like the dial report this method is very slow. Hence, by the time a manager finally views the agent’s screen he/she will have already closed or YouTube or hidden it by minimising it.

\(^{73}\) Agents often realise from personal experience that if they are talking to a person on the phone and a colleague sitting next to them is discussing personal issues, this can be irritating to the other person on the phone and also for them.

\(^{74}\) When agents want to be particularly daring, they may call each other with the companies’ phone, by dialling manually. This is impossible to spot from the statistics and only the call monitor can discover this by listening to conversations.
After their initial training day, agents will soon discover that there is no dress code as such in the call centre. It is so uncommon for anyone to wear a suit that if someone wears one, it is assumed that either they have a job interview or they must be new. In view of the absence of a dress code, it can be considered a tolerant workplace, wardrobe-wise. Many agents take advantage of this policy by cross-dressing, wearing religious clothing or items that express their affiliation to a youth subculture, such as punk. Besides the seating order, the liberal dress code is another case of non-standardisation. However, unlike the seating order, the casual dress code also applies to the managers. They, like the agents choose to dress casually, wearing just jeans and a T-shirt. Having had little interaction with managers, it can be thus difficult to tell for a new agent who is a manager and the safest way is to check whether if he/she sits in one of the managerial rows. In the next subsection, I explore in more detail who the call centre managers are and how the communication between them and team leaders/agents occurs.

3.1.9 Summary of the description of the work day

The description of the first day of a typical new call centre agent has suggested that despite call centres’ reputation in the literature as standardised workplaces, standardisation attempts in the organisation have only been partially successful. One of the reasons for this is that the organisation struggles with a number of unpredictable elements, including the:

i) flexibility of the work itself such as its project based nature and dependency on the clients’ wishes

ii) the sheer range of countries called and thus the language(s) needed to be spoken by agents

iii) the limited number of available seats

iv) the need for spontaneous recruitment to keep up with clients’ wishes and agents’ leaving

v) the nature of cold-calling including potential volatility in agents’ performance and contact rate.
The management tries to minimise or at least control some of them (see table 3.3 below) to the best of their ability.

**Table 3.3 Some aspects of call centre work and the organisational means of control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of call centre work</th>
<th>Standardisation</th>
<th>Means of control</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Updating the database</strong></td>
<td>Standardised steps of data entry</td>
<td>Software program to view screens</td>
<td>The more accurate, the database the higher probability of making leads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internal software records any changes</td>
<td>Lead with correct info send to the client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dials/Leads</strong></td>
<td>There is a set time agents are supposed to spend according to the different call outcome</td>
<td>Dial sheet/Dial report</td>
<td>Makes agent’s performance measurable and comparable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Call monitoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pitch</strong></td>
<td>Pitch the message approved by the client</td>
<td>Call monitoring</td>
<td>Agents need to say the same message to make statistics accurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Call Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>There is a right call outcome for every call made and this should be logged</td>
<td>Dial report</td>
<td>So that statistics can be produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work hours</strong></td>
<td>There is a timetable agents’ day should follow</td>
<td>Timesheet</td>
<td>Transient nature of work and campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internal software</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dial report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
standardisation. Therefore, drawing on the trope of a typical new agent on their first day in the call centre, this section has not only conveyed a picture of what call centre work entails, but also of the mix of standardisation, unpredictability and relaxation that appears to characterise CallCentral. Yet, although we have heard of the ‘management’, ‘team leaders’ and ‘agents’, like a typical new agent we still know little about them. The next section thus focuses more closely on them and the relationships between the different hierarchies before exploring how individuals talk about the tensions described so far.

3.2 The organisation and its workers

In this part, my description of the organisation is more centred on the wider aspects of organisational culture agents will get to know after their initial induction. From a typical agent’s point of view, I introduce the key people in the organisation. Previously, it also emerged that a major point of uncertainty affecting the call centre’s working stems from the recruitment of agents and for this reason, I explore how our new agent could have been hired.

3.2.1 The call centre’s three levels of management

As new agents will learn very quickly after their first day, the term ‘management’ can be ambiguous and contradictory, as the roles are not clearly assigned and often overlap. This causes constant conflict and tension among the different hierarchies and individual managers. What agents will assume initially is that the management consists only of the people who sit in the management rows, with these being: the call centre supervisor, four campaign managers and two Quality Control (QC) checkers. What the new agents will, not be told, however, is that on paper, the hierarchy is flat and that everyone in the managerial row has the same boss, the Operations manager, who is located on the floor above the call centre. Nevertheless, in practice, as new agents will learn quickly by observing the management row, some managers are more senior and thus more powerful than others.
Seniority in this case means that one has more influence on the general company management upstairs\textsuperscript{75}.

In the remainder of this section, I explain the three levels of management in the call centre, which work top down. The first is the general management of the company, which is located on the top floor above the call centre and is thus often referred to as ‘upstairs’. Then there is the local call centre management, ‘downstairs’, that consists of the people in the management rows as identified above and finally, there is a group of team leaders, who manage things on behalf of the managers on the call centre floor. My description will follow this hierarchy and start with the top level.

\textsuperscript{75} In this case, the general company management refers to the operations manager, the managing director, and sales.
Diagram 3.8 The overall hierarchy

‘Upstairs’:
Managing director of DAB Europe

‘Downstairs in the call centre:
The call centre manager
Campaign Manager Anwar
Campaign Manager Jenny
Campaign manager Laura

Sales

QC Person 1
QC Person 2
Temporary team leaders
Qualitative team leader
Team leader nurturing
General Team leader
The senior company management: ‘upstairs’

After a few days, new agents will realise that there is another part of the organisation ‘upstairs’, which is closely related to the call centre. Most likely, on their way to the call centre in the morning, they will have seen people in the lift with special electronic passes allowing them to go to the floor above. Moreover, the campaign managers will vanish from time to time for meetings for several hours through a backdoor in the call centre and afterwards they may be talking about “what upstairs says”. Another more direct point of contact may arise, if the call centre is operating at full capacity and some agents need to sit upstairs because there are no more seats. At that moment, when they go ‘upstairs’ with a team leader in a group, they will come to understand the meaning of this notion. They will then realise that on the third floor the European headquarters of an American multinational corporation is located with a very glossy reception that stands in stark contrast to the entrance to the call centre.

The call centre managers tend to use ‘upstairs’ as a collective term to refer to the senior management of the company, including the: managing director, operations manager, and the sales division. Since the call centre management is only a division of the larger company, at 18:00 every day the campaign managers have to go ‘upstairs’ to face senior management. As part of those meetings, they have to justify the lead results, statistics, and performance of every single agent across all campaigns.

The call centre management

The call centre management consists first of all of Jack, who is the call centre supervisor, who recruits new agents, carries out initial introductions to agents’ training, looks after their timesheets, does their payrolls, liaises with the agencies and any other human resources related matter. In addition to

---

76 When it comes to moving agents upstairs, most agents do not want to go, preferring to stay in the main call centre and they say that they feel unwanted upstairs. Moreover, no one will interact with them, they are constantly watched and stared at. Consequently, they cannot do things they are allowed to downstairs such as reading the newspaper or using their phone for texting or surfing on the web while on hold. New agents will also be told by their peers that if anyone applies from within the call centre on a permanent position ‘upstairs’, they will never be considered simply because they come from downstairs. It does not matter whether they hold the most amazing qualifications and experience possible. If anyone can ever move ‘upstairs’, which happens very rarely, it is the call centre managers.
him, there are four campaign managers: Valentina, Laura, Jenny, and Anwar. As campaign managers, they manage around ten campaigns each in terms of costs, agents’ allocations, and database use. Out of all of these the managers, Jenny is by far the most senior and powerful person in the call centre as she is also very influential with ‘upstairs’. There are several reasons for this. Unlike other call centre managers, she started out as a normal agent many years ago and worked her way to the top of the hierarchy. Therefore, upstairs believes that she has a very good grasp of the call centre and its workers. As a result, she manages not only the trickiest and most expensive nurturing and BANT campaigns, but also the biggest campaigns in terms of agents and lead targets. However, the campaign managers’ responsibility is not limited to campaign management, they also need to co-ordinate database and network projects with the other company owned call centres around the globe on a daily basis. Perhaps not surprisingly, they are constantly in meetings, and do not have much time to deal with agents on the floor and instead, they delegate the everyday business of running campaigns to the team leaders. In fact, new agents will rarely talk to their campaign managers, with the vast amount of their upward communication being with the team leaders. In the last subsection, I introduce the role of the team leader and talk about the role I used to have within the organisation.

The management on the floor - the team leaders

New agents will have had their first contact with a team leader on their first day during the systems training. Generally, there are only two team leaders - the team leader for nurturing campaigns, Gavin, and Ada, the team leader for the rest of the campaigns, but the number may vary according to the month of the year (some quarters are busier than others). At peak times, two temporary team leaders may be hired to deal with the amount of campaigns and people. Ada will not only do systems training on the agents’ first day, but also the campaign training, debriefs, looking after dials and stats and more generally liaises between the campaign manager and agents. She will always be the agent’s first point of contact in most matters. Agents are unlikely to meet Gavin, as he looks after the few callers who are on the high-end nurturing campaigns. That is, he sits with the few selected people working on
these campaigns and the call monitor in the small meeting room, ‘the bubble’, having little interaction with the main call centre. In the next two paragraphs, I briefly discuss the role I used to have within the organisation as a team leader.

My role
Even though I call it ‘team leading’, my position was never clearly defined. Having spent many years on the phone on a variety of campaigns (nurturing, engagement and BANT), I was asked to look after the qualitative side of campaigns (a quality team leader) and to team lead. As a team leader, I tended to oversee nurturing and BANT campaigns including campaign briefings and debriefings. But more importantly, my role was to act as the fire brigade within the call centre. By listening to agents’ conversations, I tried to find out why some agents were not performing (in terms of leads and dials). So, first, I had to identify what went wrong on the phone and then address this with them on an individual basis or as a group. During an agent’s training day, the team leader will have told the agent about my role. Nevertheless, despite making clear that all calls are monitored and that if they cheat it will come out, Ada will have also told them that my job is also to help and support them. Thus, if they are struggling they should approach me and I will try to help them. Overall, my role can be summarised as ensuring that agents have received all the required training and remedial support they can get in becoming successful, skilled, and versatile agents. The approach benefits the call centre as it ensures optimising its resources and costs. With the campaign managers being always busy and impossible for agents to approach, my role was to act as a contact person and agents could approach me regarding any issues or concerns they had and would not dare to bring up. I would then present their issues to campaign managers and resolve for them. It was also well-known among call centre agents - and I often reminded them - that I would be interested in their experiences as part

---

77 Even though I have to report back to the respective campaign manager, I also have the leeway to help out agents more discreetly, often with the help of the team leader. Agents can come to see me in the ‘bubble’ where no one will see them.

78 It is rather expensive for the call centre to hire a new agent and train them again instead of working with one who is struggling to make sure he/she hits the target.
of my research project and if they wanted to be interviewed I would be happy
to do so.

As a team leader, I often witnessed that the relationship between the
managers and the team leaders is marked by the strains of stress and
pressure. In fact, it is not unheard of that some campaign managers crack
under the pressure from upstairs and ad hoc daily deadlines, and start
shouting\textsuperscript{79} at team leaders\textsuperscript{80}. At the end of a quarter, I have also often heard
Jenny yell through the phone at someone upstairs. Yelling by some seems to
form part of a display of their investment and commitment to the
organisation, but is also emblematic of the system at its limits. That is, this
form of reaction from some people is understandable given the everyday
work pressure and the complaints sent down the management hierarchy
focus on two instances. The first is why certain agents have not dialled
enough or generated the required amount of leads\textsuperscript{81}. This may be due to
unpredictable factors such as a poor campaign being sold by sales or the bad
data agents are calling from, which may even be admitted behind closed
doors to team leaders by campaign managers. Secondly, team leaders can
also be expected to be shouted at when they approach some of the campaign
managers about a question, even though they can see that they are super
busy\textsuperscript{82}. In that case, they will have to be firm and bear being shouted at until
they can finally ask their question. The campaign manager usually answers:
“Why are you asking me? The answer is in the script.” However, team leaders
become immune to the yelling because both campaign manager and team
leaders know that sometimes no one in the call centre can be blamed for the
lack of success.

\textsuperscript{79} It may also be related to personality. I have never heard, for instance, Anwar or Laura yell
at anybody.

\textsuperscript{80} Another factor which complicates the relationship between managers and team leaders is
that the latter tend to side with the agents, for not only do they have temporary contracts but
also all of them are on the phone themselves. Some of my interviewees noted positively that
even though they can see that team leaders are under a lot of pressure they never channel
this down to the agents, unlike the managers.

\textsuperscript{81} The difference between campaign managers and team leaders is that at the end of the day
the former are responsible for any targets and lead delivery.

\textsuperscript{82} From the managers and team leaders’ point of view, the call centre is a constant place of
madness as everybody is always under pressure, understaffed, stressed and no one exactly
knows what is going on. From my time as an agent, I remember that I did not feel the stress
until I became team leader. As a team leader, I was sometimes so busy and stressed with
people talking to me simultaneously that I wanted to go outside, scream, and come back.
In summary, we have seen how the call centre’s management consists of three levels, which are the senior management of the company, the call centre management with its supervisor and campaigns managers, and the team leaders on the call centre floor. Decisions and pressure tend to come from the top level and are then channelled down to the campaign managers and team leaders. As the chain of command has its way to work down, there is also a structure in place from the bottom up. That is, team leaders have to report to the campaign managers about all the issues on the campaign and how they are planning to solve them. They, in turn, then have to face the senior management upstairs at the end of every day justifying the progress of the campaigns. As a result, there are ongoing constant tensions between the management levels, usually owing to conflict about how to manage and control the unpredictable elements, but also the agents themselves.

### 3.2.3 The agents: the language workers

Having explored the different management roles within the organisation, I now look at the agents. We have already learnt that our new agent will most likely be bilingual or even multilingual and labelled as a speaker of a specific language with no interest otherwise in who he is or his CV. I have further suggested throughout section 3.1 that the shortage of certain language speakers can be a problem and is one of the elements that can cause unpredictability. So let us see why this is the case.

As mentioned earlier, all agents will have been hired over the phone on a project basis. In this case, project based means that a blue chip company asks the call centre to generate a specific number of leads per country within a required period of time. The targets will vary per country depending on the client and their selected target audience ranging from one country to a global campaign. Generally, the lead targets for Germany, the UK, and France tend to be the highest overall targets, as ‘the big three’ represent the biggest and most lucrative markets. However, the focus on them is not always guaranteed, as it often depends on the clients’ wishes. Since most clients want to target a high number of different markets (e.g. Europe, the Middle East, and Asia) often with small targets, such as 30, this means that an agent is only needed for two days with a daily target of 15 and hence the call centre is
continuously in need of different language speakers on a short-term basis. Consequently, the recruitment of language speakers represents a constant issue contributing significantly to any uncertainty in the call centre, being about whether the speaker of the language needed can be found and the campaign can take place. In fact, the country and the language factor make an important difference when it comes to recruitment, as I explain in the following.

The document below is a typical advertisement that the call centre places online to recruit for instance European language speakers.

**Document 3.3  Generic job advertisement used for the recruitment of new agents (European languages) online**

| **Experience:** |
| Business to Customer telephone experiences with a basic IT and/or business knowledge is desirable. |
| Business to Business telephone experience with a solid understanding of IT and/or business knowledge is desirable. |
| You should be target driven, and have the ability to converse confidently at decision-maker level, have an excellent telephone manner, be customer focused, and have a good sense of humour. |

| **Languages:** |
| We currently require new agents with the following European languages: English, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Russian, Polish, German, Dutch, Flemish, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. |

This job advertisement shows that the call centre management distinguishes between work experience (e.g. IT or call centre) and language knowledge requirements, with the former being desirable but the latter are mandatory. Thus, according to the job advert, the only requirement agents need to fulfil is specific language knowledge of a European language and the importance of this is highly visible from the heading “languages”. In spite of the language component of the job, the advert does not clarify what kind of proficiency new agents should possess in those languages, for it is merely states “new agents with the following European languages are required”. That is, it could be a reference to native, proficient second language speakers or intermediate speakers and further it does not specify whether new agents merely need oral skills in the specific language or need to be literate, too. Moreover, although the advertisement suggests that speakers of all those European languages are equally required, new agents will realise, once they apply or join, that hiring and employment practices differ from language to language and that certain languages are more in demand and more valued than others.
They will learn that the demand for language speakers and work offered depends on the country’s degree of technologisation, multilingualism, the size of its population and the numbers of language speakers in London. For instance, with the UK, France and Germany being the biggest markets and most populous countries in Europe, it tends to be comparatively easy to recruit native English, French and to a lesser extent German speakers. However, the other most targeted regions in Europe, Scandinavia and the Benelux countries, do not only have a comparatively small populations, but also small immigrant communities in London. As a result, the call centre always struggles to recruit speakers of: Dutch, Flemish and Scandinavian languages. As it is very difficult to find European Dutch speakers, it is not uncommon to hire the more easily hireable Afrikaans speakers instead. It is further interesting to note that on the job advertisement a distinction is made between “Flemish” and “Dutch” speakers. In my experience, in practice the call centre is in no position to hire for both language and simply treats them as the same. Very often, there is such a high demand for both Dutch and Scandinavian languages that the management makes an announcement asking whether any agent has friends who speak these who might be interested in working at the call centre. With continuously high targets for the Netherlands and Dutch (Flemish) speaking regions in Belgium, the call centre in particular values Dutch (Flemish) speakers. The former tend to be even more highly valued than speakers of Italian and Spanish since when it comes to the IT market and expenditure, these countries are not as developed or lucrative as Scandinavia, Benelux or the ‘big three’. Moreover, with significant immigrant Spanish and Italian speaking populations in London, it is easy to find agents for smaller targets and campaigns. Switzerland is the other country that tends to be targeted a lot by the call centre in addition to the big three, Benelux and Scandinavia. The fact that Switzerland and Belgium are both officially multilingual adds a lot of complication to the calling and recruitment process. Ideally, an agent is found who speaks all the languages required per country, which is almost impossible to find. Thus, as I will show in the next subsection, if an agent is recruited who speaks

---

83 Technologisation stands for the reliance and expenditure companies in those countries spend on software and hardware.
Flemish/French for Belgium or German/French\textsuperscript{84} for the case of Switzerland, he/she will be worth a lot for the call centre since they will save a lot of hassle, time, and money for the organisation. Overall, we can thus summarise all the relevant factors using the following diagram.

Diagram 3.9 Factors affecting the value of languages in the call centre

So how does the call centre solve the constant issue around recruitment of language speakers? In the following, I highlight three solutions.

\textbf{Hiring multilingual speakers}

At first sight, multilingual agents offer a potential solution to some of the recruitment issues mentioned above. With only a limited number of seats and a certain number of campaigns having to be completed within a quarter, multilingual agents\textsuperscript{85} can not only help to increase the efficiency and productivity of the call centre but increase the certainty that several campaigns can take place. The higher the number of languages spoken per seat, the higher the productivity and efficiency of the call centre, as multilingual agents can work on several campaigns and be employed over a longer period of time. The call centre can thus hire fewer people and saves money on training and recruitment. This is particularly true of multilingual agents who are Dutch/French or French/German speakers. The reason why

\textsuperscript{84} With the Italian part of Switzerland only constituting a very small part of Switzerland, provided the agent speaks German and French, Italian tends to be ignored by the call centre.

\textsuperscript{85} An agent’s pay varies according to which languages and at which level he/she speaks all of them.
these language combinations are favoured is that the call centre constantly targets, in particular, two multilingual countries, Belgium and Switzerland. If, for instance, Belgium has to be called, a difficulty arises from the fact that unless a bilingual caller is found, all the data and lists will have to be carefully sourced according to language between two agents. However, employing two agents for a small target rather than one bilingual represents a more expensive and inefficient solution\textsuperscript{86}. Agents speaking French/German are also similarly highly sought after, not only because of the massive German and French campaigns, but also in view of the split Swiss market between German and French speakers. Of a similar value is an agent who is fluent in Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian. However, the call centre is not able to find enough bilinguals through job ads. So how else can multilingual agents be recruited?

**Recruiting through a language agency**

Besides hiring directly, the call centre often uses a language agency and with seventy per cent of agents coming from an agency, there is a very good chance that our new agent will also have been recruited externally. In this case, the call centre will have to pay £15 an hour on top of the normal wages to employ him/her, thus making it a costly affair. This will also have implications for the other agents on the same campaign, as the budget will be tighter and hence there will be more pressure to hit the target. But, at the same time, the call centre constantly needs foreign language speakers and at very short notice. In other words, despite the cost involved, it is often easier to rely on language agencies, which have an army of foreign language speakers who are passed around London’s call centres\textsuperscript{87}. However, this constant availability of language workers does not represent the only motivation for hiring externally. Another advantage is that the agency will have asked the applicants to come to their office to complete a written and spoken language

\textsuperscript{86} Following this logic, an agent who is fluent in Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian will be of more value than an Italian/Spanish bilingual. The reason is that it is very easy to find bilinguals with Italian and Spanish and the two respective countries are less lucrative to target for blue chip companies.

\textsuperscript{87} There are many agents working with an agency who come back to the call centre at regular intervals. They have told me that the agency sends them around other call centres always on short-term projects.
test to ensure they are indeed intermediate/fluent/native in the language(s) claimed\textsuperscript{88}. Conversely, the call centre does not have the same resources to carry out similar kinds of language testing as language agencies. From the call centre’s side, the need for any kind of testing will only arise if the new agent is not a ‘native speaker’\textsuperscript{89}. In this case, a phone interview will be arranged for him/her during which a proficient speaker from the call centre will test their language skills orally\textsuperscript{90}.

Even though relying on language agencies can be expensive, it can also prove to be more convenient for the call centre. The benefits and drawbacks of the two different recruitment methods from its point of view can be summarised in the following table.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Direct Recruitment} & \textbf{Disadvantages} & \textbf{Recruitment through an agency} & \textbf{Advantages} \\
\hline
Lower cost & Difficulty to assess language speakers abilities & “Tested and qualified” language speakers & Expensive (15 pounds an hour per agent) \\
\hline
Less pressure on campaigns because of lower costs & Little commitment from direct agents & Constant supply of different kinds of language speakers short term and short notice & Hiring expensive agents through an agency may affect specific campaigns budgets, and targets. With many agents from agencies, the overall budget will be more constrained with more pressure and less leeway on all agents to hit targets \\
\hline
With nature of projects, difficult to attract (minority) language speakers short term on a short notice & New agents from agencies more committed and reliable & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Advantages and disadvantages of direct vs. agency recruitment}
\end{table}

Since agency callers are more expensive new agents from them will understand very quickly that they will also be the first to be put on hold if there is less work unless they do exceptionally well performance-wise. The fact whether an agent has been employed externally or directly, thus has a

\textsuperscript{88} However, one of the problems with this process is that agencies are not very interested in testing the agent’s language knowledge and with the potential to make a lot of money with those agents, they tend to send almost everyone to the call centre.

\textsuperscript{89} Someone is considered a ‘native speaker’, if their CV states that they have lived in a country for a few years where the target country’s language is spoken as an official language or their parents originate from there.

\textsuperscript{90} There is no standardised procedure for language testing. The questions are left to the discretion of the tester and tend to be ad hoc.
direct bearing on his/her value\textsuperscript{91} to the organisation more than their individual background or skills. There is, however, a final means for the call centre to get around the shortage issue and the expensive language agencies, which I explain next.

\textbf{Recruiting semi-multilingual and semi-fluent speakers thanks to a translated script}

In theory, bi/multilingualism means that agents are fluent in several languages required in the call centre to the level that they can have business related conversations on the phone. In practice, however, the notion of bi/multilingualism is heavily affected by the knowledge that scripts reduce the need for fluent or native speakers. Out of the different kinds of campaigns, engagement ones tend to be the most standardised and script based. Conversely, on high-end campaigns, such as BANT and nurturing, agents will be expected to have in depth technical conversations, improvise and talk ‘off the scripts’ with clients expecting high quality leads. Hence, native speakers are preferred as callers for those kinds of campaigns over multilingual agents. On BANT campaigns, occasionally exceptions are made if the call centre cannot find a native speaker of the required language but the client cannot know of this. But no exceptions are made on nurturing campaigns as these are the call centre’s flagship ones.

Most agents hired directly are recruited on the basis of being ‘native speakers’. Many of these new agents might have beginner or intermediate knowledge of another language(s), which the managers will be aware of from their CVs. If the opportunity arises, for instance, at the end of quarter or when it would otherwise be too expensive to hire people externally or internally speaking those languages, new agents may be then asked to call in the other language they speak as ‘semi-fluent’ speakers with a translated script. However, as explained earlier the call centre finds it difficult to assess proficiency level, hence it is preferred to put non-native speakers on engagement campaigns. Although those agents will work in two languages in the end, they will not be paid more as they were not hired as such through a

\textsuperscript{91} Many current agents originally joined the call centre via an agency. There is an agreement between the call centre and agency that if the agents work three months at the call centre they can be employed directly.
language agency. Since new agents who are semi-fluent in languages like Dutch, Scandinavian languages, German and French are more valuable to the call centre, potentially increasing the certainty that campaigns can take place in those highly sought after target markets, the management will ensure that those agents are always working. This means that occasionally they may work on English speaking campaigns, even if their English is hardly good enough for calling just to prevent them from looking for another job. Therefore, although call centre work is officially temporary, in fact, it can be almost on a permanent basis if one speaks the right language(s).

In conclusion, we have seen that recruitment and qualifications for the job are primarily language based. As emerged from the job advertisement, knowledge of a sought after language is the key skill agents should have in order to qualify for a position in the call centre. However, recruitment is market oriented and as a result not all languages or bilingualism are valued equally. Moreover, although the call centre is officially advocating a policy of multilingualism, in practice this is limited to engagement campaigns. As these are cheap, standardised, and scripted, even agents with beginner and intermediate target language knowledge will be offered the opportunity to call in those languages, but they will not be paid accordingly. In this section, we have seen the importance of the script that seems to resolve the constant shortage of language speakers and the problem of relying on expensive language agencies. Nevertheless, the clients must not know this, because they will have been promised ‘native speakers’ only on their campaigns. Building on the extracts from interviews with agents, I probe how agents talk about their call centre experience in relation to the mix of standardisation, unpredictability, and relaxation and why they are working there.

3.3 The agents’ views

Through the eyes of a typical new agent, we have seen how, so far, by whom and on what terms agents get recruited and socialised into the different work routines. The objective of this section is to introduce the agents I interviewed. As the call centre preferably recruits multilingual agents, many of my interviewees come from countries outside Britain or have a migration
background. I have divided them into three different types of agents: - new\textsuperscript{92}, current\textsuperscript{93} and former agents\textsuperscript{94} (cf. chapter 2). Out of the 60 interviews I conducted, 40 of these were with current and new agents. With an average capacity of 60 seats, the sample of my interviewees can thus be considered representative despite the high turnover. In fact, over 20 agents of the current/new agents I interviewed did not work at the call centre six months later. Most of the agents are in the same age category, in their twenties, and have received some form of higher education (see table in Appendix D). This fact is surprising given that the call centre makes no mention of qualifications as part of the recruitment or on the job advertisement and using agents’ explanations of why they work in a call centre should shed some light on this matter.

3.3.1 Agents’ rationales for call centre work

During the interviews, agents provided a number of explanations of how they came to accept a position in the call centre and a common emerging theme appeared to be that it represented their first job opportunity in London, so they accepted the job to support themselves while living there. This was for instance the scenario for Gavin a few years ago:

\textbf{Extract 3.1}

“I was doing some TV and stuff and it was all brilliant, and I left my agent and I was living in Manchester. And I suddenly thought, ‘Oh dear, now what do I do?’ And made the decision that it was time to come to London, so I came down to London but obviously I didn’t have anything down here so I needed work. I’d never done anything to do with call centres or anything like that, and in fact phone calls used to petrify me, like to my very core, even making mobile phone calls and all calls at all. And the first job that I came across when I was in London was a charity call centre job. And then I did that for a while, then left, then went into hardcore telesales. Left that because it was a bit too high pressure, because I was doing other stuff outside of work. And then, to cut a long story even longer, I ended up getting a call from an agency, I was with an agency, and they said there’s a place at (CallCentral), walked in the front door, and the rest, as they say, is history.” \textit{(Gavin, team leader)}

While Gavin’s move to London was due to the greater job opportunities in his field there, some of my interviewees pointed out that they moved to London

\textsuperscript{92} New agents are those who have been less than three weeks at the call centre.
\textsuperscript{93} Current agents are those who have been longer than three weeks at the call centre.
\textsuperscript{94} Former agents are those who no longer work at the call centre.
to improve their English. Once in London, faced with a low command of English, they were looking for their first professional experience in a foreign country. Their best chance for a job would be one, which allowed them to use their native language. This kind of reasoning is expressed for instance by Claudia, an Italian national and Piia, a native Finn.

**Extract 3.2**

“Well initially my experience, I started working in a call centre because I came to London and I didn’t speak English properly so I was looking for a job that allowed me to speak Italian. So that was my first experience.” *(Claudia, former team leader)*

**Extract 3.3**

“Well actually I was looking for… to get any job where I can speak Finnish at first, and I, I just gave it a shot.” *(Piia, former team leader)*

Linda suggests that this kind of rationale is common among callers. She proposes that the call centre represents the first step in the trajectory of “London socialisation”.

**Extract 3.4**

JW: You mentioned that you thought that working in the call centre is the first part of London socialisation
L: Yeah it is
JW: Can you expand on that? What do you mean?
L: I think especially people are new in the country or in a city it’s kind of like… it’s one of these places where you should were you are kind of like it’s beginner it’s one of these places like… let’s say you are from Spain, you come here and you know some English but your English is maybe not good enough for you to really work in another you have to be… You need to improve your language skills… Well then you can always call Spain with your ((laughs)). It’s kind of like it’s yeah… it’s kind of like are slowly getting into this city, but still you have these bonds with your country of origin and it’s also a whole thing going into work and you have to, you wake up, and you are commuting to work (...) like other people living here and then you know you are working.” *(Linda, current agent)*

According to Linda, when foreigners like Monika and Piia come to London they are beginners in several respects. Most likely, their level of English will be low, they might not know the way around the city, and their non-UK based education and any previous professional experiences might not be recognised here either. Their only “skill” likely to be valued by the local economy at that moment is their expertise in a foreign language as a native speaker and the first and easiest place to find that recognises this expertise and allows its commodification is the call centre. In this sense, the call centre can represent
the first step in becoming a real ‘Londoner’ and for Linda, call centre work is also highly symbolic for this particular beginner state. That is, the moment the individual takes on the call centre work, he/she has not completely arrived in London yet, as through the call centre one still has “bonds with your country of origin”. One is, however, “slowly getting into this city”. But according to her statement truly arriving in London implies leaving the call centre. She therefore considers the call centre job as temporary and its main functions are to serve as an introduction to life in London and to provide an income. In fact, her reference to the call centre as “it’s one of these places” might even be interpreted as demeaning. Her orientation and perception towards call centre work is thus a very different one from Gavin’s. For Gavin, the call centre is the first part of his day, which allows him to pursue his dream in acting and TV for the rest. Conversely, Linda conceptualises call centres as a first milestone of a bigger plan, that is, finding a real job and thereby becoming a Londoner.

Roberto’s story on the whole appears to reiterate Linda’s notion of call centres and Londoner socialisation. He came to London to improve his English and the first job he could find here was in a call centre. He considers it the first stop on the road to a more qualified job.

**Extract 3.5**

“Basically it was because I moved to London about couple of years ago, the reason why I work in this call centre, because when I moved to London my first idea was to, just improve my English and then try to find a more qualified job. (...) To be honest, the first thing that I managed to get was a job in a call centre, so this is why, and that’s why I’m still, I’m still working in here.”  

(Roberto, current agent)

Even though in extract 3.5, Roberto does not state that he joined the call centre to improve his English, later during the interview, he acknowledges that as a result of the call centre experience he “learned how to improve my listening in English with English accent speaker”. Tina and Miguel also mention the theme of learning as an incentive to join the call centre. Both found that the call centre provided them with a welcomed opportunity to practise their English. Tina, a native Mandarin speaker, joined the call centre as an English caller. Since the call centre has very few campaigns in Mandarin, the position first and foremost represented an opportunity for her to improve and practise her English.
Extract 3.6

“Nothing encouraged me to work ((laughs)) in a call centre. I just at that time I’m looking for a job and the economic crisis just started and I can’t find any other better jobs, but I think call centre might be a good opportunity for me to practise my English and get some money, so that’s why (...).”

(Tina, former agent)

In retrospect, she finds “I improved a lot on my oral English, just because of the job, and I think that one year it’s very valuable for me, yes”. Miguel, who is calling in Spanish and English goes even further and likens the call centre work to a free language course where you get paid to attend:

Extract 3.7

“So even if I thought that I was good at speaking, of course I think that I improve that a little bit more. My English for example, one of the greatest things about this job is that it gave me the opportunity to call in English as well, and I know that my first calls weren’t so good. As is they are now, for example, I really think that in the month and a half I improve a lot in English. Now I feel a lot more confident when I call in English. And that’s really good, that’s really, really good; it’s like to take a course in which you are being paid instead of paying.”

(Miguel, current agent)

So, the opportunity to improve one’s language skills appears to represent another strong motivation for accepting this position.

According to my observations, scripts were also crucial, as they enabled the callers with little proficiency in English to communicate adequately in this language. Agents who were beginners or intermediate speakers of languages, always asked for a translated script before they called and found the standardised scripts very helpful. Out of my interviewees, for instance, Claudia points out that a standardised English language script was important for her English language learning experience.

Extract 3.8

“Well, because I’m not in... well I used a lot of these scripts for one reason and one reason only because, when I started, obviously my level of English was so low...”

(Claudia, former team leader)

Linnea says the same for learning German.

Extract 3.9

It [the script] has been very helpful, especially for me who doesn’t... I mean I understand a lot of German but I can’t get the main grammar perfect. I mean, you know, I’m very communicative, you know, I’m just talking blah-blah-blah-blah-blah but as you know I know I say lots... make loads of mistakes and people are laughing at the end of the line but, you know, still I get the message, you know, the message is going through and I think the script has been very helpful for me, yes, of course it
has been well written. (...) I’m improving my German which is something that I really like (...) Maybe I have to do more German experience [calling in German] that I can, you know, have some reference, I can have the German experience in London. I think if you speak German you have loads of possibilities (...) you have possibilities in London and it’s just a bigger market isn’t it than if you only speak Swedish.”

(Linnea, current agent)

The scenario of having to say more or less the same thing 250 times a day based on a script to complete strangers can thus allow agents to practise their language skills. Most likely, as Claudia’s and Linnea’s comments indicate, the script will play a role in this, as it provides the agents with a footing on which they can base their speech, especially if they are not sure about the grammar or vocabulary. The call centre, hence also, functions as a step and temporary resource that allows one to improve one’s language skills, especially in English. Coming to the call centre to develop one’s language skills thus represents another orientation for agents.

The interviewees emphasise the benefit of the temporary non-committing nature of the job. This outlook allows agents to look for another more qualified job or to study while earning some money, as Vanessa, an Austrian caller, clearly states:

Extract 3.10

“To be honest: I needed the money. I had another job eight weeks ago but the company went into administration and to do something in the meanwhile I went to work in the call centre. I had done before so I thought to myself that’s good so I can do it again for a few weeks. I don’t know anyone who has worked in the call centre over seven years. Most of the time people only stay there for a few months as they are looking for another job.”

(Vanessa, current agent)

Similarly, Michael, an American, observes that:

Extract 3.11

“It’s [call centre] a very nice working environment. It is what it is, I think it’s a pretty crappy job but someone’s got to do it, but I think that it’s... I enjoy working here much better than I have at other places. And it’s... it makes a big difference since obviously most of us are trying for other careers; it really helps to not be so stressed out because then I can look for work outside.”

(Michael, new agent)

According to my interviewees, this lack of commitment required is also signalled by the flexible. For instance, Ian notes how this helped him to set up his own business:
Extract 3.12

“I was grateful that I had somewhere that would allow me to be flexible at first ’cause, you know, I was kind of in the process of writing my own business and it allowed me to work three days a week.”

(Ian, current agent)

Similarly, Rabeya one of four agents who are still in full-time education appreciates the set working hours since she can focus on other things once she leaves the call centre.

Extract 3.13

“The 9-5 thing is very good for me so I don’t... after five o’clock I don’t think about the job, I just go and do my own thing and then that’s the good thing about it.”

(Rabeya, current agent)

For Rabeya and Ian, as with Gavin, the call centre is again only the first part of the day, whereas the rest of their day and time is dedicated to their other interests such as university and setting up their own business.

In this subsection, we have seen that agents display varying attitudes, perception, and commitment towards their workplace. However, all my informants agree that this work is only temporary and emphasise that they do not want to do it for a long time. Nevertheless, they differ in their visualisation of call centre work in respect to their longer plans. Linda’s notion of London socialisation suggests that she believes that an individual’s stay at the call centre is going to be very short. Equally, Vanessa and Tina just see this job as a springboard to another potentially better life. Although Rabeya, Ian and Gavin think the same way, their view of call centre work is perhaps a little bit more long term as their career objectives cannot be realised as quickly as that of other agents. Thus, their conceptualisation of a workday always includes the call centre in the morning as a steady element.

Diagram 3.10 Linda’s ‘Becoming a Londoner’

The call centre job Finding a “real job”

Coming to London Having arrived in London
Taking into account what agents said about their orientation towards the call centre, agents like Linda may have two browsers open during the work hours. On one browser they are working, but on the other they pursue their own interests/careers. In fact, I have often observed people applying online for other jobs while working and talking to (potential) leads. More generally, based on the extracts, it is possible to argue that my interviewees come from three different specific groups. The first group are newcomers to London, the others are newcomers to the job market and finally there are individuals who are in limbo between different careers or jobs. Agents’ perception of a call centre job is that it is not only easy to obtain, but does not require long-term commitment on their part. Another important attraction is that all the work is purely language based. In fact, the call centre job is a position where little if any previous knowledge is required, but it still allows the applicant to ‘learn’ and improve his/her skills largely thanks to the script. Overall, for every agent I interviewed, the call centre represented a transitional moment in their lives and it was just a means to an end in a transnational environment. I have often heard Jenny commenting on the fact, that the management is aware of this situation and prefers hiring graduates. They can do this because thanks to London’s thirty university colleges and its position as an economic hub, there is a constant reliable supply of highly educated multilinguals, who in their search for a real job are happy to work in a call centre located in central London for a short while.
## 3.3.2 Agents’ experience of the call centre

In the next part, I will look at how agents talk about their perception of call centre work and throughout this subsection, I point out how agents are divided in their assessment. They also mention inherent tensions that seem related to the unpredictability aspect discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2.

Overall, agents’ comments about their experiences are very mixed. Several newer agents such as Tom, Jonas and Michael, not having been at the call centre for a long time, started the interview explaining that considering the awful reputation of call centres, they were positively surprised. For instance, Tom, a new agent says:

**Extract 3.14**

“When I got the job I googled like call centre and like all these forums better don’t do it all these reasons. People complaining and I thought based on the work I made the worst choice in my life. But the good thing is that we are not selling anything and I think that’s crucial. If I was having to sell things to people, I don’t think I could do it. I think I would walk out on day one. But it’s a nice atmosphere, surprisingly sometimes. (...) I think they kind of leisurely and relaxed atmosphere and attitude a lot of people have in the way that you can talk, you can, you feel like you don’t have that much pressure whereas some call centres I know that they are literally standing over you like watching every move you make so I think compared to most other call centres. I got the lucky one here yeah.”  

*(Tom, new agent)*

Equally, Jonas, another new agent tells me:

**Extract 3.15**

“To be honest I am positively surprised because in Germany call centre work has a very bad reputation. I have heard a lot of bad accounts about call centre, some of them frightening where one asks himself whether people are still free to walk around. But I was positively surprised about the atmosphere that prevails here. It’s very pleasant and one is not put under too much pressure. This is very different from other job experience I had in England where there was consistent unbearable pressure. Thus, overall I find it very pleasant here.”  

*(Jonas, new agent)*

Despite the contrasts of image and the better reality, Tom feels stigmatised even in the call centre building:

**Extract 3.16**

“There’s a taboo with call centres you know because it’s stigmatised and it’s not on the same level as a traffic warden or anything like that. But when you say you work at the call centre it’s something like... you know when you are standing in the lift and those with the special card go to the fourth floor [people going ‘upstairs’] or whatever and when you press level two you’ll notice that everyone knows exactly
where you are going and what you are doing. There is an automatic ... that is why I take the stairs now because I refuse to do it.” (Tom, new agent)

Although not all my interviewees agree with Tom’s and Jonas’s positive experiences of call centre work, many would probably say that they have not worked there long enough to fully appreciate the issues and tensions. Nevertheless, most interviewees have negative and positive experiences to share.

Vanessa, a current agent is positive in her assessment and notes:

**Extract 3.17**

“Yes, in relation to call centres, I find it more relaxed here. I have worked in quite a few call centres and if you are even a few minutes late, you are already in big trouble asking them why you are late. Here I find it more relaxed, I think it’s because there is always a coming and going. That’s why I think the atmosphere is more, I mean more relaxed. Out of all the call centres I have been to, this I think is the best one, I have to say.” (Vanessa, current agent)

Also David appreciates certain freedoms here, which he does not take for granted:

**Extract 3.18**

“I have heard of a lot of place to put up our hands to go to the toilet, and you’re not allowed to go and make a cup of tea like. We have it pretty relaxed here. If I needed a break someone is really pissing me off I could get up and go to the toilet or go and make a cup of tea and just relax (...) we’ve got three pool tables, which is quite good socially which keeps even new people from going on like ‘Come on let’s play!’ And you get to know people. So everyone is pretty they get along pretty well considering this mixed nationalities and everything.” (David, current agent)

Perhaps Tom summarises agents’ appreciation of the social terms that prevail in the call centre best:

**Extract 3.19**

“I have bad days and good days. I think yeah it’s good. It’s fine. There are definitely worse jobs out there and seen as a social term, I’m not complaining and [...] Here, I think they do it quite well. They have got a good mix you have got an honest you got an hour lunch break which I find perfectly reasonable they are quite flexible with time off (with you not giving too much notice) and you know they got things to do like the pool table, and lots of places to sit and chat, so really here there is not that much I can think of would make it that much better in terms of the job. What it is and yeah because with so many horror stories of call centres, I just think that I would be pushing it if I complain about this one.” (Tom, new agent)

So agents are largely appreciative of the personal space they are allowed, enabling them to work on good social, informal and flexible terms. But
simultaneously it seems from the comments that there are complaints about the lack of individuality allowed. This was expressed in terms of i) the relationship between managers and agents, ii) yelling and iii) the overt inflexible nature of targets. There are critical accounts about the professional relationships between managers and agents. In fact, the three agents Linda, Andreas, and Barbara, complain specifically about the treatment they have received by the managers in the call centre.

**Extract 3.20**

“It’s the attitude that the managers have to us workers that is a really important thing because sometimes I feel it is a little bit like big fish in a small pond syndrome like we sometimes I feel like I’m back to a school class and I’m like when did this happen. (...) You don’t feel respected there. I’m sure it’s because most people there are like those who work there the callers inevitably they don’t respect it either. It’s just a work you do for money really to pay your bills. You don’t put an effort into it.”

*(Linda, current agent)*

Linda’s comment evokes a lack of respect and loss of individuality as characteristic and she is aware that not only managers can be blamed for this but also the agents themselves. She deems the lack of respect from the managers is linked to agents’ professional indifference. In her opinion, both attitudes are problematic. Marta shares Linda’s concern and suggests that that loss of individuality may be a universal characteristic of call centres.

**Extract 3.21**

“It might be it is just general things not only about call centres, but I think, I think are treated like, you know, like some kind of chickens, you are on a chicken farm, and I think a bit more individual approach, if possible, because well-being of your, of your workers is very important, so I think.”

*(Marta, former agent)*

Interestingly, Andreas is more positive towards call centres. While defending the call centre, he, however also says that one stops being a human person in there and instead, one is turned into a caged chicken in a battery farm having no freedom or agency left on a professional level.

**Extract 3.22**

“There’s nothing wrong with call centres, I really like call centres and and but it’s it’s just I wouldn’t be able because it’s not in my in my, you know, I need more responsibility, I need my freedom, and I felt like a chicken in a cage and somebody, you know, stands behind you and waits with a whip and and you know (...) it’s really tough and that stresses you out.”

*(Andreas, former agent)*
Gavin extends this notion of the call centre as a cage, for call centres sometimes remind him of human factories or prisons:

**Extract 3.23**

“It’s a bit like a human factory or a human prison I think [...] You are strapped to a you know, you’re not in a cell but you’re strapped to a desk and a computer and a target list of calls.”  
*(Gavin, team leader)*

Claudia and Tina complain that yelling by the managers also accompanies the constant pressure and stress. Claudia, for instance replies in response to my question about the atmosphere:

**Extract 3.24**

“Atmosphere? Maybe someone should shout less. Sometimes the level of stress is touchable from outside the door. Really, you can think this is not good day already from the beginning.”  
*(Claudia, former team leader)*

Claudia seems to blame one manager, “someone” in particular. However, the fact that she mentions stress in the next sentence seems to indicate that for her shouting and yelling are stress related. Equally, her response suggests that she perceives this kind of behaviour from managers as unprofessional and because of one manager’s stress the overall mood in the call centre can become stress loaded and negative. Tina also remembers incidents of yelling she experienced by some managers:

**Extract 3.25**

“We had two, three, two or three different managers when I was working there; some of them are very relaxed... one of them are very good, nice I think to me personally, but the other managers are very – how I say – distant and they try to discipline this call centre, which makes this job... it’s already very... under too much pressure but if the manager keep pushing around and yelling at me, yelling at you in the call centre, you won’t feel very good about it. And you just... the only thing you want to do is ‘When can I leave this place?’ So it’s not very helpful, it doesn’t help things (...).”  
*(Tina, former agent)*

But she is very careful to distinguish between some managers who were kind to her and others who kept yelling at her only to put her even under more pressure\(^\text{95}\). But Tina also said the following seemingly contradicting her

\(^\text{95}\) From my own experience, I remember there being two different kinds of yelling from the managers’ side. One is task related yelling, which is part of a display, which is impersonal and always occurs after the managers themselves have been yelled at from upstairs. The other kind is relational yelling and occurs after managers simply have had enough of what they perceive as an excessive concentration of agents on their personal interests during work hours. The relational yelling often forms part of a disciplining from the management.
previous negative statement about the call centre. That is, her statement indicates that some tension exists in the nature of call centre work that may explain these rather contrastive experiences.

**Extract 3.26**

“Well the atmosphere I would say when I first went in, went to the call centre, the manager was very relaxed and I don’t think there was too... there is too much pressure there, maybe I’m just too... not very sensitive, but I hear, I heard people complaining about the pressure, the targets and so on. Well maybe different people perceive in different ways. (...) I made friends in the call centre, and yeah, actually it’s a very relaxed environment.”

*(Tina, former agent)*

Many comment on their continuous struggle with targets. Eight informants evoked the imagery of the human vs. machine to capture this fight on the phone. Remarkably enough, not a single interviewee complained about the existence of scripts.

Miguel summarises this constant struggle and contradiction for agents working in a standardised environment rather poignantly:

**Extract 3.27**

“An outbound call centre needs the people because they have this human skill that sometimes accomplish like going through a gatekeeper, for example. But the ironic thing is that, at the same time, the longer you spend in a call centre, the less human skills you can show at work because your tone of voice sooner or later start to get a bit more monotonous maybe”

*(Miguel, current agent)*

Miguel laments that all targets and numbers set by the management are the same across campaigns and that they do not take account of either humans or the unpredictability factor. For Miguel, it is part of human nature that you cannot always hit your targets despite your best attempts.

**Extract 3.28**

“Of course you have your off days, and those days you... I think you are like fighting an already lost fight which is fighting against, for example, your target which is for people making enough calls, because you cannot cheat that system; you are trying to fight a number. And if you’re trying to fight emotions I guess, numbers, you’re going to lose. And, again, that’s your off days, your bad days. I think that in the long term you discover that even your managers know that we are, you know, human beings; we cannot always perform in the same way, but sometimes when you’re calling you forget that and you want to perform with everything there, you want to perform always as your best day.”

*(Miguel, current agent)*

He does not blame the management for their approach, but thinks that they are aware of this issue. Conversely, David complains that it is not right that
people are punished for not hitting their targets on BANT campaigns, which is sometimes beyond the individual’s control.

**Extract 3.29**

“But people who need a project for their campaign and then they obviously if people ain’t got projects there is nothing really they can’t just make one up. So to give them a target and to be punished for not reaching that target when it’s out of their hands I think it’s a bit harsh.”

*(David, current agent)*

Claudia found that this constant pressure left its marks on people by “burning them out”. From her experience, “there is a moment in which you say, yeah, look I can’t touch the phone, or I am not going to reach these targets anymore, you know”. If this happens at the end of the quarter, when there is a lot of focus on targets, those callers may be told off by a team leader. In the face of this pressure, new agents may find it surprising that targets are openly mocked and criticised. Some instances of this are even posted on the call centre’s *Facebook* website. Below there is a photo of what one of the individual ‘reminder’ agents wrote to another that mocks the target centeredness of the call centre. It reads: Remember only to count the minutes to the break or end of workday 😊 *(German: Denk nur daran, die Minuten zur Pause/zum Feierabend zu zählen)*.

**Image 3.2 Mocking of targets**

![Image of a handwritten note mocking targets](image)

The other photo is taken from a board that is usually used for agents to update leads/dials on a daily basis. Instead a number of agents sitting close to it used their names and super hero images to mock each other and call centre
work. A clear reference to the standardised call centre work is “Robot Charles-The Iron Man”.

**Image 3.3 Super heroes on the target boards**

In summary in this section, I have argued that my interviewees have an ambivalent experience of the call centre. On the one hand, they appreciate the social terms and the personal freedoms they enjoy while working, on the other hand, they are critical of the professional task that the work entails. But on the whole, they try to make the most of their time there, for instance, by improving their language skills. In any case, all my interviewees thought that they would only stay at the call centre for a very short time.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how some elements of call centre work, but not all, are characterised by a high degree of unpredictability. This stems from a range of factors such as:

i) the limited number of available seats (subsection 3.1.2)

ii) the nature of cold-calling including potential volatility in agents’ performance and contact rate (subsection 3.1.4)

iii) flexibility of the work itself such as its project based nature and dependency on the clients’ wishes (subsection 3.1.6)

iv) the sheer range of countries called and language(s) thus needed to be spoken by agents (section 3.2)

v) the need for spontaneous recruitment to keep up with clients’ wishes and agents leaving (section 3.2)

There are other elements in the call centre that are not ‘unpredictable’, but in spite of this agents are allowed and even encouraged to avoid standardisation
and be more flexible. The script emerges as being a means for the management to regain some control over this unpredictability and to standardise some aspects of call centre work so that they can manage them.

At the same time, there seems to be a desire by the management to make the call centre’s organisation, including agents’ performance: calculable, controllable, predictable, and efficient. Without the standardised scripts, it would not be possible to have statistics or monitor agents’ performance on the phone. Furthermore, many would not only find it impossible to work in the call centre, because they do not have an IT background, but also because their language skills might not be deemed sufficient. Equally, there could be no ‘objection handling sessions’ without scripts. The script can thus be imagined as a spider whose web covers the various different aspects of the call centre described in this chapter.

**Diagram 3.12 The scripts and their relation to different aspects of call centre work**

Overall, it seems that the script underpins most of the organisation. In fact, Jenny, the senior campaign manager, used to remind the team leaders that “we always need to make sure that we all sing from the same hymn sheet” when talking to the agents. Therefore one of the key implications of this
chapters’ description is the importance of the script to the organisation. However, at the same time, the question emerges why do agents on the one hand consider the call centre such a relaxed place (e.g. extracts 3.13 and 3.24) but also stressful and inflexible (e.g. extracts 3.21 and 3.23)? Furthermore, why are agents so critical of targets but not of scripts? Describing a day from the point of view of a new agent is too limited to understand the organisation and its tensions or managers’, team leaders’ and agents’ perception of standardisation. Thus, in view of the scripts’ centrality for the organisation, in the next three chapters I will follow ‘the career of a script’ as a window to understanding and examining these contradictions, tensions, and standardisation practices.
Chapter 4

The first stage of the script’s career:  
The production of ‘the master script’

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how scripts underpin many aspects within the call centre’s organisation and are an agreed reference point for: i) communication between agents and people on the phone, ii) training of new and current agents, iii) qualitative and quantitative measurement (generation of statistics) of the agent and script’s successes, iv) hiring practices of new agents and v) agents’ pay and bonus structures. More specifically, it seems possible to state that scripts have a powerful regulatory effect which includes:

i) Qualitative and quantitative measurement

Scripts provide a benchmark with which an agent’s performance is compared to and based on, for instance, in terms of targets, time spent talking to someone etc.

ii) Normative Framing

Scripts provide a framework within which conversations need to be produced. Agents’ practices can then be labelled correct or incorrect.

In view of scripts’ apparent importance for the organisation and regulation of people’s activities, in this and the next two chapters I will investigate their role across the organisation in more detail. In chapter 3 (‘the objection handling session’ subsection 3.1.7) we saw that although all participants within the call centre are at some stage involved with scripts, they are interpreted and viewed differently depending on the hierarchical position of the observer. This fact will set the premise of this chapter and for an investigation of ‘the career of a script’ from its production to its enactment and use on the phone.

I will address this issue by drawing on two separate analytical approaches towards the study of text. Methodologically speaking, their benefit for this study lies in the fact that they do not limit their analytical foci
to a particular event, but suggest following a particular text, a script in this case, across “chains or trajectories of events” (Wortham 2005: 95) or “sequences of action” (Smith 2001: 160).

The first approach stems from what has become known as institutional ethnography (IE) developed by sociologist Dorothy Smith. In spite of texts’ ubiquitous presence, according to Smith (2001: 169), they are rarely the focus of organisational or institutional studies. Her approach is the exception to this and her writings focus on the architectural importance of texts for institutions and organisations (cf. Smith 2001: 160). She shows how texts are central for the “objectification of organisations” and as such “mediate, regulate, and authorise people’s activities within institutions” (Smith 2001: 159). As she states:

“Texts and documents make possible the appearance of the same set of words, numbers or images in multiple local sites, however differently they may be read and taken up. They provide for the standardized recognisability of people’s doings as organisational or institutional as well as for their co-ordination across multiple local settings and times. (...) They are to be seen as they enter into people’s local practices of writing, drawing, reading, looking and so on. They must be examined as they co-ordinate people’s activities. (...) From a particular text, it is possible to trace sequences of action through the institutional paths, identifying where and how the institutional texts produce the standardized controls of everyday work activities” (Smith 2001: 160).

More generally, Smith aims to show how texts co-ordinate (increasingly globalised) ‘relations of ruling’ (Smith 2001: 191). As Farrell summarises: “the work of the text, then, is to organise people and practices so that certain kinds of preferred social relationships are established and maintained despite the fact that participants live many thousands of kilometres apart and operate in a wide variety of institutional settings. Another way of saying this is that the text shapes who we can be and what we can do, regardless of where we live and work” (2001: 206). However, relations of ruling do not just consist of domination or hegemony but a multifaceted area of co-ordinated activities, grounded on print and computer technologies of print. This research about the purposes of writing in the Smithian tradition argues that through texts, member’s behaviours come to be considered as organisational. Moreover, Anderson (2004) notes: “Unlike spoken conversation, written texts are capable of being transported to other times and places, enabling organisations to retain meanings beyond the immediate setting. Writing texts
(policies, memos etc.) are genres through which organizational action is played out and that provide the possibility for future action to be interpreted as the action of someone performing an organisational role” (Anderson 2004: 145). Although the issue of ruling relations is not the main focus of this and the next two chapters, I still draw on her approach as it not only locates texts at the heart of the institution, but recommends “tracing sequences of action through the institutional paths” (Smith 2001: 160). In particular, the latter should be helpful in understanding scripts across the call centre.

At the same time, there is a problem with institutional ethnography in that it considers texts as relatively static, as Farrell (2009: 191) notes from a literacy perspective. Regarding this, Smith does not address how texts themselves are transformed and become contextualised. Thereby she ignores recent research (e.g. Silverstein and Urban 1996; Wortham 2005; Barber 2007) on ‘transposition’ that highlights the fluidity of language and texts and their subsequent transformation through participants across textual trajectories. In this theory of ‘transposition’, texts are considered to be transportable textual ‘projectiles’, some of which may or may not be projected across events. Furthermore, using the notion of ‘entextualisation’ and ‘recontextualisation’ this approach draws attention to: a) the processes and participants who select and design the parts of the texts that can travel to successive settings and b) how texts can be transformed as they travel through, for instance, interpretation of participants and users (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 9). Thus, to examine the script’s textual trajectory and the transformation of the text itself through participants and their interpretation work, my analytical framework further employs the theory of transposition, envisioning the career of a script to consist of several event chains during which it becomes en- and re-contextualised.

I also draw on Bauman’s chapter entitled “The Transformations of the Word in the Production of Mexican Festival Drama” in Silverstein and Urban’s (1996) influential volume on the study of transposition. Although Bauman uses the theory of transposition to problematise the traditional notion of performance and to reconceptualise it, his approach is still useful for the following reasons. Thematically, he explores how participants orient to a script in terms of authoritativeness and how this has a formative impact
on the transformation of text; in his case as part of the reanimation that occurs in the production of the performance. To examine the participants’ orientations towards the script, Bauman studies the production processes from script to performance since he argues these constitute an “accessible and circumscribed field of practice in which a controlled investigation of recontextualisation of the word may be carried out” (Bauman 1996: 302). To do so, he conducts a close investigation of each stage that traces the phase structure of the reanimation process.

Following Bauman’s approach, the career of a script from production to its final enactment equally constitutes an accessible and circumscribed field of practice. His framework allows not only the study of the call centre, but also an investigation into the role of scripts, participants’ orientation towards them and their transformation as texts. Accordingly, I trace the phases in the script’s transformation process, stage by stage, from its production to its subsequent distribution and adaptation across several briefings to agents’ enactment of it on the phone. Careful analysis of each successive phase is crucial, as Bauman (1996: 302) points out, so as to understand the overall process and orientations to the text by the various participants at the different levels of the hierarchy by which the process is affected. In subsection 4.1.4, I further elaborate on the theory of transposition and its relevance for my analysis.

On another level, Bauman’s chapter is relevant as he discusses participants’ orientations towards the script as a standard, which leads us back to the issue of scripts and standardisation raised in the first chapter. In fact, if we remember the literature’s position (chapter 1) that the script is iconic and representative of standardisation practices in call centres, following its career should thus also help to address the bigger issue of standardisation and participants’ perceptions towards such practices in the call centre.

Overall, in this chapter, I argue that scripts and by extension standardisation mean different things to the participants as we descend the organisation’s hierarchy, thus reflecting their divergent orientations. At the top level of the organisation, the management ‘upstairs’ has what seems like a rather ‘purist’ view of scripts and standardisation, and they implement a
number of measures internally, such as requiring agents to read them word by word or the production of regulatory statistics to meet the client’s demands for transparency. Conversely, the management downstairs and the team leaders have a more pragmatic view of scripts and standardisation, whereby they understand them to be a kind of ‘skeleton’ or ‘scaffolding’ that provides a structure that needs to be followed and is required for regulatory purposes. At the same time, however, they are thought to allow flexibility and require improvisation around their structure in the form of hand-written personal notes on them. On the whole, while upstairs is opposed to any written or oral changes on the script that was sold to the client, downstairs is not. In sum, differences in the meaning of the script and of standardisation are manifested in: i) in the different orientations that participants display towards the script across the different activities and stages of its career and ii) in the resulting transformations that it undergoes. At a more general level, these transformations in the text and the different orientations show that the literature’s view of standardisation as a homogenous concept is too simple.

The main question this and the next two chapters seek to address is:

- How does a script manage to travel across the stages involved in the campaign it belongs to?

To facilitate this, I explore the following sub-questions:

- What are the features of the institutional system at each level of the hierarchy?
- What are the participants’ perceptions of the institutional system at each level?
- How do the textual properties of the script change during each stage of its career?
- How do the participants’ perceptions affect the journey of the text at each stage of the script’s career?

The present chapter consists of two sections. In the first, I provide some background information about scripts, create a model campaign that will underpin the discussion of the script’s career and explain the details of the contractual expectations at this level of the hierarchy (the institutional
system\textsuperscript{96}). In the second section, I stage an exemplary investigation of the 'production of a script'. This will provide further details about how I will analyse the other stages of the script's career and problematise notions arising from the literature, such as standardisation (and indeed rationalisation).

\textsuperscript{96} Throughout this chapter, I use the term “system” to mean the overall process in the call centre.
However, before moving to the first stage of the script's career, it is necessary to have a campaign which will set the career of a script in motion. For that reason, in the next subsection I introduce an anonymised model campaign.
which creates a pretext for the production, adaptation and enactment of the script described in this and the next two chapters.

4.0.1 A model campaign

For our model campaign, an IT blue chip company which I call ‘Best Internet Security’ (BIS) has contacted the call centre. In the table below I have outlined what kind of a campaign they would like to run as it would be written on their sales brief.

Table 4.1 Details of the model campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Name:</th>
<th>‘Best Internet Security (BIS)’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target:</td>
<td>4,000 engagement leads in total across the UK, France, Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Size:</td>
<td>50-1,000 employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry:</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience:</td>
<td>All IT professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe:</td>
<td>1 month but weekly delivery of leads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Collaterals(^\text{97}):</td>
<td>These should be emailed to the targeted audience (all IT professionals): 1 e-book on best practices for IT security 1 report on IT compliance 1 whitepaper/report (AUP- Acceptable Use Policy) to be basis of agent’s script</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This in fact, is an anonymised campaign closely modelled on a real one, but it differs in the details such as targets and budget, I have also anonymised the campaign’s master script that I describe below.

In the next section on ‘the production of the script’, the first phase of the script’s career, I explore what will happen once ‘BIS’ has contacted the call centre about the campaign they would like to run.

I begin my study of the script’s journey by investigating the following questions:

- How is the script composed?
- What is included, left out or amended during the meetings and for what reasons?
- What are the participants’ orientations towards the script?

\(^{97}\)A collateral is the selection of media e.g. report or e-book, which is used to support the sales or service.
In the first part of this section, I explore the essential features of the institutional system by drawing on the campaign managers’ account and in the second, I look at how the script gets produced to fit these features. After that, I consider the theoretical and analytical issues this raises. Since script productions occur mostly away from the call centre, I had little opportunity to observe it. Hence for the description of this process, I draw primarily on the accounts of three campaign managers, who actually work downstairs in the call centre for most of the time and in addition to these interview accounts I draw on a promotional brochure advertising the call centre’s services. As a result, my account here is inevitably rather more second hand than it is in subsequent chapters.

The three campaign managers I interviewed are:

- **Jenny** - Senior Campaign Manager and responsible for all the call centres belonging to CallCentral worldwide. As part of her role she is often involved in the sales meetings that are focal topics in this chapter.
- **Laura** - Senior Campaign Manager for London.
- **Anwar** - Senior Campaign Manager for London.

On the whole, Jenny’s account focused on the overall aims of the script production from a commercial point of view and for the corporation. Conversely, Laura and Anwar talked more about the practical issues and concerns that arise from the drafting of scripts. In spite of their differing points of view and experiences, all three describe the production of a script to be a lengthy process, which involves a lot of discussions and meetings during which new texts are produced and will form the basis of the master script produced.

### 4.1. The features of the institutional system: contractual expectations

All three campaign managers stressed that, for the company management upstairs, the script is a particular product that is sold to the client and once they have paid for the script, in line with current dominant management
discourses, those upstairs believe in the call centre clients’ right to transparency and accountability. These discourses suggest that the client should be able to influence future happenings and internal proceedings, and that their demands should be placed at the centre of the process. For the client and the management upstairs, the script accordingly also becomes an important means to convey transparency and accountability. In fact, as part of the contract, certain elements will be agreed on that will enable the client to influence and have an impact on the script’s production and its later use, these being as follows.

The **first** concerns the production of the script. As part of the contract, the company management upstairs and the client agree that the script to be drafted by the campaign manager has to be based on the bespoke assets (a collection of media used to support a sale or service) chosen by the client to be passed on to their targeted audience for this campaign. Anwar explains:

**Extract 4.1**

“The conventional method [for the campaign manager before start the first draft of the script] is to wait to receive assets (whitepapers, etc.) from the client. That tells us what the topic [of the script] is about and what can be written about it [within the script].”

*(Anwar, campaign manager)*

In the case of the BIS campaign, the whitepaper to be sent out is on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy), which means that the master script for this campaign should also be on this subject. Apart from the assets, as Laura says, the other source for the production of the script is a specific “call to action” from the client:

**Extract 4.2**

“[when we draft the script] we need to go through a call to action that we need to present from the client.”

*(Laura, campaign manager)*

Laura uses the marketing term ‘call to action’, which is a specific message to be delivered by the agent to convince the person contacted to accept an email containing the attachments (the client’s assets) and to open them. In marketing, the concept of prompting people to do something (e.g. click on something) through the use of texts and graphics (e.g. an email or script) is

---

98 This could be for instance an e-book, report (whitepaper) or a software trial.
referred to as a ‘call to action’\textsuperscript{99}. This concept can thus be understood to set out measurable objectives that the campaign is supposed to achieve, which are inscribed in the contract. In the call centre case, the clients will also have attached to their call to action a corresponding call to action email that is to be sent out by the agent after every ‘successful call’. The text of this email will have been composed by the client and cannot be amended by either upstairs or the campaign manager.

The second of the elements in the contract giving the client influence is that they are not only involved in the script production, but also have the last say. Regarding which Laura states:

\textbf{Extract 4.3}

“Yeah, you need to send it [script] to the client and if they’re not happy you need to amend or change your ad or image, yeah." (Laura, campaign manager)

The third element is that the management upstairs has provided a contractual assurance to the client that agents will follow the script word by word without individual variation, to ensure consistency across the phone calls. Although unfortunately I do not have a copy of an actual contract, we can see from a promotional brochure, from the interviews and fieldnotes that this assurance of agents following it word by word really matters. In the publicity brochure from upstairs, advertising the call centre’s “cost effective” services, the client is assured that “clients will be consulted and advised on script changes”. My understanding is that this refers to any changes in the wording of the final script previously approved by the client, and the assumption seems to be that unless communicated otherwise, agents will follow the approved script word by word.

\textsuperscript{99} An example of a call to action could be if a client wanted a select audience to agree to receive the email over the phone, read the email they were told about as part of the script, open the attachments of the email (containing the client’s assets for the targeted audience) and engage with the attachments.
As Anwar (extract 4.4) told me during the interview, “getting the correct message across” (the client’s message) is central for the client. Additionally, as the fieldnote entry 4.1 below shows, for the client the scripts are a means to carrying out marketing and branding as well as providing a follow-up customer service to its existing or potential new customers.

**Extract 4.4**

JW: Why do you use scripts?
A: This again is to keep consistency in the message being delivered to the targeted audience by different agents who are working on the same project. (…) Quality of work is essential and we need to make sure that the correct message is reaching the targeted audience. (Anwar, senior campaign manager)

The concept of the ‘call to action’ has another implication for the script’s use, for thanks to advances in technology it is nowadays possible to record, for instance, who clicks on the assets or opens the email. This makes it possible to measure the success of the script and the call to action through a range of mathematical formulas, which allow the generation of statistics and based on these statistics, the client will take the decision as to whether it is necessary to change the wording of the final script (the master script). At the same time, all these calculations are based on the assumption that agents follow the script word by word without variation. Any variation on the part of the individual agent, in terms of wording, would make it impossible to assess the: strength, weakness or the success of the script.

The formulas that are employed for generating statistics use the following information:

- Out of all the calls agents that made using the script approved by the client, how many resulted in agents sending out the emails containing the assets

---

**Codes of best practices for supplier and client:**

- Thorough understanding of client expectations
- Find a supplier who truly understand your needs
- Clients will be consulted and advised on script changes

Quoted from a promotional call centre brochure
• Out of all the email sent out, how many of these emails were opened

• Out of the people that were sent the emails, how many opened the attachments

• How many people followed up or used the services provided or advertised as part of the attachments.

All these formulas are meant to calculate different kinds of ‘convergence rates’ and the CallCentral corporate website advertises high rates based on “objective and proven formulas”. However, out of the four different scenarios for convergence rate calculations, it is the last that clients will care most about. For the example of the BIS campaign, the client would be interested in calculating the convergence rate of how many people opened the AUP email sent to them, read it and then clicked on the BIS website hot key provided in the email as part of the follow up engagement.

Generally, if we return to the issue of how the client can influence the script’s production and its later use, we have already seen that not only does it have to be based on the bespoke assets chosen by them and their call to action, but that they also have the last say on it. But, the fact that upstairs has provided contractual assurance that agents will follow the script verbatim and the generation of the corresponding statistics allows the client to regulate and influence proceedings even after the contract has been signed, since they will be emailed the calculations of the responses to the script on a weekly basis. So if they are not satisfied with the results that their master script is achieving, they may ask for changes in the wording.

Agreeing on textual fidelity has therefore two important motives for the management upstairs and the client. First of all, it constitutes a way for the former to show that they are committed to fulfilling the contract and the client’s demands even after the script has been produced and approved. Secondly, it makes any analysis based on the calculations of the responses to the final script (master script) objective, comparable and accurate as well as easy to influence. As Jenny comments:
Extract 4.5

“We prefer people read from the scripts (...) and that regulates what everyone’s saying across the calls.”

(Jenny, campaign manager)

In addition, in an environment where the client places a premium on textual fidelity and has also paid for it, following the script comes to be seen as an indicator and a benchmark for delivering good quality, as Anwar’s comment (extract 4.4) and the vignette (fieldnote entry 4.1) below illustrate.

Fieldnote entry 4.1 (09/09/2010) ‘Delivering textual fidelity to please new high-profile client X’

Sales had finally managed to sign client X, one of the biggest and most important clients in IT after having failed to sign them for years. After the sales had been agreed, Jenny told me in the panic room that this campaign had to be top-notch quality. She (and upstairs) wanted to impress the client X. Thus, she had not only arranged for the best agents to work on this campaign but it was my job also to ensure that agents follow the client’s X’s script word by word. As she put it, working for this client, is a dream come true. So if any agents did not follow the script, I should let her know and she will make sure they do. Moreover, according to her this campaign is not about smashing the daily targets (quantity), but about delivering quality. In this case quality means following client X’s script.

In the fieldnote entry 4.2 below, Jenny discusses some of the elements I have mentioned so far that enable the client to influence the script’s production. The extract is helpful in that during the meeting she explained in detail the importance of the script for the organisation, her own stance towards the script, and she sets the elements of the process into the larger context. More generally, the episode illustrates how pervasive the client’s influence is when it comes to the proceedings surrounding the production of the scripts and the prioritisation of their demands for the management upstairs. So even if the campaign managers’ means for meeting the targets may secretly undermine upstairs and the client, they will still have to produce the results that have been sold to the client.
Fieldnote entry 4.2 (15/03/2011) ‘Problems with a campaign and Jenny’s secret solution’

[I had received a Yahoo Instant Message from Jenny asking me to come to the panic room for an emergency meeting. Previously, I had already received a visit from the operations manager from upstairs asking me to fix a particular campaign where the numbers were very bad. As I walked into the panic room, I saw Jenny sitting in there with her feet up on a chair with a paper script in her hand. She looked rather stressed. She asked me “what the hell” was going on the specific campaign where the numbers were a disaster. She told me that there was a lot of pressure from upstairs and as the quarter will end in two days, the campaign will have to be finished no matter what. [Campaigns always need to be finished within the quarter because of financial and legal reasons and because new campaigns will start at the beginning of the new quarter]. She asked me what the problem was on the campaign. My reply was that the data was not very good and the topic of the script was not very interesting either. However, I added that I knew that we could not do anything about this as the script comes from the client and agents need to read from it. [Knowing how she is sometimes funny about saying out loud that one changes the script from the client, I don’t tell her that I have already tried to ‘spice up the script’ a bit under the radar to improve the statistics. Although she often says one needs to improve the script, I played innocent to see how she reacted to the situation. Because of her constant flip-flopping, some team leaders call her two-faced.]

In this situation, she gets angry with me and says that in a case like this I need to change the script - I should have known that. Then, she goes on complaining about sales and says that the script should have never been sold like this. This script is an example of sales trying to land a client. The entire campaign had always been unrealistic and sales upstairs should have never agreed to it as then we would not be in this mess in the first place. She should always be present when a campaign is sold to ensure that a good campaign is sold. However, now at the end of the quarter, hitting the numbers no matter how is more important than following the “client’s script”. According to her, if the numbers won’t be hit, everyone in the call centre will be in more trouble than I can possibly imagine.

Jenny knows that it is not possible to read straight from the script, although she will never admit to that openly. As she told me, “do you really think, I don’t know that agents don’t follow the script word for word. I’m not blind or deaf and I have been on the phone too once”. However, she believes it’s dangerous to tell agents that they can ignore the script although she knows that most do. Officially, her line is that agents need to read from the script. As she also added, the client would also not be very happy if they found out that people who know very little about IT (and only after a few hours training), possibly not native speakers, call up in the client’s name and conduct customer service, marketing and sales on their behalf without a script or not reading from it. But right now, between me and her at this moment, for this campaign, she does not care about following the script but just about hitting the targets. Her suggestion is for me to give agents a few tips how they can make the script more interesting and they can take a few notes. She warns me though that I need to be discreet about this, neither the operations manager nor anyone from upstairs should neither hear nor see me doing this as they would not be happy about this and would not understand it.]

184
Jenny, as the boss of all of CallCentral’s call centres worldwide and with her frequent dealings with clients, is perhaps one of the most authoritative people in the organisation to talk about the clients’ beliefs and their influence on the proceedings around the script’s production and use. But Jenny’s point about the clients’ orientation towards the script is also mentioned by less senior members from downstairs, such as Gavin. As one of the more experienced team leaders, over the years he has also often participated in meetings for the production of scripts upstairs and talked to clients.

**Extract 4.6**

“The client always gets final send-off [on the script]. And, as far as the client’s aware, that is what is said.”

*(Gavin, senior team leader)*

He further notes that the client’s influence is so strong during the phase of the script’s production that the script becomes “artificial”. For him, the script has been put together by “corporate people”, who he specifies to be the client\(^{100}\). He seems to use “corporate” in a derogatory sense, denoting distant from reality, ignorant of how things at the bottom actually work and artificiality as the end result\(^{101}\).

\(^{100}\) I also read into his statement that he is pointing out the irony within the scripts production and the later proceedings, which is often remarked upon by the campaign managers. On the one hand, the client signs a contract with the idealised notion of imposing a specific script on agents but then it relies on the call centre full of human beings to spread the message to make it more personal. After all, the client could spread the ‘message’ to the selected targeted audience via email, a service which the call centre also offers, but they do not do that as most likely people would never open or read it and just delete it. Thus, on the one hand, the client wants the personal touch but on the other hand they do not. However, the client ultimately knows that they need human beings in the call centre to get past the gatekeeper so that the message can actually be delivered to the target audience.

\(^{101}\) More generally, the client’s belief that agents follow a pre-written approved script word by word has also been a frequent point of departure for the literature on call centres and has become considered a well-known industry fact (e.g. Johnstone 2003: 273; Farrell 2009: 190). In fact, as we saw in the first chapter, Cameron (2000b: 324), for instance, has argued that the process of branding has been extended to the verbal behaviour of employees and scripts are instrumental for this. Johnstone (2003: 273) has further pointed out that the call centre reputation, its capacity to attract clients, rests on its guarantee that individuals follow the script word by word without individual variations. We have also seen that this applies to the call centre in that clients are assured that agents will follow a script word by word so that reliable convergence rates and statistics can be generated.
Extract 4.7

“It [the script] is put together by corporate people. It’s put together by the client who sees it and thinks, ‘That’s exactly the message that this company wants to get across’, and it seems to me like they completely forget that this is human beings talking to human beings. And if someone’s going to take a report from you or an email or a webinar or whatever it’s going to be, it’s a human dealing with another human being and if you make that artificial then in some ways you’re negating the point of having a call centre. (...) They [the client] always get the final send-off, which is why it [the script] can sound quite artificial because we’re writing to please them, if you know what I mean. So they’ll go ‘oh that’s exactly the script we want’ (...) I mean I would make it [script] less formal, but then you have a problem there because that won’t meet the client’s demands.” (Gavin, senior team leader)

Like Jenny in fieldnote 4.2, Gavin respects the clients’ wishes but seems to imply that the client may not necessarily know what is best for them and that their (implausible) demands may be more of a hindrance than help.

The final elements of the system that gives the client influence are three measures of control or what Jenny calls “trackable tools”. These enable the client to monitor the progress of the campaign and success of their master script, intervene if they feel the need for any changes in the wording of the master script, and to ensure that agents indeed follow their script as reviewed. The first measure of control I have already discussed is the convergence statistics. As Jenny notes:

Extract 4.8

“It’s [production of statistics] actually that you can show their convergence and their acquisition rate.” (Jenny, senior campaign manager)

The second is that the client will receive a weekly list of ‘successful calls’ that agents have conducted each week. For the call to have been successful, the people who have been phoned (‘a lead’) must have also agreed to the opt-in section on the script that asks whether their contact details can be passed back to the client for a follow up call. As part of any subsequent follow up call, the client may then ask the contact/lead about the script and the assets that the agent is supposed to have talked to them about.
The closing section of the master script

If the contact cannot remember the call with the agent, the name of the client’s company or anything from the script, the client will reject those leads on the assumption that the agent did not follow the script. Often the rejection is also accompanied by a threat to the call centre to pull the campaign. The vignette (fieldnote entry 4.3) below is an example of such an incident when a client was not happy with the feedback they had received from following up the list of contacts (leads) from the call centre.
Fieldnote entry 4.3 (02/02/2011) ‘A client complains about the lack of quality’

During the day, I received several messages on the YIM (Yahoo Instant Messenger) from Jenny telling me that I need to talk to an agent called Jonas. Jenny had told me that a big client had rejected almost all of his leads as they could not remember anything from the script nor about the email containing the assets. Furthermore, the client threatened to pull the campaign if this was not investigated and quality was not improved. She yimed me whether I thought whether he was cheating and what was going on there. My reply was that as far as I was aware he wasn’t. The truth was that I always had kept an eye on him not entirely trusting him since I knew that he was very economical with the content of the script (He often left out large chunks of the script). But at the same time he was funny and charismatic on the phone so I had always supposed he would make an impression on people and they would remember the phone calls. However, Jenny also complained that the length of his phone calls was also not sufficient. So I took Jonas to the panic room and told him that there had been a big complaint from the client. As I informed him, they had threatened to pull the campaign as they are not happy with the quality and pleaded with him to actually follow the script for this campaign.

The third measure is another specific set of generated statistics, which are the ‘dial report’ and ‘dial sheet’ and they will have also been sold to the client as part of the contract, to be delivered to them on a weekly basis. We already came across them in chapter 3, where it was reported that they record how many dials agents make, the outcome of all calls and their length\textsuperscript{102}. Summaries of these are required for the calculation of the convergence rate statistics, and hence they are a separate set of statistics as well as being a separate information source. That is, whereas convergence statistics are based on whether people click on the email and open the attachment, the dial report and dial sheet focus on agents’ performance and their calls. The reason why they are sent to the client is that they allow them easily to monitor the progress of the campaign and the success of their approved master script. Moreover, with the help of these statistics, which are generated every time an agent makes a call, clients are not only supposed to be up to date on the latest developments, but can also intervene if things do not go according to their wishes\textsuperscript{103}.

\textsuperscript{102} Agents can also access their own dial report and summary and that of their peers.
\textsuperscript{103} Before I explain the process in more detail, it is important to state that the call based statistics only rely on quantitative numbers and predictions; qualitative phone monitoring is not part of this and can only be done from downstairs in the call centre.
In diagram 4.2 I have summarised, step by step, how the production of statistics is an element that enables the client to influence the production of the script and its use. The first step (step 1) is that the client will approve a script. Based on that script (step 2), campaign managers will predict how long each agent’s call should be, based on the time it would take to read the approved script word by word, how many leads agents can make per day, and what the possible call outcomes are. Once the agents call using the script, they should then log every call using the predicted outcomes so that the dial report statistics can be generated. Thanks to the dial report (step 3) and the dial sheet, the call centre management, on behalf of the client, can monitor agents’ performance and productivity by comparing the values that they predicted with the actual statistics that the computer system records. If for instance, it has been estimated that the client’s script takes 3 minutes to read but a call logged as successful only lasted 1 minute, the agent could not have followed the script word by word. The dial report will not be shared with the client or with upstairs, but it represents a quick way for the management downstairs to check whether agents have followed the script. In the final step (step 4), instead of sending the client hundreds of long lists of the dial sheets and reports as they are generated every day, the campaign managers will summarise and analyse the results in the form of bar charts and send them to the client. From time to time, these summaries prompt the client to ask for

104 Statistics such as dial reports, in turn, will then allow the management upstairs to separate out any additional information agents may obtain over the phone. For instance, what could happen is that when agents ask IT managers whether they are planning to virtualise their desktops in the next twelve months, they may reply that they have only done half of all their desktops and they might be planning to do the rest in 12 months or perhaps would like to upgrade their virtualised desktops in the next 12 months. In the current number of call outcomes that the agent can see on the computer system, they cannot save this interesting information. So, what campaign managers usually do is add another two call outcomes and also add two more qualifying questions to the script, with the purpose of obtaining more information about this, but systematically. However, this additional information will be sold on top to the clients as they had not originally paid for it as part of the contract they signed and if they do not want to pay for it, the information will not be passed onto them but deleted.

105 Therefore, thanks to the computer system it is possible to record, monitor and make agents’ activity visible in the form of text. The computer system also allows tracking back any changes that may have been made on the database to a particular agent. For instance, occasionally if mistakes were made with particular data logging, managers downstairs ran a query these to find out who made them. In the organisational literature, this part of the process, where information computer technology is used to record and make organisational activities visible, is called ‘textualisation’ (Zuboff 1988). Zuboff (1988) also defined ‘informating’ as procedures that convert descriptions and measurements of activities, events and objects into information, whereby they become visible to the company.
redrafts of the approved script, because they are not happy with the progress of the campaign or the results achieved so far.

Diagram 4.2 The generation of statistics based on the master script to monitor the campaign’s progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call Outcome</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>When the contact agrees to all the questions on the script and his/her company matches the campaign criteria for the lead definition they must also agree to speak to the client after our initial call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Data</td>
<td>When the company details are incorrect or a duplicate company has been identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Back</td>
<td>You should only use this option when you speak to the contact directly. Call is used only when the contact him/herself asks you to call back another time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Outsourced</td>
<td>When the company does not have an IT Department or anyone else who makes IT decisions. Normally this option is also valid when the company uses an external company to handle their IT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not contacted</td>
<td>This outcome can be used for all those various reasons when you do not get through to the contact. When a receptionist, colleague, or the PA of the contact asks you to call back that is considered as a Not Contacted, not Call Back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>This option should only be used when you speak to the correct contact (one of the target audience) and he/she refuses your offer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The campaign specific script

Predictions will be made based on this script for call outcomes, dial report, and dial sheet.

Call outcomes fitting the campaign specific script

The dial report

The dial sheet

Time agents spent on the phone can be compared to the predictions made for the campaign specific script in [1]

Statistics passed on to the call centre’s client

Screen outs (15%) Leads (20%) Bad data (20%) Not interested (10%) Not contacted (30%)
4.1.1 Summary of the institutional system: contractual expectations

We have seen that the institutional system allows the client to influence the script’s production and its later use in various ways. Most of them are written into the contract. When it comes to the production of the script, the client has a very strong influence on the wording and content of the script and also has the last say on it. Moreover as part of the contract, the client also has been assured some influence over the use of the script by the agents on the phone. This is supposed to be safeguarded through a variety of control measures ranging from the production of two different kinds of sets of statistics to follow up control calls.

More generally, the campaign managers’ description of the processes provides a picture of an institutional system and organisation characterised by rationalisation. In chapter 1 (subsection 1.3.2), we have seen that sociologists agree this is one of the central features of contemporary organisations\textsuperscript{106}. For instance, Ritzer views rationalisation as a continuation of the Fordist standardisation project to allow the management to regulate workers better. Moreover, applying Ritzer’s neo-Weberian approach ‘McDonaldisation’ to call centres, Cameron (2000a) and Korczynski (2001) have argued that call centres are also characterised by four rationalisation characteristics, namely: ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘control’. This section’s description has shown that all four rationalisation characteristics apply to the call centre. In particular when it comes to the generation of statistics, these four rationalisation characteristics are key, in that specific ‘predictions’ are made by upstairs based on the client’s bespoke script, so that statistics can be: generated, analysed and compared with targets. Further, these ‘predictions’ are also made to ensure ‘efficiency’ on the part of the agent and in the call centre’s use of resources. Finally, the statistics are also needed to ensure ‘control’ for both the client and management over what is happening on the phone and to monitor progress. On a more general level, the motivation of clients to use the call centre services also seems to be based on its ability to offer ones that meet the four

\textsuperscript{106} For a more detailed discussion of what constitutes an organisation and institution cf. e.g. Brunsson et Sahlins-Andersson (2000)
rationalisation characteristics, thereby guaranteeing measurable results through the convergence rate calculations and statistics\textsuperscript{107}.

However, despite these elements forming part of the institutional system, throughout the entire discussion we have seen that ‘downstairs’ seems to operate with a different and more pragmatic kind of rationality. As a result, the client’s influence is lessened when it comes to the use of the script. This is also evident in the vignette below in which Eva, a newcomer to the call centre management team and consequently not yet fully socialised into the environment, unwittingly reveals the (secret) nature of the downstairs handling of the script to the manager upstairs.


| Eva, the new campaign manager was asked to join Jenny, the operations manager from upstairs and me in the panic room for a meeting. The reason for this panic room meeting was that her campaigns were going very badly and upstairs was getting nervous. During the meeting, Eva said that she felt it was going badly due to the script and that script had to be changed by the agents. At that moment, the operations manager lost it and got very upset. He said that this cannot happen as the script comes from the client. After all, he pointed out the script never gets changed and read out on all the other campaigns which are successful. Eva looked very confused and tried to counter the operations manager’s words. However, he would not let her. Once the operations manager had left, Jenny went crazy and started shouting at Eva that no one ever changes the script downstairs and how she can say something like that in front of the operations manager. After the meeting, Eva came up to me and asked me why Jenny had told her the previous day that agents need to change the script (also in front of me), but she had denied it in front of the operations manager. My reply was that I had observed that one can never say these things in front of upstairs unless one wants to risk anger from them. |

With this account of the control system now in place, let us now turn to the processes involved in the actual production of the script, and the ways in which campaign managers’ knowledge of the system affects their participation.

**4.2 The production of the script**

The campaign managers say that the script’s production consists of three activities. The first activity (‘sales meeting’) centres on the sales transaction between the company’s sales person and the client in terms of agreeing on the

\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, the description of the institutional system upstairs (see also fieldnote entry 4.4 below) also points towards rationalisation in the literature’s sense discussed in chapter 1.
The second activity ('script drafting') pertains to the writing of the first draft of the script by the campaign manager using the texts from the first activity. The third activity ('client approval meeting') involves finalising the production of the script with the client, sales and the campaign managers, with them all meeting to discuss the draft and agree on the final version for the master script.

Diagram 4.3 The production of a script

4.2.1 The sales meeting

During the sales meeting, the client and sales person will meet and agree on specific details for the contract and the subsequent proceedings. The client will come to the meeting with a written sales brief, which summarises their wishes and priorities for the campaign. Below, table 4.2 lists and explains some of the contractual terms that will be discussed. Each of the different contractual elements involved, apart from the sales brief itself, has its own price tag, which feeds into the overall cost of the campaign108.

---

108 As a general rule, the pricing is based on the notion that the more detailed and specific the information required the more expensive the campaign will be. The justification for this is that this requires not only very skilled agents in terms of language skills, who will be expensive, but most likely it will also take longer to collect the information and more manpower will be required.
Table 4.2  List of contractual terms discussed and agreed on as part of the sales meeting

| 1) Sales brief: A summary of the client’s needs and wishes which gives a preliminary view of the type of leads, lead criteria and the collaterals |
| 2) Leads: An indicator that the agent has successfully contacted the desired person within the particular company and managed to obtain all the required information |
| a) Type: The call centre distinguishes between three types of leads: |
| Engagement leads: Agents do not need to obtain any information apart from contact details and company details (company size, industry, address) |
| BANT leads: Agents need to ask several (profiling) questions regarding a potential project plus they need to obtain contact details and company details (company size, industry, address) |
| Nurturing leads: Agents need to ask a long list of very specific detailed technical questions regarding a potential project, issues and needs, plus they need to obtain contact details and company details (company size, industry, address) |
| b) Criteria: The lead criteria specify |
| • which questions agents need to ask |
| • which company size, industry and job titles are to be targeted. |
| c) Quantity and deadlines: There will be a discussion of how many leads need to be generated and by when. The call centre will predict how many leads they can generate, the staff they will need to employ and the cost of those, and it will charge the client accordingly. |
| 3) Collaterals: This is the information e.g. a whitepaper, reports, webinar that the client wants the call centre to send to the target audience. It is the “bait”, so to speak, to attract the interest of the person called. |
| 4) Script: It will be agreed that the call centre produces a script based on the client’s sales brief, collaterals and details of the sales contract. |
| 5) Dial rates: Statistical information based on the call outcomes logged by agents after each call. It is useful information for the client to understand how the script (campaign and company) is perceived by the target audience. The numbers of how many dials agents should make per day will have to be decided during the meeting. |

In the case of the BIS campaign, the following contractual elements were agreed on:

---

109 I summarised the contractual terms based on information that was available to me in the forms of briefs and interviews with the campaign managers.

110 These categories are not institution specific but are part of the normal sales vocabulary for call centres. I summarised the contractual terms based on information that was available to me in the forms of briefs and interviews with the campaign managers.
As part of the contract, there will also be agreement about which collateral(s) the client would like to be emailed. Regarding this, the client will have brought a range of these, such as reports or e-books, used to support a service or sale to the sales meeting and the client and upstairs will then decide which one(s) should be sent out and become the focus of the campaign. In the case of the BIS campaign, the client and upstairs agree on a whitepaper on Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). Overall, all agreements reached during the sales meeting will be summarised in the sales contract that is finalised and signed by the two parties at the end of the meeting. Once the sales agreement has been signed, the campaign managers can start drafting the reference script, the next activity, drawing on the client’s sales brief, sales contract and the agreed collateral(s). Most likely, none of the campaign managers will have been present during the sales meeting and hence will need these texts (sales brief, sales contract, collateral(s)) in order to draft a script that meets the client’s wishes. In the next subsection the script drafting is explored in more detail.
4.2.2 The script drafting

During the interviews, the campaign managers explained that the script drafting consists of two parts. The first is a pre-set template\(^{111}\) that campaign managers should follow (document 4.4)\(^{112}\) and as a second step, the campaign managers then fill in the blank sections.

Document 4.4  The template for scripts

Both in the template (document 4.4) and in the example of a campaign specific script (document 4.5), we can see that there there are eight fields/textboxes\(^{113}\). Seven of these represent different stages within the call and have their own heading. The first is entitled the introduction to the receptionist (1), which is followed by possible objection handling to the receptionist (3). Textbox 2 instructs agents that if they do not face any rebuttals that they can skip textbox (3). Agents then introduce themselves

---

111 The script is always initially produced in English and with the English market in mind and afterwards translated into the other languages.

112 As Laura told me, these templates have been written over time by different campaign managers and then passed on to their successors. Apart from a very specific campaign which runs globally and is organised through an agency with already agreed scripts, in all my time at the call centre I never saw any scripts which did not follow this specific appearance.

113 Although there are eight textboxes only seven have headings and are considered separate sections.
to the desired contact person (4) and there is the **introduction of the client they are calling on behalf of** (5). The **pitch** (6) represents the centre piece of the script, which is followed by the **confirmation of details** (7) and the **closing** (8). The blank spaces on the template indicate the only parts that are to be newly drafted from campaign to campaign, these being ‘the pitch’ (6) and ‘the introduction of the client’ (5). As part of the drafting process, the campaign managers will work their way through the template and fill in the blank spaces. The script below provides an example of how campaign managers will refer back to specific parts of texts from the sales meeting, such as the sales contract, and en- and re-contextualise them.

**Document 4.5 An example of a campaign specific script (BIS campaign)**

We can further see in table 4.4 below how for every campaign specific production, there is a fixed process which decides the design of the script and content of each textbox.
Table 4.4  Textboxes on the script and their source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of each textbox of the script</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The introduction to the receptionist</td>
<td>Template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objection Handling</td>
<td>Template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the contact</td>
<td>Template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of the client</td>
<td>Sales brief, corporate website, info provided by the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch</td>
<td>Template, collateral (e.g. whitepaper), sales agreement, sales brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Template, Sales brief, sales agreement contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Template</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More specifically, when it comes to composition, campaign managers follow a range of strategies advocated in textbooks on business talk, that tell them which parts of the text from the first activity (‘the sales meeting’) should be embedded in the script to make it successful. This becomes clear if we list the strategies that the campaign managers mentioned in the interviews, and then cross-refer to these textbooks.

The campaign managers said that the first and most important step is to identify the main points of the contract and the collaterals (the assets such as reports or e-books the client wants to be sent out). To identify the main points of the latter, they will try to elicit what they are about, and highlight the benefits of the product(s) or issues discussed. Laura explains:

**Extract 4.9**

“then we go through the collaterals that we need to present from the client. And we try to find the core of it, so what’s the solution of the product or the problem about, what, reading this White Paper or listening to this webcast will they learn about, so what’s the benefit about it, which is like why they should say yes to receiving it. And then, then we just finish off for a minute there the rest of the script.” *Laura, campaign manager*

Like Laura, Jenny also says that the first thing is to identify the topic within the resources provided to them and she believes that to be important as she considers talking directly about the product that the client potentially wants to sell is bad practice. Instead, the pitch should be framed as a service enquiry by focusing on the audience’s potential needs and problems, and the benefits of the solution. In addition, it should aim for personal relevance, for instance,
by using a personal pronoun like “you”. What Jenny suggests can be summarised as:

- “The tone” of the script should not be direct
- Questions should be carefully phrased
- Focus on benefits of solutions rather than product
- Creation of personal relevance and relevance to the company
- No mention of the product
- Promotion of the topic over the product.

Both Jenny’s and Laura’s strategies are in line with strategies that can be found in general textbooks about business talk. For instance, Leiskar’s basic business communication (2001) makes similar recommendations:

“Requests that are likely to be resisted, require a slow, deliberate approach. The direct order suggested for routine requests just will not do the job. Persuasion is necessary. By persuasion, we mean reasoning with the reader- presenting facts and logic that support your case. In this approach, which is discussed in detail below, you should generally follow this indirect plan:

- Open with words that (1) set up the strategy and (2) gain attention
- Present the strategy (the persuasion), using persuasive language and you-viewpoint.
- Make the requests clearly and without negatives (1) either as the end of the message or (2) Followed by words that recall the persuasive appeal”

(Leiskar, Pettit and Flatley 2001: 161) [emphasis added]

Like Jenny and Laura, the book also suggests making “scripts memorable and have a good introduction” (gain attention), “talk about benefits and promote topic” (the persuasion) and “also make it relevant to them and their company” (you-viewpoint) (Leiskar et al. 2001: 161). In another commercially successful book, The Ultimate Book of Phone Scripts (2010), author Mike Brooks, an experienced salesman and consultant, also follows the same principles as advocated by Laura and Jenny and the textbook by Leiskar et al (2001). Not only does Brooks dedicate several chapters to “how to have a ‘smart opening’ on the phone”, he also lists “five ways to sound more natural on the phone”. In the extract below, I have again underlined the strategies and wordings which are reminiscent of Laura and Jenny’s.
Set in the larger institutional context, I have described, the script drafting holds several challenges for the campaign managers:

- They were not present at the sales meeting, and have not heard all the details.
- The institutional system prioritises the client’s wishes and interpretation.
- The contractual understanding does not consider the fact that texts travel and that they have to be reinterpreted by the participants in the process and as a result take on a different significance.
- Texts emerging from the sales meeting (sales contract) or as the basis of the master script (sales contract, sales brief and collaterals) are often described by campaign managers as too impractical to be implemented.

In the remainder of this chapter and the next two chapters, I explore how they resolve these challenges. As Laura’s quote below (extract 4.10) indicates, the campaign managers know well that contractually the most important thing is to produce a written script that pleases the client.

**Extract 4.10**

“When we write the script we need to think about the client as well so the client wants to see something in the script that someone on the phone might not necessarily want to hear.”  

*(Laura, campaign manager)*
Let us now turn very briefly indeed to the final activity in the production of the master script, the client approval meeting.

**4.2.3 The client approval meeting**

Although there might be some discussion about the draft that the client has been sent in advance of the meeting, and although the campaign manager may complain that the texts from the first sales meeting are impractical for use, the client most likely will force through what they believe is the best version of the script, and this will become the master script. The client then expects agents to read from the master script word for word. Nevertheless, Laura like the other campaign managers is aware that once the script travels further along the system, it will not be realistic for agents to use the master script as the management upstairs thinks it should.

**Extract 4.11**

“You don’t need to read it, you can just make it yours, you can just change and see it’s… like maybe, if you are the target audience, maybe talking to you in a conversation you don’t say something because the conversation just flow in a different way and with me it’s different so I expect them to… not to follow it completely word by word. (...) So I expect agents to [change the script]… because one of the most important things for me is to sound colloquial.”

*(Laura, campaign manager)*

I now summarise the process described so far.

**4.2.4 Summary of the production of the script**

The production of the script follows a set process which is based on the principles outlined in section 4.1. When it comes to the production of a campaign specific script, the main source is the sales contract, which in large part determines the content and in the final instance, it is always the client who decides this even though the campaign managers produce a draft using a range of compositional strategies advocated in business textbooks. More generally, it seems that the position of the management upstairs has a lot in common with Dorothy Smith’s perception of texts and their role in institutions. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, Institutional Ethnography (IE) suggests that texts help establish ruling relations and the co-ordination of people’s activities as “they provide for the standardised
recognisablility of people’s doings as organisational or institutional as well as for their co-ordination across multiple local settings and time” (Smith 2001: 160).

The importance that the campaign-specific scripts hold for the call centre is underlined when we remember that a script and the accompanying briefs are the only documents/texts that agents and team leaders are given during their employment at the call centre\(^{114}\). As such, it is an organisational document that will establish a sense of hierarchy, organisational identity and rules for the ‘temporary’ agents\(^{115}\) as well as co-ordinate people’s activities across multiple local settings and time. However, the campaign managers’ comments suggest that the client (and managers upstairs) only ever see the script as a ‘static’ text that cannot be transformed during its career. In contrast, the campaign managers conceptualise scripts as always needing some flexible adaptation. Along their career, scripts may be transformed by the various participants in line with changes in as the premises and contexts within which they are addressed. Anwar, for instance, critiques the widespread ‘industry view’ of static scripts that should be read out verbatim.

**Extract 4.12**

> “Personally I think scripts are essential to the business but that doesn’t mean forcing agents to read word by word which I consider a very bad industry practice.”

*(Anwar, campaign manager)*

I wonder, however, whether Anwar’s comment is an indirect criticism of the call centre’s clients and the management upstairs. In particular, the latter are routinely ‘bashed’ by the managers downstairs for being narrow-minded, out of touch and incompetent. But the purpose of this chapter is not to agree or disagree with my participants’ views. Instead, it is important to consider the master script as part of a trajectory, because this perspective then allows us to see the attitudes upstairs, not as either out of touch or incompetent, but as positioned. Viewed in this way, we san say that i) their orientation towards

\(^{114}\) Since most agents are hired through a language agency, many do not even have to sign a contract on their first day of training. The agents that are recruited directly, nonetheless, will sign a copy for a temporary contract and will take that piece of paper back home. The campaign specific script and brief are also the only training documents.

\(^{115}\) cf. e.g. Cooren (2004); Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) for more detailed discussions of how texts are used to establish an organisational identity, hierarchy, and regulation.
the script is different from downstairs as their vantage point is determined by a prioritisation of the client’s needs, ii) their orientation is produced within different premises and activities than those of the campaign managers downstairs and iii) they are not involved in any of the script’s further career stages downstairs.

4.3 Interim conclusion

The script’s production thus raises questions about:

- the different orientations, readings, meaning and interpretations the participants in the organisation seem to display towards the script depending on their hierarchical position and the impact this has on the ruling relations of the organisation
- what happens now that the master script has been produced and gets transported further down the system
- the implications for discussions of standardisation

I address each of these points in the paragraphs that follow.

**The different orientations, readings and interpretations that participants in the organisation seem to display towards the script depending on their hierarchical position** first emerged in part of chapter 3. In fact, I took the discussion about the ‘objection handling session’ (chapter 3 section 3.1.7) as the first sign that shows that participants’ orientation towards the script may differ depending on their hierarchical position. Despite the management upstairs having sold a campaign specific script that is supposed to be read by agents, team leaders teach agents how to adapt and individualise the client’s script using a variety of strategies. Section 4.2, which is about the activities within the ‘production of the script’, has elaborated this point. Regarding this, campaign managers participate in meetings that are aimed at the production of a particular script, the master script, just to please the client. But campaign managers state that as the ‘master script’ moves further along the system, they expect it to be transformed since the premises underpinning how it will be looked at, used, read, interpreted by the various participants along the process will change.
This raises the question of what happens now that the master script has been produced and is transported further down the system. Across the next two chapters, I will therefore explore whether, why and how the ‘master script’ undergoes any written or oral transformations along its next two career stages, its ‘adaptation’ (chapter 5) and ‘enactment and use’ (chapter 6).

To trace the textual transformations of the ‘master script’, it is useful to draw on the theory of transposition (e.g. Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Agha 2005 & Wortham 2005) and its analytical vocabulary to describe the processes and textual transformation that campaign managers indicate are likely to happen to the script. As I have outlined in the introduction, this theory is helpful because of its focus on texts being transported across trajectories and the transformations they may undergo with each stage. For example, institutional ethnographers have suggested that for those like the management upstairs the script is a key text that regulates activities downstairs in a variety of ways (cf. list in the introduction of this chapter). However, if we apply the framework of the theory of transposition, the view of the script as a text that regulates activities downstairs, as institutional ethnographers suggest, is only one framing of the script. Although it is undoubtedly important, it is ‘upstairs-centric’ and potentially limited to the locality. In fact, a key term in the theory of transposition has been the notion of ‘entextualisation’ and ‘recontextualisation’.

The term ‘entextualisation’ has been defined as the “process of rendering a given instance of discourse as text, detachable from its local context” (Silverstein and Urban 1996: 21). Under this lens, as Barber (2007: 22) notes “discourse is the unrepeated and unremarked flow of utterances within which most human activities are bathed”. Moreover, “text is created when instances of discourse, by being made detachable from their immediate context of emission, are made available for repetition or recreation in other contexts” (Barber 2007: 22). It then becomes a question of why and how certain stretches or ‘projectiles’ of texts are decided upon to be transmitted to the next event over others. In other words, they are stretches of discourse which can be reproduced and thus transmitted over time and space and the
theory is concerned with how and why the different textual projectiles travel over time. This makes one of the foci how processes and multiple people are involved in the design and selection of textual sections that will travel (cf. Barber 2007; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Agha and Wortham 2005; Blommaert and Rampton 2011).

In the case of the script’s production, we have seen that the client lays out the basis and frame for its production before the details of the contract and which collateral(s) are to be sent out are agreed upon with upstairs during the sales meeting. As part of the next activity (the script drafting), drawing on the frame from the sales meeting and general procedure for script production in the call centre, the campaign managers will choose which parts of the contract or collaterals are to be included or referred to in their draft of the script. During the final meeting (the client approval meeting), the client will then have an opportunity to decide whether they agree with the campaign managers’ selection and that draft should become the master script or if they want any changes to it.

By following textual trajectories, another focus of the theory of transposition is on the alterations and revaluation that texts undergo, as they become embedded in new contexts such as in: templates, meetings or training sessions. As seen in this chapter, during each event different meanings of the script are generated in a sequence of partial and predictable interactional activities. This makes it possible to map and analyse these activities as part of “speech chains” as well as examine “the transposition of entextualisation from context to context” (cf. Mehan 1996: 258), as I have undertaken for the production of the script. Thus, I have taken the production of the script as the initial focus and point of departure of the career of a script, because the point of the meetings was to produce a text, which in Bauman’s words is “durable and authoritative” and in line with the client’s wishes. Now that this has been achieved, I will trace in the later chapters how participants refer back to the master script and use it, by mapping the other activities that will occur as part of the script’s career.

At the same time, the importance that the company’s client seems to attach to textual fidelity and to agents having to read the master script word by word, leads us back to the literature reviewed in the first chapter
on standardisation, scripts and call centres. In chapter 1, we saw that the literature suggests that scripts are iconic and representative of standardisation practices in call centres, which involve i) rationalisation, ii) an attempt to impose linguistic uniformity onto agents’ speech in order to regulate their speech, iii) and finally deskilling of agents by imposing a standardised script. For the theorists of iii), the script then becomes a sign of providing agents with only the minimum training and knowledge necessary. Finally, iv) scripts are said to evoke resistance among users with individuals refusing to follow the instructions printed on them. Therefore, following the career of the script and its potential transformations allows us to explore the themes (resistance, deskilling, and rationalisation) through which standardisation has been discussed in the literature and investigate their relevance and significance at CallCentral.

Following the description of the script’s production, it appears as if rationalisation is important at this career stage. For example, in section 4.2 I have pointed out that the call centre seems to be rationalised. But let us remind ourselves briefly what has been written in the literature on this topic (cf. chapter 1 section 1.3.2). The most prominent proponents of this approach in the call centre literature have been Cameron (2000a;b) and Korczynski (2001). Following Ritzer’s neo-Weberian ‘McDonaldisation’ paradigm that views rationalisation as a continuation of the Fordist-standardisation project to allow the management to regulate workers better, they have argued that call centres are also characterised by four rationalising characteristics: ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘control’. In fact, in subsection 4.1.2 I argued that all four apply to the call centre. In particular, thanks to upstairs’ ‘predictions’ made on the client’s bespoke script, statistics can be created that are comparable with the targets. Further, the ‘predictions’ are to guarantee ‘efficiency’ on behalf of the agent and of the call centre’s use of resources. Finally, the statistics are needed to ensure ‘control’ for both the client and the management over what is happening on the phone and to monitor any progress. On a more general level, the clients’ motivation to use the call centre services seems to be based on upstairs’ offering a service, which not only meets the four characteristics but also guarantees measurable results through the convergence rate calculations and statistics. In fact, the
description of the contractual expectations (see also fieldnote entry 4.4) also points towards an understanding of rationalisation by upstairs and the client similar to that of the literature discussed in chapter 1. Nevertheless, despite ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘control’ being crucial in the negotiation of the contractual agreement, we have seen that ‘downstairs’ seems to operate on another kind of rationalisation, underpinned by a different sort of pragmatism, than is propagated by upstairs and the client. Hence, we need to look at what happens in the later stages of the script’s career to establish whether this is, indeed, the case and the significance of it.

So, in the next chapter on the ‘adaptation of the master script’, we will move down a level in the hierarchy to the campaign managers and team leaders. This is one-step down in the overall system that constitutes the script’s career and in the physical sense downstairs in the call centre.
Chapter 5

The second stage in the script’s career: The adaptation of the ‘master script’

5.0 Introduction

The last chapter focused on the production of the master script. There we saw how the script, complemented by a range of electronic text-mediated technologies, is crucial in creating a local order of accountability, compatible with the sales contract signed with the client. I also drew on Dorothy Smith’s (1996: 177) theorisation of texts as “mediators and base of discourse and relations of ruling that regulate and coordinate beyond the particular local setting of their reading and writing”. Following Smith’s framework, this chapter explores how upstairs now uses the text of the master script to regulate and co-ordinate ‘courses of actions’ in the call centre itself. Hitherto, we have seen that the production of the master script is marked by different orientations and potential disagreement between the three main parties encountered so far: the client, the management upstairs and the campaign managers. The client and upstairs expect the master script to be read word by word by its users downstairs and not to be changed. Conversely, the campaign managers predict the master script to become subject to oral and textual transformations, as it is taken up by different participants across various settings and activities. Set against this backdrop, this chapter investigates what happens during the next stage of the script’s career, its adaptation, in terms of: i) activities underpinning this stage ii) participants’ orientation towards the master script and iii) changes to the master script itself.

To explore the next phase of the script’s career, it is helpful to return to the example of the anonymised BIS model campaign. Different sets of activities (two briefings) are observed, where the BIS master script will be taken up by groups of new participants (campaign managers, team leaders and agents), who, with the exception of the campaign manager, have not been involved in the master script’s production. The ground covered is
diagrammed in 5.1, but before moving on to an account of the two principal interactional activities involved in the adaptation of the master script, I will first briefly introduce the informants, and then provide an introductory account of a process that is pervasive throughout the practices enacted at this level of the institutional system: monitoring.

**Diagram 5.1 The adaptation of the master script**
The chapter is based on several sources. In addition to my fieldnotes and an internal training document, I also draw on the interviews I conducted with the campaign managers and team leaders. The interviews with the agents will form the focus of the next chapter. The team leaders I interviewed were:

- **Gavin**, the team leader for Jenny’s campaigns. He is the most senior and experienced of the current team leaders and is now in charge of the high-end nurturing campaigns.
- **Ada**, the team leader for Laura’s campaigns.
- **Siiri**, a substitute team leader brought in to help out during peak times like Christmas. She reports to Laura.
- **Barbara**, a substitute team leader who helps out during peak times; she is otherwise doing quality control. She reports to Jenny.
- **Claudia**, former team leader. She used to be Jenny’s team leader before Gavin.
- **Piia**, a former team leader. She was the first team leader after a long time when the position was reintroduced in 2008\(^{116}\).

The table below summarises the team leaders’ different backgrounds:

### Table 5.1 The team leaders’ professional, linguistic and educational background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team leader</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Work other than the call centre job</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Language(s) spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gavin</strong></td>
<td>BA in Drama and Acting</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>He is involved in productions on TV and in the theatre</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ada</strong></td>
<td>BSc and MSc in Human Resource Management</td>
<td>HR Consultant</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Nigerian, American (born in Egypt)</td>
<td>English, Yoruba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Siiri</strong></td>
<td>BA and MA in Film Studies and Production</td>
<td>Film Director and Producer</td>
<td>She directs and produces movies. Sometimes she takes time off to go to other countries to shoot films</td>
<td>Finnish, American (born in Germany)</td>
<td>Finnish, English, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{116}\) When I joined the call centre in 2005, they had a team leader. However, it was decided the day after I had joined that the institutional system was to be changed and there would be no more team leaders. In 2008, the role was reintroduced.
The relations between the campaign managers and the team leaders can be visualised using this diagram:

Diagram 5.2 The hierarchy in the call centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team leader</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Work other than the call centre job</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Language(s) spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Fully-qualified medical doctor; MBA from a top University</td>
<td>Medical doctor</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>BA and MA in Law</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piia</td>
<td>BSc and MSc in Media and IT</td>
<td>Media and IT consultant</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operations Manager (call centre’s big boss)

'Upstairs': The campaign managers and team leaders.

'Downstairs' in the call centre:
5.1 Monitoring: a key structural feature of the institutional system

Monitoring becomes a key issue at this stage in the career of the script. Although it is not always consistent and may depend on the time of the quarter, and on the campaign as well as the market targeted, it has an impact on the interpretation of the script in ways that need to be addressed right at the start of my description. Let us begin with the operations managers’ account of the intended features of monitoring and then move from there to the team leaders’ perceptions on this matter.

5.1.1 The operations manager’s account of monitoring

According to the operations manager, the management upstairs expects the campaign managers and team leaders to ensure: i) that agents read the master script word by word and interpret it as intended by the client, and that ii) the regulation and co-ordination of agents’ activities downstairs is in line with a set procedure. The procedure is supposed to begin with the campaign managers ‘briefing’ the respective team leaders on the campaign. During the briefing, two documents should be covered. The first is the master script which is to be read aloud to team leaders and the second is the client’s brief outlining targets and any useful background information about the campaign. Once the team leaders have been briefed, they are expected to provide the same briefing to the agents. Team leaders must also ensure that all agents have their own copy of the printed master script. This is important so that agents can read from it word by word and the corresponding statistics including dial reports can be generated. These will then be comparable with the predictions made for the specific master script. If we return to the example of the anonymised BIS campaign, it is predicted that every agent makes 15 leads and 200 dials a day, with a lead call lasting at least three minutes. If the statistics reveal that agents do not make either of the numbers, the call monitor downstairs will be asked to listen to their calls and

117 In fact, I may have been the only ‘team leader’ who was given an official instruction of what upstairs expects to happen downstairs. That is, the operations manager, who is part of the management upstairs, once sat down with me and instructed me. The section on the operations manager’s account of monitoring (section 5.1.1) is based on the fieldnotes I took of that meeting.
drill deeper to ‘fix the problem’. If the issue persists, the agent should be laid off. Otherwise, there is a risk that the agent could increase the overall cost of the campaign by requiring more time than calculated and covered by the campaign’s budget. For this reason, team leaders need to report back every day to their campaign managers about each agent’s performance, explaining any deviations, and how they have dealt with any problems. Based on the team leaders’ accounts and the statistics, the campaign managers will then compile their own report for the daily six o’clock p.m. meeting upstairs with their managers.

The following vignette provides an illustration of the operations manager’s notion of monitoring.
Fieldnote entry 5.1 (14/04/2010) ‘The operations manager’s view of monitoring’

After lunch I received a message telling me to come to the panic room for a meeting. Jenny and the operations manager were there looking at statistics. The operations manager was complaining to Jenny that agents on the BIS campaign (at that moment the biggest campaign in the call centre) had neither made enough calls nor leads. He also asked me why the lead and dial results were so low given that reading the script on the phone lasts only two and a half minutes. With such a short script, he claimed agents could make many more calls than they did. He ordered me to make sure that my fellow team leaders enforced the dial rates.

Given that it was the team leaders’ job to report back to the management every afternoon, he got annoyed how no one upstairs had been alerted to the problems on the BIS campaign. He seemed to blame me (and my fellow team leaders) for this lack of communication and the subsequent poor results. He looked me deep in the eye and told me with a serious voice that it was essential that the team leaders and I needed to report back to our campaign managers in the future. I apologised and promised to do so (although of course everything had been reported back to the campaign managers and Jenny knew that). Jenny did not say anything, but it was clear to me that her strategy was, as she had done before, to blame the poor results on “unsackable” (difficult to replace) team leaders to ensure that none of the agents were being fired by the operations manager. The real reason for the lack of results was the poor data, which included many invalid numbers, making it impossible for agents to have a high dial or lead rate, and she did not share this with the operations manager as she said he would not understand it anyway.

Once the operations manager had gone back upstairs, Jenny apologised to me about what had happened in the panic room. She knew, of course, that it was neither mine nor any of the other team leaders’ faults. She needed more time to fix the campaign and to prevent the operations manager from “sending anyone home”.

Since the operations manager expects team leaders and agents to read from the script word by word, he does not say anything about a possible adaptation. Instead, his account stresses the need for team leaders to monitor agents’ performances so that they meet their targets and generate the statistics. In chapter 4, we saw that the targets and statistics were sold to the client and calculated based on the approved master script. From an upstairs’ point of view, it is thus important that agents meet these targets.

What do the team leaders think of this monitoring?

5.1.2. The team leaders’ perception of monitoring

Team leaders do not criticise monitoring per se, but rather the fact that it is impersonal, inflexible and that there is no regard for particular pressures at
certain times. It is also felt that there is insensitivity to the unavoidable variability in individual performance in the face of the same set of high targets every day. More specifically, there are four points of criticism.

Firstly, combined targets of dial rates\textsuperscript{118} and lead targets\textsuperscript{119} are regarded as being unrealistic, inflexible, incompatible and unachievable. As Barbara notes:

**Extract 5.1**

“Targets are always kept at a level which are pretty much impossible to hit (...) yes, it’s stressful (...) I would find it more beneficial if such targets could be kind of ordered on and off, modified, sometimes brought a bit down, because obviously you know... the management knows what can be hit and what cannot be, and sometimes they can be unrealistic and that can frustrate you as well because you know that there’s no point even trying harder because I’m not going to hit that. I think sometimes they should be a bit more realistic (...). It’s fine to have them high but I think they should be high to a point where they can still be achievable and realistic (...) everybody’s different and one person might be able to dial 250 dials a day and one person just cannot do more than 150. Sometimes people do 120 and they get more, many more leads than people who are doing 200/250 dials. So I think we can’t like put everyone in one box but we should have like an average around which we should have like room for people who are falling within that range, you know, and not too far below basically.”

*Barbara, substitute team leader*

Secondly, the technology behind the monitoring system is perceived as inadequate. For instance, Ada suggests that it only tells half the story of what happens on the phone.

**Extract 5.2**

“I’m not listening to their calls. If I see someone with like 120 dials when it’s like three o’clock or four o’clock and things like that, sometimes I feel bad. I don’t want to actually come out and say, ‘Yeah, you need to pick up your dials’, and things like that, because at the end of the day, I don’t know why you have the number of dials you have; I don’t know the people you have been speaking with. I check that if you have lengthy conversations, what am I supposed to say? I can see it on the system [from the statistics] that you’ve had lengthy conversations with people; I’m not going to tell you, ‘Yeah, if the person’s talking too much cut them off’.”

*Ada, senior team leader*

Piia, the call monitor also complains about the system.

**Extract 5.3**

“I find that, I find it [the system] is not made for monitoring (...) that’s why sometimes I’m really hesitant to say something.”

*Piia, former team leader*

\textsuperscript{118} see chapter 4 subsection 4.2.1.

\textsuperscript{119} see chapter 4 subsection 4.2.1..
Thirdly, the dial rate targets on their own are described as not feasible. Both Siiri and Ada agree that this is in particular the case for engagement campaigns’ dial rates like that for BIS.

**Extract 5.4**

“There’s no way people can actually get 200 dials.” *(Ada, senior team leader)*

Siiri explicitly criticises the exclusively quantitative assessment of performance which takes no account of quality.

**Extract 5.5**

“I’ve actually counted it once because one of my friends was like I can’t reach 200 dials no matter what I do, and I’ve reached it maybe once but maybe I’ve talked to two people like besides the gatekeeper. (…) It’s like do you want more quantity or do you want quality? So (…) it depends exactly what you want because if you want quality leads, then you’re not going to get 200 dials per day, that’s I think just a fact (…). So if they want always 200 dials (…) So I think it was per person, per dials, like two and a half minutes, two minutes, [per dial and person you cannot talk longer than two and a half minutes] to get to that target (…) Some people can do it, but they’re not, you know, they’re not talking to anyone, yeah.” *(Siiri, substitute team leader)*

Importantly, Siiri contradicts the operation managers’ calculations explained in the previous section 5.1.1. We saw that he had estimated that reading the BIS script word by word should last three minutes and that agents should be able to make 200 dials a day. Siiri, nonetheless, says that she counted it once and for an agent to meet their target of 200 dials a day, the average call, including a lead call, cannot be longer than two and a half minutes.

With targets perceived as unrealistic, the question emerges how do team leaders cope with monitoring? Here is a vignette that describes what can happen when the operations manager makes a visit:
Fieldnote entry 5.2 (14/10/2010) ‘Visits by the operations manager: Pressure on meeting increased targets and coping with them’

[The operations manager came downstairs from time to time. He often also came to talk to me as he was my direct line manager since I was responsible for the quality of the campaigns. Prior to my first one-to-one meeting with him, Jenny had warned me that whenever I dealt with him, I needed to remember that he had no idea what was going on in the call centre or what working on the phone involved. He spends all his day looking at numbers and estimating things. At the same time, it is his job to try to lower costs and bring up the call centre’s revenue.] These are the notes I took of one of my meetings with him:

That day the operations manager came downstairs to have a chat with me in one of the meeting rooms about targets at the end of the quarter. I was very proud of what we as a group of team leaders had achieved that quarter, as we were in all campaigns on or above target, but without having put too much pressure on agents. However, looking over the results for that day, he pointed at the performance of one of the star performers called Sonia. For that day, she had already hit her target of 15 leads a day (she had made 17 leads at that point). He then asked me the rhetorical question of how I would double her performance today, if I were the operations manager. To my horror, he then ordered me to go up to her (it was 4 p.m.) and tell her that she should try to hit 30 leads in the next hour; otherwise she would not get her incentive.

After the meeting, I talked to Ada about what had happened. She was rather upset and angry. We agreed that I would talk about it to Jenny, as the most powerful person downstairs. Jenny told me to ignore him and just do my thing. She would talk to him to ensure that he would never bother me again. She is very happy with me and the job I do, that is all that matters. She told me that everybody just ignores him as he is incompetent and I should do the same.

Since the intervention of the operations manager is perceived as being unfair and raising unrealistic expectations, the request is met with anger, resistance and it is probably ignored.

Another mechanism for coping is what is known downstairs as the ‘voicemail strategy’, which essentially is a short cut for agents and team leaders to increase their dial rates without calling properly. Its benefit is that it is almost impossible to spot from the statistics. The idea is to primarily log, track and call back numbers that probably no one will answer (voicemails). Without any unpredictable human interaction, an agent can make many valid calls in a minute but long enough not to appear like ‘dummy calls’ (see chapter 3 subsection 3.1.4). For example, Claudia explains:
Extract 5.6

“For instance I remember on the DDC campaign (...) I had the operations manager on my case because Jenny was on holiday (...) I took readings [of the time I spend on the phone for each call] (...) the one ring, two ring, three ring (...) [and no one picks up the phone], boom, next. (...) I used to track voicemail and put VM, VM, VM, VM [so she will have a list of calls she logged as voicemails - where no one picked up the phone]. So that at some point of the day I used to go back just on voicemail [and call all the numbers again which were voicemail as most likely they were still on voicemail. This allows her to make 10 calls in one minute as there will be no long human interaction], that could help me in increasing my reachability and my target in terms of numbers.” (Claudia, former team leader)

Despite these attempts to cope, team leaders still report that the pressures of monitoring have an impact on the adaptation of the master script. As we can see from the following vignette, this is frequently the case at the end of the quarter.

Fieldnote entry 5.3 (20/12/2010) ‘The impact of monitoring on the master script at the end of the quarter’

So far it had not been a very stressful day and the atmosphere in the call centre was very relaxed. The team leaders thought everyone was on track when it came to targets.

During lunch, the entire call centre management goes upstairs for a meeting that lasts two hours. Once they come back downstairs, Jenny calls all the substitute team leaders, team leaders who help out, to the panic room.

Following the panic room meeting, the substitute team leaders walked around the call centre with a piece of paper, reprimanding specific agents, all on UK engagement campaigns, such as the BIS campaign, that they needed to make more dials as upstairs had increased the dial rates again (to 250 dials instead of 200). Jenny also shouted some names across the call centre who according to the dial sheet, were not doing well, while swearing about sales upstairs. There was some confusion downstairs among the team leaders about what the actual new targets were with everyone saying something else. Agents also panicked. They complained that the targets were impossible and if the dial rates are so high, they would have to leave out a lot of sentences from the master script and only stick to the skeleton.

At one point, Ada came to the bubble room to talk to me about how we were going to handle the even more unrealistic targets and the fact that agents have started leaving out huge chunks from the script, with calls being too short now. We agree on what needs to be mentioned and what can be left out. As Ada says, no one can expect agents to talk to for long on the phone with such high targets. We then get all the agents involved to the panic room and de-brief them.

The vignette shows that the pressure team leaders feel due to monitoring has an important influence on their subsequent adaptation of the master script.
That is, as the pressure increases due to higher targets, the master script gets more pared down (as is shown in section 5.2.1. below).

From time to time, the gaps between upstairs’ and downstairs’ understanding of monitoring and the master script become very conspicuous:

**Fieldnote entry 5.4 (01/03/2010) ‘The operations manager’s unannounced visits to the call centre’**

From time to time, the operations manager from upstairs (the call centre’s big boss) would come unannounced downstairs. He would then take a seat among the agents and work from there for a few hours on his laptop. The operations manager called this a “hands on approach”.

He always took advantage of the fact none of the agents knew who he was. Despite his seniority, he is only a little bit older than the average call centre agent and also always casually dressed like everyone else. It is also not uncommon for IT technicians to come to the call centre and fix computers without interacting or introducing themselves to agents. So it would not be really strange for agents to see a random guy sitting among them, who would not talk to them, but only type on his laptop.

When the operations manager took a seat downstairs, he remained a nameless figure, talking to none of the agents and like the Holy Spirit, he just came and vanished again. However, the result of these sit-ins was that he was usually very very upset about what he saw happening ‘uncensored’ downstairs.

If Jenny knew he was coming or that he was already there, she was suddenly very strict. The team leaders also tried to give secret warnings to agents that they had to be careful what they did around him. Jenny used to say that we needed to behave according to his rules and ideas when he was around. But once he had gone we could go back to normal, breathe and have fun again. This is what literally happened today, once he had finally gone back upstairs. It was so nice that one could move and talk again freely around the call centre.

Otherwise, the gap is systematically managed by the campaign managers, for they know that upstairs cannot find out about the short cuts taken with the script for three reasons. First, they cannot listen to calls downstairs as monitoring only happens downstairs. Second, the dial sheet available to them does not show the time agents spend on the phone. Third, the client’s call back to the lead is highly unlikely to reveal that agents have not read the script word by word.
5.1.3 Discussion

Taking an analytical step back, we can say that the monitoring system implemented downstairs is based on a scientific notion of reproducibility and accounting. In fact, it is similar to what Smith (1996: 181) described for large-scale corporations:

"[Within the reality of large-scale corporation management] reproducibility constitutes a 'reality' corresponding to the circulation of the (printed) text. (...) The replication of local events as identical (though identity is always more or less a fiction) makes possible, for example, systems of measurement, the accumulation of statistical data, the formulation of rules and instructions applicable from one setting and time to others, and other textual practices of science, management and the market. Control or production process at the level of shop floor is tied into accounting systems and other computerised technologies of management that render the company operable within the field of capitalist social relations. (...) Accounting is more than a source of information travelling between work organisation at the level of the shop floor and the decision-making level of corporate executives and financial managers. It is an actual organiser of the relations articulating people’s work, particularly the processes of production and sales but also of management (...). Accounting and related textual technologies of management coordinate local work processes at the shop floor level” (Smith 1996: 181 - 182).

Similar to Smith’s observation, we have seen in this and the previous chapter that upstairs’ notion of accountability is built on their belief in identical replication of a master script in every call. The problem for downstairs is that not only are the estimated targets not feasible, but also it is unrealistic for team leaders and agents to read the master script word by word on the phone with every call. So, the campaign managers have to mediate between upstairs and the team leaders and agents’ need for flexibility. But despite their mediation, we have seen that monitoring affects the way the script is handled. Let us turn now to this in more detail. How are the team leaders and agents briefed on the master script?

5.2 Briefing on the master script by the campaign managers and team leaders

Briefing consists of two activities: ‘briefing the team leaders’ and ‘briefing the agents’. In both, adaptation of the master script is the central concern and the master script acquires a range of new meanings.
5.2.1 Briefing the team leaders

The team leaders’ briefing is generally very short as they are already meant to be proficient in the use of master scripts and it usually takes place in the panic room. At the outset, they will be handed a printed copy of the typed master script and the clients’ brief. It will be the latter that the campaign managers will cover first, which lists all the targets and any useful background information about the client. Any other notes that team leaders take about the client or the campaign will have to be written on a notepad that they are required to bring to every briefing. The discussion of the brief is followed by a reading of the master script. At this point, team leaders may underline sentences or words in the script that they or the campaign managers deem important. They will also hand-annotate the script, scribbling down key words that the campaign manager mentioned and these annotations might also include personal notes of things they consider important. At the end of the meeting, every team leader will have a typed copy of the master script with individual hand-annotations and this will now be considered his/her own script.

Let us return to the anonymised BIS campaign to illustrate the material to be discussed (cf. chapter 4 subsection 4.2.1). Most likely, campaign managers would point out the following:

The brief:
- The customer is one of the call centre’s best clients
- Brief summary/description of BIS
- All industries can be targeted, company size 50-1000
- Target all job titles in the IT Department (except IT support)
- Goal: 2000 UK leads, 1000 leads in France and Germany
- A definition of Acceptable Use Policy\textsuperscript{120} (AUP)

The master script:
- BIS is a leading provider of internet security

\textsuperscript{120} AUP is about how companies manage their digital footprint, in particular, that of their employees.
- 1 whitepaper/report on Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) written by an independent company
- Benefits (bullet points) in the section of the pitch

How would this material be covered in the briefing:

Two of the campaign managers made some specific comments about their general approach to briefings. For instance, Laura says:

**Extract 5.8**

“When I train them and usually when I read the script to them, I make it... I show them straight away that I’m cutting points and tell them I don’t expect you to follow every single thing.”

*Laura, campaign manager*

Jenny talks about the problem that many people do not understand the technical language and concepts used in the script and the need for explaining these:

**Extract 5.9**

“It’s very important that everyone gets the idea [of the master script], and people don’t always understand what they’re talking about, especially the new people that come in. So I remember myself, when I first started here I started to read a script about SSL sockets. I had no idea what I was talking about.”

*Jenny, campaign manager*

Beyond this, more generally campaign managers draw attention to two strategies that should be used as the script moves closer to actual use:

i) sticking to the basic elements of the script, but personalising it
   (‘the eight sections’ cf. section on the ‘consultative approach’ below)

ii) being ‘consultative’ with the other person on the phone.

It is worth noting that the ‘consultative’ approach is only applicable to high-end BANT and nurturing campaigns, not to engagement campaigns. It is worth tuning to these two approaches in more detail.

**Personalisation of the master script (“make it your own”)**

Once team leaders have understood the core points of the script, Laura stresses the need for the user to personalise it. She does not want the team leaders or agents to read the script word by word and sound like a robot.
Instead, she would like them to use the parts of the script which fit the conversation.

**Extract 5.10**

“Because if you sound like you are reading, you’re a robot, I would say no. So I want them to get used to it, touch on the core points, make it like they... after they memorise, after they know what they’re talking about, you don’t need to read it, you can just make it yours, you can just change and see it’s... like maybe, if you are the target audience, maybe talking to you in a conversation you don’t say something because the conversation just flows in a different way and with me it’s different so I expect them to... not to follow it completely word by word.”

*(Laura, campaign manager)*

For her, the script is a basic structure which allows team leaders and agents to make amendments within set boundaries:

**Extract 5.11**

JW: Are you in favour of using scripts?
L: Yeah, yeah, yeah, completely, because every time it’s different (...) we need everyone to have the same structure and then of course you can amend it slightly [within the structure] but you need a structure for that. *(Laura, campaign manager)*

Anwar shares Laura’s view of scripts, which he prefers to call “call guides”.

**Extract 5.12**

“Personally I think scripts are essential to the business, but that doesn’t mean forcing agents to read word by word, which I consider a very bad industry practice. Each individual has their own way of delivering a message and the whole idea of a script is to set guidelines around what needs to be said and asked. That’s why I like calling them ‘Call Guides’ instead. (...) We need to make sure all relevant questions are asked in a professional manner and for that reason, a flow is devised in the script to help them stay on track.”

*(Anwar, campaign manager)*

**Consultative approach (going beyond the master script)**

Jenny described the consultative approach in the following way.

**Extract 5.13**

“When you’re pitching to someone, you don’t want to waste their time, so it’s very, very important that you make the pitch memorable; you have to engage with them on the script, otherwise there’s no recall after it; so you need to make sure that you’re thinking about positioning the script in a way that you grasp them quickly but you don’t rattle on to them too much. Then you get them listening and then you could start pitching them, but you need to listen and pause to hear for their [feedback/reaction]... If they’re getting bored you need to speed up. If they’re asking questions, slow down and answer the questions.

*(Jenny, campaign manager)*
She adds that ‘consultative’ calling develops with experience:

**Extract 5.14**

“When people first start, they’re asked to read from the scripts, but our older agents we trust to sort of be a bit more consultative in their use of the master script.”

(Jenny, campaign manager)

In fact, most new agents will start off on an engagement campaign and the idea behind this is that they will first need to learn how to personalise the script. The engagement scripts are good for beginners as they are brief and their language is not very technical. Once the campaign managers deem them able to do so, agents will be trained in the consultative approach\(^\text{121}\) and move to corresponding BANT and nurturing campaigns.

How, though, are these personalisation and consultation strategies compatible with monitoring?

If we look back at the structure of the script, the headings show that when agents call, they should (1) **introduce themselves to the receptionist**, (2) handle **potential objections** (3) **introduce themselves to the contact** (4) **introduce the client** (5) **cover the core points of the pitch and profiling questions** (6), (7) **confirm the details** and (8) **close the call**.

\(^\text{121}\) During the training, a training document will be covered listing strategies for the consultative approach and then these will be applied to the master script and practised with role plays.
In chapter 4, we saw that the production of specific scripts focused on two sections. These were ‘the pitch’ and ‘introduction of the client’, the two campaign sections of the script which were specifically approved by the client. The information from these two sections is important and will need to be mentioned during the call.

There is an occasional call monitor downstairs, a team leader, who will listen to whether agents mention the key points of those two sections during the call, and whether they follow the structure of the master script (the eight sections).

Former call monitor Piia provides some examples of what she monitored:

**Extract 5.15**

“Do they actually mention the things what the contact is supposed to know, like what is [the pitch- key section of the script (textbox 6)] really about? So [the pitch] is not just an email, it’s the email (...) is about something. And then if there was profiling questions, do they really ask the questions [part of the pitch (textbox 6)] and do they ask that they will receive a call back [closing statement – (textbox 8)].”

(Piia, former team leader and call monitor)
Imagining the master script as a skeleton makes it also possible to claim that agents’ calls can be monitored even if they are speaking another language. Piia explains:

**Extract 5.16**

“I don’t know any Arabic, but when I listened to calls in Arabic, I could tell whether agents followed the script because of their intonation.” (Piia, former team leader)

As I discussed earlier in chapter 4 (fieldnote 4.3), team leaders sometimes find it difficult to tell how closely agents are to follow the content of the master script or what the key points of the pitch are that need to be mentioned and they may sometimes have to guess what is important. However, when clients do the call backs and find that the people called were not told all the information they were supposed to hear, team leaders and agents will then be in trouble if their version of the master script diverged too far from the skeleton.

So downstairs, the master script is no longer thought of as a fixed product sold to the client. That is, attention has been shifted away from the word for word focus to the general structure or guidelines of the script. Campaign managers encourage team leaders and agents to adapt the words of the master script to make it fit in with their own way of talking. Expressions like Laura’s “make it your own” highlight the difference in downstairs’ orientation towards the master script as opposed to that of upstairs. Across this activity, the master script will thus take on another significance for the team leaders, which is also influenced by their hierarchical position. Team leaders’ orientation towards the script is well-exemplified by the fact that after they have been briefed by the campaign managers, they will treat their hand-annotated script as their own possession and store it in their pigeon hole to ensure that it does not get thrown away. The script is no longer the master script that was sold to the client (upstairs’ view). Now it is theirs, they own it and it is this that they refer to in the next activity, briefing the agents.
5.2.2 Briefing the agents

Team leaders brief the agents in the panic room using their own individually annotated version of the master script.

How is the briefing staged and what are the strategies that team leaders propose to agents?

At the beginning of the briefing, every agent will be handed a printed copy of the typed BIS master script and the client’s brief, and then there are two stages: Agents will be first introduced to the overview of the client (client’s brief) and then to the master script.

Extract 5.17

“When I train people I basically, after doing the briefing and so, going through the overview of the client and everything, I go through the entire script, I tell them that if you feel that you have a certain way of saying things and it’s not helping, try and change that. If you feel you want to summarise some key points do that. If you feel you want to write down a script in your own words, write it down but have this information in that, you know, the sequence might alter.”

(Barbara, substitute team leader)

Extract 5.18

“When I train people, I try to make it as simple as I can. I still read what’s in front of me [master script] but, after reading like a line, I try to translate it like in a simpler way more like, so if they don’t get what’s on the script, ‘Okay, this is what they’re saying.’ I’ll put it in layman’s terms (...) to help them. (...) I always make sure I tell them [agents], as long as you don’t leave out any vital information (...). You can summarise it [the master script] in a way that they understand it, you understand it clearly, and that’s it. (...). One thing I always make sure I talk about when I’m reading the script, I never ever leave out the benefits. Even if you’re summarising anything, always still mention the benefits (...).”

(Ada, senior team leader)

The entire master script will be read out to agents, but Siiri and Ada say that it will be made clear what the key points are that need to be mentioned on the phone. These are i) the reasons for the call, ii) who they are targeting and iii) the benefits (of the material to be sent out).

How do team leaders cover this material?

The first step will be to make a few general comments about the master script itself, including highlighting its eight basic elements. All the team leaders also told me that they would draw on an analogy to better illustrate the script’s function to agents. Here are four examples:
i) Gavin: The master script has parameters which are not set in stone:

**Extract 5.19**

“The script’s constructed in a way that has all the information but also the parameters on the script are not set in stone, you’re allowed to change and adapt to your way of talking and your way of getting the information across, I think that’s the perfect script.”

*(Gavin, senior team leader)*

ii) Siiri: The master script as a good bible with good and flexible rules:

**Extract 5.20**

“They [scripts] are good... they’re like a good bible, you know, you can... they have good rules and they have a set, a set, you know, target, use this, you know, just outline the most important things and make it your own (...) meaning making it sound like you.”

*(Siiri, substitute team leader)*

iii) Ada: The master script as a guideline:

**Extract 5.21**

“Using a script, to be honest with you, I believe it’s just like a guideline. At the end of the day, if you give someone a script, I believe the person should use that script, but use it in their own ... as in change the words, put it in their own words basically to fit the way they would present it, not the whole, you have to follow a particular script or you have to do this this particular way. It might work for you, it might not work for another person (...) The script thing, as in general is okay because it actually helps people as in: it directs people.”

*(Ada, senior team leader)*

iv) Barbara: The master script as a standard with some leeway around it:

**Extract 5.22**

“Because everybody is different and everybody has their own style, so if you make everybody do the same script, it becomes very robotic and nobody wants to hear that on the phone. I think the most successful agents are those who just make it their own; they kind of just get into that role and they just do it naturally, the script is not there, it just comes naturally to them. (...) But yes, that standard should be there; however there should be some leeway around it.”

*(Barbara, substitute team leader)*

The next step for the team leaders will be to train agents on how to use the skeleton to i) personalise and ii) be consultative.

However, before this, it is stressed that the typed text and format of the master script itself cannot be modified or re-printed. Any adaptation that the team leaders talk about will have to be oral or hand-written as the field note entry indicates.
Fieldnote entry 5.5 (08/09/2010) ‘Changes to the typed master script allowed downstairs’

Following a number of crisis meetings after an important client sent back leads, I asked Jenny whether we could not simply add a number of questions to the master script to ensure that agents asked them and the leads were indeed leads. It had emerged that agents did not ask any follow up questions as “they were not on the script”. Jenny replied that we can’t do that as the script came from the client and upstairs, we can’t change it. Moreover, the client has not paid for those questions. Instead, she suggested me to write those additional questions on a separate hand-out, which I could print and distribute to give to agents. I did as she told me.

Plainly, all scripts and questions have price tags attached to them. That is, the client has paid for a bespoke typed script, the price of which is calculated on the number of questions, and the depth and detail of those questions. If any ‘typed questions’ are added to the already ‘approved’ typed master script, the client should have to pay extra. But this is not the case with a hand-written question, since handwriting indexes something less official and is invisible upstairs.

Now, let us look at what personalisation of the master script involves based on the team leaders’ account.

Personalisation of the master script

The team leaders still work the lines and they all said they pursued their own individual strategies for making the script their own. During the briefing, they share those strategies with the agents and enact solo different versions of the master script. Here are examples that Siiri, Gavin and Ada used to show what personalisation involves for them.
Siiri told me she writes her own script on a blank piece of paper by hand:

**Extract 5.23**

“So it’s not about changing the script, I think it’s more about using the key elements in the script and making it sound like you (…) I rewrite it I write it into one blank piece of paper from the beginning (…) so I just rewrite it and make it my own, yeah. So that’s why I think it’s better to have it as a guideline but make just to make it sound like yourself, so it comes out of your mouth. … I mean the scripts are good but they sound like someone else, that..., they sound like very general kind, I think that’s the problem that I faced in the beginning (…) whatever you write down, just make it sound like you’re interested. You have to be interested, you have to, you have to sell it yourself.”  

*(Siiri, substitute team leader)*

Ada mentions “reshuffling the words” to make it sound like her:

**Extract 5.24**

“When I say the same thing over and over again it gives me a headache (…) So I have to like reshuffle my words. I always like changing it because it’s like sometimes I believe I sound like a scratched CD (…) saying the same thing over and over and over. It became so bad I was actually saying it in my sleep (…) and it wasn’t even fun anymore. So you just need to change it around a bit.”  

*(Ada, senior team leader)*

Finally, Gavin notes that he will make all the changes to the script in his head:

**Extract 5.25**

“When someone brief[ed] me when I first came here; you just want to look like you’re doing something to the script if they’re going through and saying, ‘You should really underline this bit’, but I don’t touch scripts like that, I do it all in head and verbal and just… I see what’s on the page and after a few calls I know what needs to be said and what doesn’t. (…) I guess there’s phrases I steer clear of like ‘report’, not a big fan of that sort of word, because I think it’s too client-driven I use ‘we’ a lot (…) it’s odd because I always say I’m calling ‘on behalf of’ and then I say… later on I’ll drop in, ‘Yeah, we’ve just put this together’, but I do it very casually so it sounds… even though I say I’m calling ‘on behalf of’ it then sounds like I’m part of… they can’t picture me, say, in a call centre calling them.”  

*(Gavin, senior team leader)*

In view of these differences in their approaches, personalisation strategies are likely to have different impacts on the master script. While for Siiri it will involve both hand-written and oral changes, Gavin and Ada only talk of oral ones.

When it comes to training the agents, team leaders advise them to make any changes prior to calling. Although everyone is allowed to make hand-written changes to the script even after they have started calling, making the script one’s own before they start provides an opportunity for agents to familiarise themselves with an entirely new text. After a few calls
and feedback, more hand-written notes will be added to the script and as a result, agents’ personal versions are also likely to change.

While all scripts independent of the type of campaigns need to be personalised, the same does not apply to the consultative approach. This strategy is reserved for high-end campaigns like BANT and nurturing, where the scripts are long, containing a great deal of information and many questions. So, one would not be consultative with the BIS master script, as it is an engagement script. Furthermore, only agents who are considered ‘good’ at personalisation and fluent in the language of the target market are trained in being consultative.

So what does being consultative involve, and how are agents trained in this?

**Being ‘consultative’ with the master script**

Whereas personalisation centres on the agents’ individual preferences and needs, the consultative approach is about using the master script to engage *the other person* on the phone in a conversation. Gavin, who is considered the expert in the call centre on consultative calling, describes it the following way:

**Extract 5.26**

“The sort of a consultative approach on things. (...) It’s far more about them than it is about us. I find with engagement [scripts] it’s all about us really, really we’re calling for us. I think with engagement [campaigns], we have objectives obviously, we are getting them these things because we’re employed by a company to hit them with it, but it’s just far more focused around them (...).”

*(Gavin, senior team leader)*

According to the team leaders, it is about a range of questions that agents should ask to prompt a conversation. Agents can do this by enquiring about the other persons’ needs and asking questions like “what problems have you got at the moment?”.
Extract 5.27

“The consultative approach (...) it’s not ((sighs)) ‘We have this, take it, and then someone’s going to give you a call back in the next two weeks’. It’s much more like, ‘What problems have you got at the moment? What issues are you having?’ It’s far more about them than it is about us. And in terms of a caller, they’re the skills now I think that are going to be prized above any other is the consultative approach. (...) we need guys that can sit on the phone for a quarter of an hour, 20 minutes. It’s going to be far more knowledge based, for the agent. (...). It’s (...) far more just talking, just having a conversation, an actual conversation.”  (Gavin, team leader)

These kinds of conversations-prompting questions will also be listed on a specific training sheet and the agent is free either to integrate them into the eight sections of the already personalised master script or to ask them after the scripts’ basic elements have been covered122.

**Document 5.2 Internal training document for the consultative approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For BANT (Budget Authority Need Time) campaigns we are looking for IT professionals who have a <strong>project within a specific timeframe, the relevant authority, need and frequently the budget too</strong>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlike with Engagement campaigns, for BANT and for nurturing campaigns, it is often necessary to go beyond the script to clarify whether they actually got a project. We call this a “consultative approach”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It often helps to find out the answer to <strong>why</strong> they have a project so that we can be sure that they really have a project. In order to do so it is often good to obtain an answer to the following question during a conversation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do they face any issues or problems in the respective areas? (What is their need?)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do they have contracts/licenses which expire? Do they want to upgrade their products?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does it depend on whether they will have the project (the budget, timeframe etc.)?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do they have annual reviews for the relevant areas?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gavin also suggests that there are three different components of every call: the tone, flow and content of the conversation.

---

122 BANT, nurturing and engagement campaigns all have the same basic eight elements. The difference between the campaign scripts is the amount of profiling questions that follow the basic sections. Engagements usually have none, BANT some and nurturing many.
Extract 5.28
“Regardless of what the information is, I think it has to be put in an engaging way. (...) change words, get rid of like whole sentences, and I’ll change sentences, and I’ll lynchpin it around the information that matters, that we have to let them know what it’s about, but I’ll change… but I’ll never do the same every time. For example, if I call someone up, I probably have a phone voice. A lot of people tend to. But then if I go through to IT managers (...) if they make it much more friendly and a much more conversational thing then I will obviously mirror that in terms of I’ll probably let my natural accent come through a little bit more, I won’t use as formal terms I suppose (...) But I just mirror really, that’s what I tend to do (...) You should let them dictate the tone. (...)You should always dictate where it [conversation] is going but let them dictate the tone and the terms they want to talk to you on....”

(Gavin, senior team leader)

While he will let the other person dictate the tone of the conversation, his control over the flow of the conversation will supposedly enable him to stay within the skeleton of the master script. For an agent to respond to the tone and flow, listening becomes important. In fact, all the team leaders identify this as a key factor:

Extract 5.29
“I’d probably say it’s the key skill, listening. (...) I don’t mean just listening to what they’re saying. (...) I don’t know whether that comes from me being an actor but when you’re on stage and when you’re performing, for me the most important thing is listening, but not listening with your ears, listening with your whole body. That’s what we’re meant to do on stage as an actor, okay. So that doesn’t just mean watching what the person’s saying and waiting for your bit. You have to listen: like you say you have to have an emotional intelligence, you have to be switched on to certain movements and things. Now we don’t have that on the phone but what we do have is a whole wealth of stuff that they can give us. Hence a guy saying, ‘Yeah, what is it?’ or a guy going, ‘Oh all right, yeah, yeah, I’m okay’. (groans) (...) you have to have a sense of being able to listen to how they are as a person. And of course it’s split-second, you don’t have time to sit there and get to know them, but I think listening is a massive important skill and not just to what they’re saying but how they’re saying it. That’s all we have. But I think being adaptable, listening to them and being able to adapt to what they’re saying (...)”

(Gavin, senior team leader)

Extract 5.30
“When you sense the tone of the voice of the other person who is on the other side of the line and like how to talk to people, yeah, and it’s just sensing things. (...) Every single phone call is different (...).”

(Piia, former team leader)

Ada adds that it is also about listening to what things and pointers the client might find useful:
Extract 5.31

“[For the consultative approach] you should be a good listener, you should be a very good listener to be honest, because at the end of the day you can put something, other pointers in the remarks, things that the client, information that the client might find very useful.”  

(Ada, senior team leader)

When it comes to the writing that needs to go on with the consultative approach, there are two different forms. First of all, agents are expected to take notes on their notepad of what the other person says. They can then type up and save this information in the call centre’s database so it can be analysed by campaign managers and subsequently passed on to the client. Secondly, agents are also encouraged to listen and make a note on their scripts of any keyword that seems to lead people to open up. Most likely, during the briefing the team leaders will give agents some tips based on their experience as to what potential key words and prompters for conversations there could be. Agents will then scribble these on their master script.

On the whole, the consultative approach is seen as being much less a matter of set rules and is often described as developing a feel for the master script and calls. Team leaders call it developing an “intuition” (Gavin) or “sensing things” (Piia and Siiri) and the ideal of the consultative approach is that one cannot even tell that these agents are working off a script but it appears like a spontaneous conversation instead.

Role plays are considered a useful means for training agents on the consultative approach. For instance, Barbara says:

Extract 5.32

“I think that a better way to do this [train them on the consultative approach] is that to train them on the generic script but then do some roleplays with them and show them how it [the script] could be modified (...) They kind of just have [to learn] to get into that role and just do it naturally, the script is not there, it just comes naturally to them. I think more role-playing (...) in terms of what they might say and how they might speak might help.”  

(Barbara, substitute team leader)

5.2.3 Discussion

This section has shown how different the team leaders’ orientation towards the master script is from that of upstairs. For the team leaders, the master script is not a fixed product that was sold to the client. Instead, it is thought of as a skeleton that can be adapted to the situation and context, while the
overall skeleton needs to remain intact (i.e. the obligatory closing phrase to complete the calls that is required for legal reasons). Returning to the issue of standardisation, we can say that although team leaders state that they follow ‘the standard’, this does not imply strict fidelity to the text as requested by the client. For them, following the standard means that there is some leeway around it, and this includes practical adaptations of the master script (oral or hand-written), which do not undermine or compromise the framing of the master script as an authoritative reference point. In many ways, this perception of a ‘standard’ is similar to that described in the chapter by Bauman (1996) I mentioned in the introduction of chapter 4. The master script and the notion of standardisation, therefore, mean different things to team leaders and upstairs. Team leaders are pragmatic in their orientation and adaptation of the master script. They believe communication will be most successful when they personalise and adapt the script into a dialogue in which the caller reacts to their partner on the phone. Concerning the transformations that the master script undergoes at this stage, team leaders and agents hand-annotate their typed copy. Based on the discussion of the two briefings, the following characterisations can be made about the use of the script and its potential transformations.

Table 5.2 Types of scripts and their expected transformations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of campaign</th>
<th>Hand-written and oral transformations</th>
<th>Personalisation</th>
<th>Consultative approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement campaigns</td>
<td>It can be read word by word. A few hand-written or oral transformations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANT campaigns</td>
<td>The master script may require some oral or hand-written transformations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - follow up questions added to the master script that are context dependent, not scripted, and are based on what the other person on the phone has told them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing campaigns</td>
<td>The master script will require a lot of hand-written and oral transformations.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - improvise by adding a lot of questions to the master script. These questions will be context dependent and not scripted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next section, I will look at concrete examples of team leaders’ personalisation of the script, which they provided me with during an interview role play. An analysis of these should help us understand what
personalisation of the script approach entails in terms of changes made to the script.

5.3 Example of personalisation of the master script in an interview role play

During the interviews, I asked three of the team leaders to enact solo their personalisation of the pitch, the longer of the two campaign specific sections of the script. To analyse these examples, I draw on a framework that Johnstone (2003) developed for examining individual variation in telephone interviewers’ scripted speech. In line with her approach, I address two questions. First, can we observe any variation from speaker to speaker? Secondly, what are the continua along which team leaders’ choices, overall, appear to vary? (cf. Johnstone 2003: 274)

The answer to the first question is yes. None of the three enacted versions are exactly the same and all vary from the master script. A good illustration of this are the two introductory sentences of the pitch. On the typed master script, the following is written:

The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS, has put together a complimentary report on AUP. The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems.

This is Ada’s personalisation of the first two sentences:

Table 5.3 Ada’s version of the S.1-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘THE BIS MASTER SCRIPT’ PITCH</th>
<th>ADA’S BIS MASTER SCRIPT PITCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.1 The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.)</td>
<td>Ada leaves out name change of BIS to TAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2 The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems.</td>
<td>Ada inserts “now”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key: ∅ = omission from original text</td>
<td>Ada leaves out sentence 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More specifically, we can see that Ada:

S.1:  
- adds a “now” in the beginning
- leaves out that BIS has changed its company name to TAS (“TAS, formerly known as BIS”)
- adds a relative clause after AUP “which, as you know”

**S.2:**
- she leaves out the entire second sentence

Siiri’s version of the master script was the following:

**Table 5.4  Siiri’s version of S.1-2 of the master script’s pitch**

| S.1 | The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS, has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.) |
| S.2 | The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems. |

We can observe the following changes in her personalisation:

**S.1**
- she omits that BIS has changed its company name to TAS (“TAS, formerly known as BIS”)
- she changes “has” to “have”

**S.2**
- she leaves out the entire second sentence
Finally, Barbara provided me with this personalisation of the first two lines:

Table 5.5  Barbara’s version of S.1-2 of the master script’s pitch

| S.0 | The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.) |
| S.1 | The reason for my call today is that I was looking to send across a complimentary resource kit to you as a one-off email on behalf of BIS, which is now known as X. |
| S.2 | The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems. The resource kit is a report, it’s a complimentary report which is on Acceptable Use Policy and, as you know, the Acceptable Use Policy is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of corporate IT systems. |

Barbara made a range of changes:

**S.1:**
- she begins with a greeting “Hi”
- she puts the purpose of the call from the end of the script in S.1 and modifies the wording to “I was looking to send across a complimentary resource kit to you”
- she uses “resource kit” instead of “report”
- she inserts “one-off email”, “on behalf of” and “which is now known as X”(relative clause)

**S.2:**
- the remaining left out information from S.2 is integrated into the second sentence
- she clarifies that the “resource kit” (her term) is a “complimentary report” (the script’s term)
- she includes “which is on Acceptable Use Policy” and “as you you know”
Importantly, the three introductions all differ from one another and from the script. That is, in their personalisations team leaders can be seen to reorder and leave out information from the script. Although these sentences indicate some variation, if one looks at the three personalised pitches and variation as a whole (table 5.6–5.8) below, it becomes evident that from Sentence 5 below (S.5)\(^{123}\) ‘the conclusion of the pitch’ all three versions become very deviant from the master script. Not only is information left out and reordered, new information is added, and entire sentences are reformulated.

Table 5.6  The BIS master script pitch and Ada’s personalisation of it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introductory sentences of the pitch (S.1-S.2)</th>
<th>Main body of the pitch (S.3-S.5)</th>
<th>Conclusion of the pitch (S.5-S.7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘THE BIS MASTER SCRIPT’ PITCH</strong></td>
<td><strong>ADA’S BIS MASTER SCRIPT PITCH</strong></td>
<td><strong>Provide information about the email</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.1  The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.)</td>
<td>Now the reason for my call today is that BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP which, as you know, is Acceptable Use Policy.</td>
<td>I would like to send this piece of information to you as well, if that’s okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2  The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems.</td>
<td>∅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.3  This whitepaper is written by an external company that look at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. By reading this whitepaper you will learn about:</td>
<td>Now this report was written by an external company that looks at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. And by reading this report you learn about so many things like:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| S.4  • Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP  
• What should be in an AUP  
• Provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  
• Explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively | • common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP  
• and what should be in an AUP, provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  
• explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively. | |
| S.5  Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful. | Now we’ve sent this report to IT professionals across the country; most of them have found it very useful. | |
| S.6  Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary? | Like I said it’s complimentary information. | |
| S.7  | I would like to send this piece of information to you as well, if that’s okay. | |

Key:  
∅ = omission from original text  
Other font = very deviant

\(^{123}\) In the remainder of the section, I refer to sentence as S..
The fact that there are variations leads us to the next question along which continua these vary, to address this, I draw on Johnstone’s framework.
In Johnstone’s study, the telephone interviewers were given a completely scripted introduction to read and she focused on how they changed it. The script printed for the interviewer was the following:

“Hello, this is ___ calling for the Texas Poll, a statewide, non-partisan public opinion poll. This month we are conducting a confidential survey of public opinion in Texas, and we’d really appreciate your help and cooperation.” (quoted in Johnstone 2003: 274)

Johnstone (2003: 275) found that interviewers varied in their use of the script along two continua, one discourse-syntactic and one interactional, with the former referring to how the five separate clauses in this are connected. Regarding this, the author observed that the interviewers preferred speaking a version of the script “in which bits of information were less tightly packed into clauses and more explicitly linked” to one another than in the script, and they did so in a variety of ways (2003: 276). In the original script, there are only three independent clauses, but, as Johnstone (1996: 116) notes, apart from the first sentence, all five could be linked to the foregoing clause with and. Several agents used and as a connector between the third and fourth clauses as well as between the second and third clauses (cf. Johnstone 2003: 276). Overall, they preferred more co-coordinative ways of connecting clauses to sub-ordinate clauses. The third clause, an appositive noun phrase “a statewide, nonpartisan public opinion poll” was also changed by the majority of the interviewers to a finite clause and they used seven options to do so:

“It’s a statewide...
   It’s just a statewide...
   This is a statewide...
   This is merely a statewide...
   We’re a statewide...
   We’re doing the statewide...
   which is a statewide...”

(quoted from Johnstone 2003: 275)

Johnstone (Johnstone 2003: 274-275; 1996: 116-117) calls the other axis interactional (personability). This continuum describes how frequently and in which ways the agents referred to the people they were talking to and themselves. In her study, she found that agents included additional personal pronouns such as “we” and “I” in the script. For instance, Elaine, one of the interviewers, inserted two necessary “we’s” and three extra first-person pronouns:
“Hi, my name is Elaine, and I’m calling for the Texas Poll. We’re a statewide, non-partisan public opinion poll. And this month we are conducting a confidential survey of public opinions in Texas. We’d really appreciate your help and cooperation. Do you have a few moments?” (quoted from Johnstone 2003: 276)

Other interviewers included ma’am or sir. Others changed the greeting from hello (script) to a more “personable” hi, while others used the more formal good afternoon (Johnstone 1996: 116).

Johnstone’s two continua also seem to apply to the team leaders’ personalisations. The personability axis features strongly in all three versions (marked in bold in tables 5.9-5.11 below).

Table 5.9  The BIS master script pitch and Ada’s inclusion of personal pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘THE BIS MASTER SCRIPT PITCH’</th>
<th>ADA’S BIS MASTER SCRIPT PITCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.1  The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.)</td>
<td>Now the reason for my call today is that BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP which, as you know, is Acceptable Use Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2  The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems.</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.3  This whitepaper is written by an external company that look at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. By reading this whitepaper you will learn about:</td>
<td>Now this report was written by an external company that looks at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. And by reading this report you will learn about so many things like:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| S.4  •  Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP  
•  What should be in an AUP  
•  Provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  
•  Explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively |  •  common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP  
•  and what should be in an AUP, provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  
•  explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively. |
| S.5  Other IT Personnel have received it and found it to be very useful. | Now we’ve sent this report to IT professionals across the country; most of them have found it very useful. |
| S.6  Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary? | Like I said it’s complimentary information. |
| S.7  | I would like to send this piece of information to you as well, if that’s okay. |
In two of the versions a “we” is introduced into the script, which is very noteworthy if one remembers that in the master script, there is no mention of “we” since agents are calling on behalf of the client. We can also observe that team leaders complement their version by a range of personal pronouns “I”,

### Table 5.10 The master script pitch and Siiri’s inclusion of pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>THE BIS MASTER SCRIPT</strong> PITCH</th>
<th><strong>SIIRI’S BIS MASTER SCRIPT PITCH</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.1 The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS, has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.)</td>
<td>The reason for my call today is that BIS have put together a complimentary report on AUP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2 The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.3 This whitepaper is written by an external company that look at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.4 By reading this whitepaper you will learn about:  • Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP  • What should be in an AUP  • Provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  • Explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.5 Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful.</td>
<td>I’m sending it out to all kinds of IT decision makers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.6 Can I send a complimentary copy?</td>
<td>Thought maybe you would be interested as well. If it’s okay I can send it to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.7 Can I send a complimentary copy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.11 The master script pitch and Barbara’s inclusion of pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>THE BIS MASTER SCRIPT</strong> PITCH</th>
<th><strong>BARBARA’S BIS MASTER SCRIPT PITCH</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.0 The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS, has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.)</td>
<td>Hi. The reason for my call today is that I was looking to send across a complimentary resource kit to X as a one-off email on behalf of BIS, which is now known as X.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.1 The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems.</td>
<td>This resource kit is looking at:  • some of the common mistakes made in creating an AUP,  • what should be in an AUP  • practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  • how to enforce and create an AUP effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.3 This whitepaper is written by an external company that look at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.4 By reading this whitepaper you will learn about:  • Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP  • What should be in an AUP  • Provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks  • Explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.5 Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful.</td>
<td>We’re sending it across to IT professionals across the country and they’ve found it useful. Would it be okay if I send a copy, a copy across to yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.6 Can I send a complimentary copy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“you”, “yourself” in each of their version. This can be summarised using the following table:

**Table 5.12 The use of personal pronouns (personability axis)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master script</th>
<th>Ada</th>
<th>Siiri</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1x <em>I</em> (in S.6)</td>
<td>2x <em>I</em> (in S. 6 and S.7)</td>
<td>3x <em>I</em> (in S.5, S.6 and S.7)</td>
<td>2x <em>I</em> (in S.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2x <em>you</em> (in S.4 and S.6)</td>
<td>3x <em>you</em> (in S.1, S.4 and S.7)</td>
<td>2x <em>you</em> (in S.6 and S.7)</td>
<td>2x <em>you</em> (in S.1, S.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1x <em>we</em> (in S.5)</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>1x <em>we</em> (in S.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 3 | Total: 6 | Total: 5 | Total: 7 |

The majority of the pronouns seem to be used in the conclusion section, both in the pitch of the master script itself and in the team leaders’ personalisations. Below, I explore why. However, let us first look at the other discourse-syntactic continuum.

Out of the three team leaders, Ada and Barbara are like Johnstone’s informants, using subordinate and co-ordinate clauses to make the pitch easier to read and sound less dense. In the tables below, I have highlighted in italics the subordinate or co-ordinate conjunctions that both include in their speech.
Table 5.13  The BIS master script pitch and Ada’s inclusion of sub- and co-ordinate clauses

| S.0 | The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.) |
| S.1 | The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems. |
| S.2 | This whitepaper is written by an external company that look at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. |
| S.3 | By reading this whitepaper you will learn about: |
| S.4 | Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP |
| S.5 | Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful. |
| S.6 | Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary? |

Table 5.14  The master script pitch and Barbara’s inclusion of sub- and co-ordinate clauses

| S.0 | The reason for my call today is that TAS, formerly known as BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy.) |
| S.1 | The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems. |
| S.2 | This whitepaper is written by an external company that look at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. |
| S.3 | By reading this whitepaper you will learn about: |
| S.4 | Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP |
| S.5 | Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful. |
| S.6 | Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary? |

We have seen above that the ‘conclusion of the pitch’ is not only the most deviant section of the entire script in terms of changing the word order and
adding new information but also many personal pronouns are included. Why is this the case?

The clue for this lies in the function of the pitch conclusion. Its purpose is to convince the other person on the phone to accept the email and provide further information. For this reason, in the call centre, this final part of the pitch (S.5-S.7), is considered separate and team leaders and agents are allowed to change these lines freely to convince the other person. Agents are even taught specific strategies for doing so. The team leaders made the following alterations to ‘their conclusions’.

Table 5.15  Ada’s personalisation of the pitch’s conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE MASTER SCRIPT</th>
<th>ADA’S SCRIPT</th>
<th>Changes and Additional Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.5 Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful.</td>
<td>Now we’ve sent this report across the country, most of them have found it very useful.</td>
<td>She inserts “now”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.6 Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary?</td>
<td>Like I said it’s complimentary information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.7 I would like to send this piece of information to you as well. That’s okay.</td>
<td>Insertion of “you as well”</td>
<td>She includes the subordinate conditional clause “if it’s okay”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.16  Siiri’s personalisation of the pitch’s conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE MASTER SCRIPT</th>
<th>SIIRI’S SCRIPT</th>
<th>Changes and Additional Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.5 Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful.</td>
<td>I’m sending it out to all kinds of IT decision makers</td>
<td>She changes the verb to “send” and uses present progressive aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.6 Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary?</td>
<td>I thought maybe you would be interested as well</td>
<td>She adds an entire sentence to the conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.7 If it’s okay I can send it to you.</td>
<td>Insertions of “maybe”</td>
<td>She includes the subordinate conditional clause “if it’s okay”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.17  Barbara’s personalisation of the pitch’s conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE MASTER SCRIPT</th>
<th>BARBARA’S SCRIPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.5 Other IT Personal have received it and found it to be very useful.</td>
<td>They change “receive” to “send” and use progressive aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.6 Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary?</td>
<td>She reformulates “Can I send you?” into “Would it be okay…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So what are the strategies behind these alterations?

The writers of the original master script in the concluding section of the pitch (S.5-7) used what is known in the call centre as an ‘inclusive approach’124. That is, the last two sentences stress the global appeal of the resource and how even important people apparently have accepted it and “found it useful”. The approach is also meant to make the action of accepting the resource over the phone from an unknown agent less face-threatening and risky. The ‘fact’ that so many other people have already taken the email, may supposedly convince the person on the phone to do the same. The three team leaders seem to align with this inclusive strategy of the master script by keeping the gist of the message. In addition, we can see them using other approaches. One appears to make the original pitch more polite by using “would” and hedges, such as “maybe”. Secondly, they exaggerate certain parts of the message. So it is not only “IT Personal” (master script) who have received the email but “IT professionals across the country” (Barbara) or “all kinds of IT decision makers” (Siiri). Finally, downstairs it is considered vital to establish rapport with the other person on the phone especially in the concluding part of the pitch, and one of the ways of doing so is to insert personal pronouns to make the call not only relevant to the persons addressed but also to reach out to them on a personal level.

In summary, these three examples suggest that personalisation of the master script happens across two axes: interacionally and discourse-

---

124 The opposite of this strategy would be to use the ‘exclusive’ approach. In that case, one would try and make the other person feel special. An example of this would be: “We are sending this report to a selected number of IT Managers in Europe/UK”. However, the inclusive approach is more popular among agents and team leaders.
syntactically. Moreover, as Johnstone (2003: 280) suggests, these changes do not only appear to have the effect of making the script “easier to understand by ear”, but also enhance “the individuality of the speaker”. That is, the callers sound more like themselves than a representative of the company, and as I explained earlier, the strategy of ‘personalisation’ is about allowing the caller to insert his/her own preferences into the script within a set framework.

At the same time, if we remember what should be mentioned during the call for the BIS script, it emerges that Siiri leaves out the key points of the main body of the pitch in her enactment. In fact, she is the least experienced out of all the team leaders and that may explain her faux pas. She was made temporary team leader after only four weeks at the call centre, at a time of such great need that her inexperience was overlooked. Her lack of experience may also account for the fact that she applies fewer ‘personalisation strategies’ to the script than her colleagues. But the campaign managers would not be happy about her enactment and would reprimand her. The question that emerges in light of Siiri’s faux pas is whether the client’s needs are compromised when team leaders and agents personalise the master script. Upstairs would probably say that the clients’ needs are compromised without full textual fidelity, while downstairs believes that is more in the interest of the client that the call is memorable, personalised and the key information of the master script is conveyed in a variety of ways. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to answer this question, the point I want to make here is that upstairs and downstairs have different motivations for their positions, but both are convinced that they are acting in the interest of the company and client.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the master script acquires a range of different meanings at this career stage from those it had upstairs. Although the text regulates courses of actions downstairs, as Smith (1996) suggested, it does so in different ways than intended by upstairs. There are at least four factors influencing the way that it is adapted: monitoring, interpretations of
briefings, personalisation and the consultative approach. Even so, any change to the script is monitored and regulated downstairs. Deviations from the typed master script can only happen within a set framework and can only be oral or hand-written. The team leaders’ solo enactment of the script has provided some examples of the types of changes that a script is likely to undergo. In the examples examined, these were discourse-syntactic and interactional. Despite the variations, their degree is not a matter of focus in my analysis for two reasons. The first is that in order to assess the extent of the variations one would have to analyse several of their phone conversations, a considerable task considering not only how many languages scripts are being translated but also called in. Secondly, it is not something that even the call centre manages to do despite their immense monitoring apparatus, which includes technological innovation and a call monitor. In fact, the eight-section approach used downstairs seems like a practical framework to cope with the sheer volume of multilingual calls that need monitoring since it shifts the focus from a word-to-word focus to the more abstract eight sections. From listening to the conversation, despite not necessarily understanding every single word, the monitor is believed to be able to tell whether the agents follow the skeleton approach, if they are, e.g. introducing themselves or the client, pitching, confirming the address and by hearing and identifying certain keywords or change of intonation by the caller. Simultaneously, this shift of viewing the script further represents an admission from downstairs that it is difficult to ensure that everyone follows the script verbatim. It would be hard to find a single call monitor who understands every single language spoken in the call centre or to monitor up to over 60 callers simultaneously. A solution could be to hire several call monitors, but this is very costly and in any case not feasible given the capacity limitations discussed in chapter 3. Consequently, the eight-section approach is a more efficient and practical approach as the individual call monitor does not need to go into detail which words an agent may have left out, but merely check whether they have followed the overall structure (the eight sections). This form of monitoring is said to be viable in any language, independent of whether the monitor understands the target language called in or not (e.g. extract 5.16).
If we return to the question of standardisation, this chapter has suggested that standardisation is not a homogenous process and does not mean the same thing to different people in the organisation. For the team leaders, following the standard of the script does not mean complete textual fidelity. In fact, they believe that there is some leeway around it and adapting it does not compromise its framing as authoritative. Overall, it becomes apparent how the notion of the script and standardisation is more flexible downstairs than upstairs. We have also seen that although upstairs sometimes finds out that downstairs does not follow the script verbatim, most of the time campaign managers manage the gap systematically and mediate between the different parties, for example advising agents how to rewrite their script.

We have seen earlier in chapters 1 and 2, that the majority of the few studies on organisational resistance and control take either a neo-Marxist or Foucauldian approach. Notwithstanding the vast epistemological divide between the two, these analyses have been criticised for framing resistance within a dualism of control and resistance and rarely go beyond this. For example, Mumby laments that within both Foucauldian and neo-Marxian studies resistance is in individual terms, and latent at best, and any notion of collective worker struggle and consciousness are subsumed, “in the face of onward, irresistible march of managerialism” (2005: 27). Similar to the broader literature on workplace resistance, Leidner (1993:5) writes that sociologists writing about standardisation have also preferred to focus on instances of open individual resistance to control through standardisation. In this literature, it is supposed that all workers have to be dissatisfied and those who describe themselves as being pleased with their tightly scripted jobs, and

---

125 Mumby (2005) suggests that while in neo-Marxist studies “resistance is ultimately framed in individual terms, and any sense of collective worker consciousness and struggle is subsumed beneath interpersonal forms of conflict” (Mumby 2005: 25), “Foucauldian studies similarly ascribe large amounts of agency to managerial forms of control and relatively little to the employees who struggle with them everyday” (ibid: 27). Where neo-Marxist and Foucauldian-inspired analyses differ from one another according to Mumby (2005: 27), is “the focus on larger managerial discourses of surveillance and normalisation”. With the Foucauldian analyses of resistance, Mumby (2005: 28) further argues, that “this elision is, in part, accounted for by the lack of attention to the empirics of everyday organising and a privileging of managerial texts (...) as the primary object of analysis”. One of the consequences of this textual focus, according to Ackroyd and Thomson (1999: 161), is “the removal of the workers from the academic gaze and the distinction between intent and outcome of managerial strategies and practices”. 

250
even to like them, in Leidner’s word (1993: 5), “are a theoretical embarrassment to critics of routinisation [standardisation]”.

In call centre studies (cf. chapter 1), Foucauldian-inspired analyses are prevalent and most researchers have argued that the panoptic control achieved through technological advances leaves no possibility for collective and little for individual resistance, if any, and leads agents to be complicit in the creation of their own discipline (cf. e.g. Fernie and Metcalf 1998; Knights and McCabe 1998). In this line of argument, the fact that managers and supervisors have access to real-time statistics comprising every keystroke and action agents ever carry out as well as being able to listen to any call without prior warning, is thought to establish ‘the ultimate surveillance regime’ (McPhail 2002: 44). Moreover, the managements’ decisions are enforced rigorously top-down. Illustrative of this is Fernie and Metcalf’s (1998: 2) widely quoted assertion that “the tyranny of the assembly line is but a Sunday school picnic compared with the control that management can exercise in computer telephony”. Agents then have little choice but to comply with regulations, including the linguistic, which entail following a script that is codified to the smallest detail. Studies, such as those by Cameron (2000a; 2000b; 2008), Mirchandani (2004) and Tyler and Taylor (1997), further assume that workers must be discontented having to follow a script and managers’ attempts to control their speech. Thus, they hunt sometimes painstakingly for instances of agents resisting the script and beating the system. For example, Cameron notes:

“Tyler and Taylor (1997) found telephone sales and reservations staff at an airline company insisting that they could tell when they were being monitored. These reported that if they encountered a rude or ‘ignorant’ caller and were sure no one was listening in, they would deviate from the prescribed routine, and might even disconnect the offender (2000a: 99). (...) My informants reported taking liberties with their scripts and ignoring instructions to smile” (ibid: 113).

For Cameron the symbol of control is the script and thus the obvious site for resistance. But she implies and assumes that any such action, although heroic, will be in vain and with the extent of the monitoring in place can only ever be individualistic.

From the data in this chapter, we have seen that although team leaders adapt the script, the adaptations they mention do not constitute resistance for
the following reasons. With the exception of Gavin, the team leaders are unaware of upstairs’ stress on textual fidelity. During their training and briefings, campaign managers will have instructed them on how to adapt the script by hand and these instructions entail that the meaning (the key points and eight sections) and the topic, but not the wording have to be standardised. Accordingly, they are encouraged to personalise and be consultative with the script by hand or orally within the structure provided to them. Thus for the adaptations to be ‘resistance’, team leaders would have to defy the eight-section framework, the script in general. However, during the interviews the team leaders explained that they not only welcomed the use of scripts, but also were keen to follow it. Some even referred to it as the “standard” (e.g. Barbara in extract 5.22). Several of them stressed that despite personalising the script or being consultative with it, they tried to ensure mentioning the key points (e.g. Siiri in extract 5.20). More importantly, they appeared to make a great effort with their adaptations, revealing a desire to do their jobs well and the extent of their investment into the company. Therefore, the team leaders’ script adaptations were more intended to help the business than possibly to sabotage it.

In the next chapter we will see what happens in the final moments of the script’s career at the agents’ level.
Chapter 6

The final stage of the script’s career:
The enactment and use of ‘the master script’

6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that the script acquires a new significance the moment it travels downstairs to the call centre, where it is adapted by the team leaders and agents. In this chapter, I will explore the final stage of its career: its initial testing and potential use by callers on the phone.

We have learnt so far that upstairs uses the master script to regulate downstairs. This followed what Smith (1996: 177) theorised about the function of texts in large corporations as “mediators and base of discourse and relations of ruling that regulate and coordinate beyond the particular local setting of their reading and writing”. Even though the regulation downstairs did not happen as intended by upstairs, the master script still played an important part during the briefings by campaign managers and team leaders. This chapter will begin where the last chapter ended, and explore what will happen after the BIS script has been individually hand-annotated.

We will see that this phase of its career is very important in terms of potential additional oral and written transformations. Not only will it be rehearsed, tested, and used by countless agents, it will also be translated into other languages. Callers are further supposed to record the feedback it produces from the phone conversation in the call centre’s database. The results obtained from this process will then decide for how much longer its life will continue, as the client and upstairs may choose to replace it with a new campaign script. Thus, data logging becomes an important issue at this stage.

The first section describes the different types of data entry and agents’ perception of them. Subsequently, I will look at callers’ activities involving

126 Throughout this chapter, I will use the terms ‘agent’ and ‘caller’ as synonyms.
the script and the third section will examine agents' adaptation of the BIS master script.

Diagram 6.1 The enactment and use of the script
For this chapter, I will draw on several sources. These are my fieldnotes, training documents, the recording of a telephone conversation, and thirty-three interviews I conducted with callers. The agents I interviewed and to whose accounts I refer to in this chapter were:

**Table 6.1 Agents’ educational, linguistic, and professional background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent's Name</th>
<th>Type of Agent</th>
<th>Time worked at call centre</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Types of campaign caller</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akash</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Marketing</td>
<td>English, Hindi</td>
<td>Engagement BANT, Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>British Portuguese</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Marketing and Economics</td>
<td>Portuguese, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in Journalism</td>
<td>English, Hindi</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreas</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA in Economics (Oxbridge) MSc in Finance Now Head of Business Development for Europe and America for a multinational corporation in London</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Film and Media</td>
<td>Spanish, English, Italian, Galician</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlottene</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Tourism</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>MSc Marketing Own business</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in History</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>British Portuguese</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Media and Computing</td>
<td>Portuguese, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BSc in Engineering (Russell Group Own business in property development</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>BA and MA in Journalism Journalist</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in Journalism Journalist</td>
<td>Spanish, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadeem</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>British Asian (Mauritius)</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA in Media and Marketing</td>
<td>Creole, English, French, Hindi</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Swedish/Finnish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA, MA (Russell Group) applying for a PhD in Social Policy at Oxford Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent's Name</td>
<td>Type of Agent</td>
<td>Time worked at call centre</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Languages spoken</td>
<td>Types of campaign caller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linnea</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Media, Marketing and Languages</td>
<td>English, German, Swedish, French, Norwegian</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in German qualified Teacher</td>
<td>Polish, German, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>MSc Economics (Russell Group)</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Argentinean /Spanish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Journalist freelance writer</td>
<td>Spanish, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Economics</td>
<td>Polish, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabeya</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>British Asian (Bangladeshi)</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Studying BSc in Sociology and Criminology</td>
<td>English, Sylethi</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raul</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Spanish, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>MSc Economics</td>
<td>English, Italian, Spanish, Napolitaneeano</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>British Caribbean</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>GSCE</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Studying BA in Communication and Media</td>
<td>English, Punjabi, Urdu</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suganthi</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA in English</td>
<td>Hindi, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suhela</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>British Asian (Bangladeshi)</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>She is doing a BSc in Sociology</td>
<td>English, Sylethi</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Journalism; MSc in Social Anthropology (Russell Group PhD) (Russell Group)</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Studying BA in Art History (Russell Group)</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Languages</td>
<td>German, English, Spanish</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yannick</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>BSc in Economics, MSc in Economics and Marketing</td>
<td>French, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmin</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>Belgian Arabic</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Languages</td>
<td>French, Arabic, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1 The institutional system: data entry, call logging and updating of the database (computer system)

At this stage data entry and logging\textsuperscript{127} becomes a major issue. Although its importance varies with the types of campaign, any phone call should lead to some form of information logging, and we will see that updating the database is not only in the interest of upstairs but also of campaign managers, team leaders, and agents themselves. More importantly, data entry further influences the use and the overall career of the script in ways that will be revealed in this section. But let me summarise first what we have learnt previously about updating the database from chapters 3, 4 and 5.

6.1.1 Agents’ training on data entry, call logging and updating the database

In chapter 3, we learnt there are several reasons why a lot of time is spent on teaching new agents how to maintain the integrity of the database.

The first is that other sites and divisions of the company worldwide use the same database and if callers accidentally delete any valuable information, this may have an effect on other parts of the company in the US, Australia, France, Germany, Singapore or China. Secondly, for upstairs, it is more cost-efficient to have agents keep the database clean and up-to-date than buying expensive new lists of contacts from other companies. Finally, the database is one of the call centres’ prime assets. For instance, during the initial sales meeting it will also be discussed. As Jenny explains:

**Extract 6.1**

“So (...) a client will come to us, and at that point a sales person will meet up with them, have a conversation and tell them what our database can do for them and pitch them.”  

(Jenny, senior campaign manager)

\textsuperscript{127} In the remainder of the chapter, I use the terms ‘data entry’, ‘logging’ and ‘updating the database’ as referring to the same process. Strictly speaking, logging refers to the selection of given options by clicking on them with the mouse whereas data entry describes the process of typing new information into the database.
Let us now think back to the five different types of data entry that we have encountered so far, and how these influence the adaptation of the script.

1) Logging call outcomes:

After every call, agents have to fill out the field ‘call outcomes’. Although some of the outcomes vary from campaign to campaign, there are some standard ones, such as: ‘no answer’, ‘voicemail’, ‘call back’, ‘bad data’.

As explored in chapters 4 and 5, upstairs needs callers to undertake (correct) call logging because it allows the: i) supervision of agents and teams’ performances ii) the generation of the dial sheet and dial summary statistics and iii) the calculation of the convergence rates. These three elements may affect the career of the script in several ways. For instance, if none of the statistics meets upstairs’ estimates, it may be that the client asks for changes in the campaign, master script or even ends the entire campaign and the latter most would mean an abrupt end to the script’s career.128

2) Updating the individual company record information:

Ideally, in line with the brief agents should always update the following fields after every call:

- Name of the company
- Company’s address
- Phone number
- Fax number
- Corporate website
- Industry
- Employee size
- Enter and update contact name and details:
  o job titles (in English)
  o job function
  o email address
  o Telephone Extension
  o If the contact has left, it is crucial to log this.
- If any of the other contacts listed for the company has left this should be logged
- Any new contacts and their job titles obtained over the phone need to be added

However, updating all these fields may prove to be time consuming for agents. In fact, it usually takes several minutes to enter and save everything.

128 Because of the importance of (correct) logging, campaign managers and senior leaders have software installed on their computers, which allows them from their desks to view callers’ computer screens without their being aware of it.
3) **Filling out the fields for different types of campaigns**

Whenever a contact answers all the questions on the script (producing a ‘lead’), callers need to enter all the answers obtained from the phone conversation in the database, and there are several section headings on the computer screen, corresponding to the questions on the paper master script, to help them with this.

Below is a screenshot of such subheadings for an engagement campaign. If we think back to the anonymised BIS model campaign, these fields would be very similar. In fact, there would be three questions.

- a) Are you responsible for IT security within your organisation?
- b) Agreed to receive the report?
- c) Agreed to be contacted by BIS?

![Image 6.1 Screenshot of question on the computer system](image)

Since BANT and nurturing campaigns’ master scripts, in general, have more (profiling) questions, agents will also have to fill out more fields on the computer screen than for engagement ones, but it is important to note that data entry will not be done simultaneously with the call. There is a rule that everything is first written down by hand and then, it is typed into the computer system[^29] after the completion of the call.

4) **Writing call specific summary remarks**

Agents should, further, always save[^30] a summary of what has happened when they tried to call a company from their calling list. As campaigns often run several weeks, these remarks may range from abbreviations like vm (for

[^29]: This is to avoid the potential loss of any information, as there is the constant risk of the computer crashing before anything can be saved.

[^30]: This is in a list of companies particularly compiled for this campaign by the campaign manager.
voicemail) or N/A (no No Answer), to long comments spanning several paragraphs\textsuperscript{131}.

These notes can help: i) the campaign manager and team leader to understand what the problem is with the campaign ii) another agent phoning this company again or iii) the caller themselves to remember what happened or whom they talked to over the course of several weeks.

5) Lead remarks for BANT and nurturing campaigns

For the high-end campaigns, callers have to write accompanying remarks with every lead (‘lead remarks’)\textsuperscript{132} and these are forwarded to the client, being normally two pages long\textsuperscript{133}, in English and summarising the phone conversation(s). From the campaign managers’ point of view, good lead remarks contain specific information (e.g. the nature of problems they have had with a particular software brand) that can only have been obtained through a phone conversation with the contact.

Thus, they represent another criterion that allows the client to assess the quality of the work that the call centre provides. For this reason, under no circumstances are agents allowed to simply cut and paste lead remarks. Equally, callers are expected to personalise their script sufficiently and use the consultative approach to engage the contact to obtain the desired information. There is an internal quality control process in place to ensure that several team leaders have read the text before it is sent to the client. If the results reported in the lead remarks across the campaign are considered poor, most likely the campaign manager will make changes to the master script. Nevertheless, as we saw in the previous chapter, these will not be made to the typed master script but summarised on a separate hand-out that will be given to callers.

\textsuperscript{131} These comments are not saved permanently on the database but only for the duration of the campaign. After the completion of the campaigns, they are deleted unlike the other forms of data entry.

\textsuperscript{132} For their composition, agents often draw on their summaries (cf. data entry type 4) from previous calls.

\textsuperscript{133} In general, the length and detail of the lead remarks will also reflect the cost of the campaign and master script.
Overall, in this section I have discussed five types of data entry, which are not equally applicable to the different types of campaigns. While for engagement campaigns there are only four types of data entry, callers on BANT and nurturing campaigns have to do five types of data entry including the time-consuming lead remarks. In spite of the fact that agents have to do more data entry for BANT campaigns, the dial rates are still the same for BANT and engagement campaigns.

It is also worth noting that for any kind of data entry discussed in 1-5, agents always need to press the ‘save’ button. But the computer software is designed in such a way that several things cannot be saved simultaneously (e.g. new address and contact name) and agents thus have to press ‘save’ several times and wait every time for the system to process all the information. Only once this has happened, can they press the ‘next contact’ button for the new company record to load and the latter may again take several seconds. Performing data entry will therefore always take significantly longer than making the call itself no matter whether it is an engagement, nurturing or BANT campaign.

Let us now examine agents’ attitudes towards these types of data entry.

6.1.2 Agents’ perception of data entry, the database and call logging

Many callers mention the importance of a good database for carrying out their job. For instance, Juan notes:

Extract 6.2

“I think the key [for this job] is the database. If you have very accurate information you can get very good service and you come straight to the people you need.”

(Juan, current agent)

sometimes callers try to postpone writing lead remarks until the late afternoon so as not to waste valuable calling time, for afternoons are generally quieter than mornings. However if they do this, they will cause confusion in the process since as soon there is a lead in the system, a team leader from quality control should read the lead remarks to ensure that it is indeed a lead, and that the lead remarks are good, so as to stay on top of all the texts being entered into the system.
David considers updating the database so important that he would like to lower the call rate:

**Extract 6.3**

“If I was in charge personally, I would lower the calls the amount of calls you need to make per day (...) the main reason why I would do that is for people to put better information into the systems [database]. I think that’s 50% of the job.”

*(David, current agent)*

Nevertheless, there is also an awareness that partly because of pressure to meet targets and the lack of training many (newer) agents do not update the database.

As David observes:

**Extract 6.4**

“The way it currently works is that people are under pressure to make calls so they will write something in the remarks [personal agent remarks - data type entry 4] or write something up quickly, but they aren’t gonna go into the whole systems [database] and save it, because you have to go back saving it three or four times. People can’t bother. They don’t have time. (...) So (...) the system [the database] kinds of goes a bit out of sync. It will be like 5 names and you don’t know who is who and it just makes your job like 5 times harder. (...) They just take it away from the team. (...) It’s like they really don’t understand but people who have been here long enough understand that this will come back round to you at some point (...) ”

*(David, current agent)*

**Fieldnote entry 6.1 (02/03/2011) ‘The special database training for new agents’**

After continuous complaints from the team leaders and upstairs about agents’ failure to do correct data logging, Jenny had enough and booked a meeting room upstairs. She took all the team leaders and the newer agents to the ‘Florence’ meeting room upstairs. [In all my time there, I had never seen agents being taken upstairs, apart from when downstairs was operating beyond capacity]. I can still remember how the people working upstairs’ jaws dropped open when they saw twenty agents following Jenny to ‘Florence’. They were simply staring at them in disbelief.

It was my impression that Jenny wanted the new callers to see upstairs to understand what a great company they worked for so they could identify with it. It was said downstairs that agents, all of whom are employed temporarily, had little incentive to update the database, in particular, if they only stayed at the call centre for two weeks anyway. During our stay in “Florence”, Jenny spent a lot of time explaining the function of each section on the database.

Later in the afternoon, I overheard Jenny saying that the operations manager was not happy about the long training session upstairs, as too much time had been lost off the phone. According to the operations manager, every minute agents spend off the phone (including training), the company loses revenue. Apparently, people upstairs had also complained about agents coming upstairs.
For example, Yasmin, who recently joined the call centre, told me that it was only after the special database training session upstairs that she understood the need for updating.

**Extract 6.5**

“After the first training if it’s not a lead I don’t spend time updating. (…) [Only after] the special training (…) I (…) realised that updating (…) is so important.”

(Yasmin, new agent)

Similarly, Gavin believes that often agents do not understand why the database requires updating:

**Extract 6.6**

“I think we baffle callers as to why we make the demands that we make [about data entry], so maybe if we explain that, ‘…well because we need this for this data section and this for this data section.’ I think that would be a way to improve training.”

(Gavin, team leader)

In fact, experienced agents like Miguel suggest that there should be more training on this.

**Extract 6.7**

“Training about how to keep the database clean (…) To me that’s really important (…) it’s really a slow job to keep the database clean and as neat as possible, but I’m sure that it pays back, because maybe you are not saving time for yourself but I’m sure that you’re saving time for the next guy who’s calling your contact. (…) You should take your time to (…) to keep it clean (…) when you find out that someone’s not working there any more to put that (…) instead of thinking that you’re wasting time and you need to make the other call. But (…) if you ask for someone who’s not working there anymore, then you have their immediate objection [and you need objection handling].”

(Miguel, current agent)

The other point raised by Miguel is that if agents operate on the wrong information, they are less likely to be able to pitch the script. Even if they manage to get through, they will have to integrate a lot of objection handling into their version of the script. This will, however, reduce the time they can devote to the script’s main and longest section, the pitch, as a daily target of 200 dials means there is a limit as to how long they can spend on each call (cf. chapter 5). Moreover, if callers do not do the (correct) data entry, the statistics will not reveal that the data is a problem. Consequently, upstairs and the client may wrongly assume that the master script is the issue and will provide agents with a new one rather than better data. The failure to update
the database and perform correct logging has thus direct implications for callers’ performance and the script’s career. There are, however, other general complaints about the design of the database. Suganthi, like many, comments on the slowness of the database entry process and the software behind it making it impossible to reach one’s targets.

**Extract 6.8**

“I would definitely improve the software: a small example, when you have the option of save, when you just click the button to save it takes a good eight seconds to sometimes 40 seconds (...) That’s a huge time (...) when you go to the button next to go to the next page, again you’re looking at (...) between 10 seconds to 30 seconds, so you’ve lost about one a half minutes right there, and then you’re expecting us to make 200 calls, which is probably not fair when I’m losing one and a half minutes merely in just changing, in just saving one and changing to another.”

(Suganthi, current agent)

In conclusion, in this section we have seen a variety of ways that the database and saving changes may influence the career of the script. These are:

i) Agents may choose not to update the database so they can spend more time on the phone and follow the master script properly. But the lack of updating may lead to an end to the scripts’ career, as the data for calling will continuously get worse. This will then make it difficult and more time consuming for callers to get through to people and pitch the script. Secondly, without correct data logging there are no reliable statistics or feedback produced for upstairs (and the client). They may not know what is going on downstairs and believe that the script needs to be replaced by a new one in order to resolve the issue.

ii) Updating the database is slow and means that agents may lose time that they need to spend on the phone to meet their high dial rates. So because of time constraints, callers are less able to ask all the questions from the master script and obtain less valuable information for their lead remarks. Subsequently, the client may complain about the lack of quality (evident from the lead remarks) and as a result ask for a new script or cancel the campaign.

Let us now return to the example of the anonymised BIS campaign to understand what will happen to the master script once callers have been briefed.
6.2 Rehearsing and using the master script:
‘A script in progress’

In the last chapter, we saw that campaign managers and team leaders think of the master script as a structure. All the agents interviewed also reprise this notion. For instance, Roberto says:

**Extract 6.9**

“I think that the script is (...) it’s just structure that we can change in the end. (...) the script is just the... a form (...) so I think as long as we think about it like a form, like it would be okay if I change the script.” (Roberto, current agent)

But what does this mean when callers start using the master script on the phone? Do they also personalise the master script and use the consultative approach the team leaders taught them?

6.2.1 Before dialling: translating the master script and adapting it

Most of the time, campaigns such as our anonymised BIS model campaign are not only aimed at the UK but also other countries, such as Germany and France. The master script thus needs to be translated. But because of the cost involved in hiring a language agency, the call centre usually asks agents to do it instead. Depending on the circumstances of the campaigns and the moment in the quarter, they may do this as a group or on their own. Occasionally, a client may also ask to see the translated script(s).

However, as the vignette below reveals, certain problems may arise when callers translate the master script.
Fieldnote entry 6.2 (18/04/2011) ‘Translating master scripts’

Around twenty new callers were hired for a new campaign. The campaign was supposed to run in twenty different markets. Thus, nineteen scripts had to be translated. Every agent was given a script template [with the script’s eight sections] and told to translate the English master script. Once they had done so, it would be printed for them. However, the issue was that agents did not necessarily know how to translate the master script with its complex IT vocabulary. For instance, there was a Somali agent, who had lived for some time in Norway and was supposed to translate a script into Norwegian as a native speaker. But, he told me that he could not to translate the script as he did not know the vocabulary. His solution was to use Google Translator and copy and paste the different sentences into the template. But in the past, there had been many complaints about agents who had done this. Other agents said that the translations were so poor that they had to re-translate the entire script, which also raised the issue of how agents who clearly did not speak the language could make any translations. The new German agent equally struggled. He told me, in German, that he had no idea how to translate words like “network convergence” or “network integrity”. Additionally, he was also rather upset that he was even asked to do this. In his words, he was not hired for this and that they should pay a language agency for this. My response was to tell him to try his best. A Polish girl who knew some Russian also struggled with translating a script into Russian. She was rather afraid to translate the script telling me that she did not know the language that well nor was she sure of how to translate the cultural norms and politeness formulas. In the meanwhile, Jenny asked me why everyone was taking so long. I told her that several agents were struggling with translating the technical vocabulary. She looked at me angrily and pointed out that all the new callers are native speakers hired through expensive language agencies. Thus, there should not be any problem. Twenty minutes later, the German agent still had no idea how to translate the script. I told him not to worry that I would make the translation for him.

Agents also discuss several of the issues described in the vignette during the interviews. For example, Yasmin comments on the importance of knowing the cultural norms of the target market when translating a script:

Extract 6.10

“You cannot translate literally because from one language to another (...) it really depend [sic] on the market. I mean French market you have to be formal. You have to start with ‘Mr...’ and cannot say ‘Hi, Hi Peter, how are you today?’ In the British market it’s different because they are informal. (...) I think it’s very important to take into consideration the culture as well...because if I do the same thing in France, ‘Hi Peter’, they’ll ask me, ‘Do I know you’?.” (Yasmin, new agent)
Many also mentioned the difficulty of translating specific terms from English into other languages. For instance, Yannick describes how he initially struggled with translating technical terms into his native French:

**Extract 6.11**

“It was very difficult when I started because I never actually worked... or a long time ago, 15 years ago I worked in French but I’ve always done that [worked] in English, so my technical knowledge is stronger in English than it is in French (...).”

(Yannick, current agent)

David reports a similar experience with his Portuguese:

**Extract 6.12**

“My Portuguese is not technical (...) I learnt to speak Portuguese at home with my family and friends. So when I translate or I’m calling the IT Managers I don’t know the words for like IT or system and all of these I just try my best to get my point across.”

(David, current agent)

Several callers further note that they are uncertain whether the technical terms have to be translated. For example, Linda says that in German, the English technical terms are often kept.

**Extract 6.13**

“One needs to be really careful with technical terms [in German], sometimes you don’t translate those. This has happened to me a couple of times [that she tried to translate them] and was rather embarrassing.”

(Linda, current agent)

Conversely, Juan points out that in Spanish there is usually an equivalent.

**Extract 6.14**

“[When you] translate you [have] to interpret what that’s [sic] means in your language. (...) Sometimes it takes some pieces of English, but mainly in Spanish because (...) in my language they (...) adopt every single word [even technical terms] to the language (...) every single word have a Spanish interpretation.”

(Juan, current agent)

As indicated in the vignette, agents do not always necessarily translate into what they would call their “native language”. For instance, Carolina, who belongs to a Swedish minority in Finland, told me that she had never translated into her native language:

**Extract 6.15**

“I was given a script in English and I had to [translate] the script in Norwegian (...) Norwegian is not my mother tongue and but (...) still I had to do it in Norwegian which I found a bit frustrating. (...) I have never been given a script in Swedish (...).”

(Carolina, current agent)
Considering this context, it is perhaps not surprising, that some callers said that they often have to re-translate the already translated scripts. So Vanessa says:

**Extract 6.16**

“With the BIS script I found the translation very poor. It looked like it was done with Google translator so we as a team sat together and started reformulating it. (...)”

*(Vanessa, current agent)*

Miguel adds that sometimes the translations are not “accurate” or good for use on the phone.

**Extract 6.17**

“Sometimes the translation is not so accurate (...) sometimes it has to do with how it’s going to sound. So if it’s going to sound too artificial you change it with words that make sense, makes things like easier for the people who’s listening (...) you want your call to sound like speech, not a script...and there’s a difference between speech and script. So you can read a script but you can’t read speech, you need to create your own speech, so (...) I think it’s logical to change something.”

*(Miguel, current agent)*

In fact, other agents like Yannick state that through the process of translating they simultaneously personalise the master script, too.

**Extract 6.18**

“You don’t translate word by word so it had to make sense, and that was not always evident. Like you extract the meaning of the speech...of the script, and then you make it your own word[s].”

*(Yannick, current agent)*

Apart from the context of translation, how do the others talk about personalising the script and what are their steps in doing so?

All agents thought it natural to personalise the master script. Carolina suggests that because the script is neutral, one makes a choice about which bits to use.

**Extract 6.19**

“When you just look at a script it’s (...) of course it is quite objective neutral. [So] you think which words works for me or which phrases will be for me.”

*(Carolina, current agent)*

Moreover, there is some agreement that before calling one needs to underline or highlight the important words in the master script, then reword it and make it ‘their own’.
Extract 6.20

“I always underline words [in the script]; I think a lot of people do that.”

(Michael, new agent)

Extract 6.21

“I highlight a few lines or a few words which will be most important.”

(Suganthi, current agent)

The rewriting part is either done on i) an extra piece of paper while others do the reworking and/or ii) by scribbling on the script itself. The majority of my interviewees told me that they prefer the former method. This activity is associated with the early stages of a new campaign. As Rabeya notes:

Extract 6.22

“The first thing I do [before calling] is I will just write my own speech.”

(Rabeya, current agent)

Marta also speaks of writing her own script to begin with.

Extract 6.23

“[Once given a new campaign script] I changed the wording of the script. So it was the same message but with different words but I did write down my own script and I had it in front of me with the original script.”

(Marta, former agent)

Miguel, Michael and Christina, like most others, likewise stated that they do this.

Extract 6.24

“I read the script and pick up the words, the key words, and then I put kind of my words on it. (...) I interpret the script. (...) I’ll rewrite the script on a spare piece of paper.”

(Miguel, current agent)

Extract 6.25

“I would reword it [script on a spare piece of paper] (...) ‘cause it’s very long sentences so that’s where it gets hard to say it.”

(Michael, new agent)

Extract 6.26

“I try to think of a shorter version of the script before I start calling and then write it on a separate piece of paper.”

(Christina, current agent)

Others like Kadeem scribble out things on the typed master script they are given.
Extract 6.27

“I write on the script I’m given and change a few things around. So the main points you highlight them, make sure you put it into the pitch you want to say, the things you don’t need just scribble it out.”  
(Kadeem, current agent)

According to Vanessa, the annotation of the script may also happen as part of a team:

Extract 6.28

“We [the team] underlined, highlighted and for some points we added some notes or different expressions or words [on the script] one could use instead.”  
(Vanessa, current agent)

Let us explore now what agents say about what happens once they start dialling.

6.2.2 Experimenting with the master script: in search of the perfect version

Most agents agree that their rewritten script is not necessarily the “perfect script” yet and so, one needs to try out different versions to find it. As Kadeem says:

Extract 6.29

“I change it [the script] a little bit just to see what the reaction is (...). So I’ll get sort of like in a way feedback. So if they understand it fully or they want me to explain again, so I’ll just change a few things around. I mean that’s it, feedback’s very important on how to improve scripts all the time. Feedback from yourself and from another person. You have to obviously get to know the reaction to it. So obviously you have to sort of like get the right script, get the like pitch (...) so they understand it. (...) You could say a ‘work in progress’.”  
(Kadeem, current agent)

Linda and Jonas mention doing the same.

Extract 6.30

“I will write my own version of the script but I will also try out different versions of that script. To see which version of the script and key points are received better not so well and then adapt my version accordingly. So I will maybe change a few words around till I find the right script.”  
(Linda, current agent)

Extract 6.31

“I will write my own script so that I can work with it well. But with the feedback on the phone you will notice which words trigger a positive or negative reaction, what they like. So based on that I will always try and improve my script to the point that I’ll have the perfect script.”  
(Jonas, new agent)
Alex even requests several copies of the master script to try out different things.

**Extract 6.32**

“I actually ask for several copies of the [master] script and I underline different things on different scripts and try them out.”

*(Alex, current agent)*

Thus, as soon as agents start dialling they continue annotating their handwritten script or take more notes on their already individually hand-annotated paper copy, incorporating the feedback they receive over the phone.

Overall, only three informants mention that once they have found the ‘right script’, they would repeat this with every call.

**Extract 6.33**

“I usually stick to what works so if it works I will keep on going with it.”

*(Stephen, new agent)*

**Extract 6.34**

JW: Do you change some words? Did you always say the same thing once you...?
I: I generally did say normally the same thing actually.

*(Ian, former agent)*

**Extract 6.35**

JW: And do you say, do you say the same thing or do you change?
Michael: I do say the same thing. I do repeat the same thing again and again.

*(Michael, new agent)*

Interestingly, they are all ‘engagement only’ callers and two of the new agents. Having only recently joined the call centre, they will not yet have been trained in the consultative approach. These three are, nevertheless, the minority, for the other informants said they would continue altering it even after they had found the “right script”. As Sonia explains, one may have a generic script as a basis from which one works on every call, but one will vary in their use of it.

**Extract 6.36**

“I have a generic one [but] I vary (...). But obviously I have to stick to the main reason why I’m calling blah-blah-blah.”

*(Sonia, current agent)*

Let us now explore which factors lead to these variations and modifications of the script. Here callers mention three dimensions: the context off the phone, their dispositions, and the other person’s reaction.
1) The context off the phone:

According to David, the pressure that comes with the high dial rates constrains him in his use of the script.

**Extract 6.37**

“I think if the call targets were lower if we had more time to speak to every person so you could get more more in the way of […] you’re not [an agent] saying blabla next call blabla but you could actually talk to them.”  
(David, current agent)

In the same vein, Christina notes that there is a discrepancy between having to meet a high number of calls on the one hand, and the need for consistent and correct data entry and long calls, on the other.

**Extract 6.38**

“On the one hand, you have the pressure to make calls and on the other to follow the script, make long calls and do data entry. So I wonder what the price-value relationship is. But I can see a discrepancy between pressure and achievement. (...) I can tell from what I hear the other agents say on the phone, that the script and quality suffer a lot under the pressure.”  
(Christina, current agent)

Several agents further point out that they listen to and copy successful callers and that this may then lead to further changes of their version(s) of the script. But although Tina, for instance, told me that she copies others, she still claims to do it her way.

**Extract 6.39**

“If you can’t get any leads you will sit listening to other people. Some people can get a lot of leads, then just listen to them (…) how they start chat with people, and you copy them (…) in your way.”  
(Tina, current agent)

Moreover, team leaders also like to draw on this method and place new agents next to the experienced ones calling in the same language. So, Miguel recalled his experience of being sat next to Juan, a star caller, and the impact this had on his script.

**Extract 6.40**

“I remember that they put me next to Juan. And I remember that when I read my script for the first time I noticed that I couldn’t use that, you know, as a script just to follow because it didn’t sound natural. And when I was listening to him it sounded really different. So then was when I understood that I had to make my own script. I remember then I went to my house and rewrite my own script. And, yeah, and then I did that with all my scripts from then.”  
(Miguel, current agent)

Again others, like David, mention going up to the high achievers and asking them for their script.
**Extract 6.41**

“I usually (...) ask [successful agents] how are you getting so many leads. What are you saying? Let me see your script!” *(David, current agent)*

Sometimes, during the course of the campaign there will also be debriefings\(^{135}\). During these, feedback is collected of what seems to work and what does not. Charlotte, for instance, says that she integrates what she hears there into her script.

**Extract 6.42**

“During the campaign debriefings it is sometimes asked whether anyone has a trick or (...) feedback I collected what the other people’s reaction are, what sounds good or with what people engage and don’t respond to and then I will integrate this into my script.” *(Charlotte, current agent)*

**2) Agent’s own dispositions**

Apart from pressure, David and Daniela suggest that they make changes to their script to beat the monotony.

**Extract 6.43**

“So after a while if you have been at a campaign for long enough you do find yourself just saying it and that’s when I think it gets the worst as you will just be saying it monotonously you will be just like blabla but you just will be used to it not from the script but you’re reading it like from your head you will follow the same sort of pattern (...). So I do like to try to switch (it) off every so often and keep it like you’re entertained and happy (...) you will have to play it around like make a little joke with the IT Manager here and there.” *(David, current agent)*

**Extract 6.44**

“It would be too boring to always say exactly the same thing. I need a bit of change from time to time.” *(Daniela, current agent)*

**3) The other person’s reaction on the phone:**

Most callers further agree that the other person’s reaction on the phone will be important for any further changes to the script. David and Daniela for example confirm this:

---

\(^{135}\) Generally, the majority of agents said they would like to have more debriefings as they found them very useful.
Extract 6.45

“I don’t think that conversations, they don’t go along them lines of I say this you say that. It does not work like that. So every script you have has to have some sort of leniency to if this person says this and obviously you will have to react differently and say different stuff.” (David, current agent)

Extract 6.46

“I will change my script according to their reaction.” (Daniela, current agent)

When agents call using the script, team leaders and campaign managers encourage and rely on callers using strategies to make it more successful. In fact, the success of these strategies, including the consultative approach, should be evident from their lead remarks and data entry. If either indicates that their strategizing is not working, the call monitor downstairs has to investigate systematically where agents are going wrong with the strategies and if they fail to identify the problem, there is a risk that the entire career of the script may come to a halt.

So beyond these three dimensions, which other strategies do callers use in further modifying their scripts?

6.2.3 The strategies around the use of the script on the phone

The majority of agents stress that none of their modifications will affect the content (the skeleton or scaffolding) of the master script itself. As Anand explains, any changes concern more “the expression of the content, the packaging, the communication, the style” than the content.

Extract 6.47

“The content [of the script] can’t be changed; the expression of the content can be (...) so we can’t mess with the content. (...) the content obviously remains the same...but the expression of the content, the packaging, the communication, the style, that we can change.” (Anand, current agent)

So let us explore what this means in concrete terms and how callers talk about the script. Miguel says that despite its usefulness one has to be selective in one’s use of it.
Extract 6.48

“But the script I think is like the tiny wheels in the bicycle (...) these wheels that you put when you are learning how to ride a bicycle. (...) you need to know when to let it go, you know, the script. (...) it’s even like a love letter. If you read a love letter to someone, it sounds silly, so you need to maybe read a little bit, take part of them, and then make a speech about that (...). I think scripts are good because it gives you like a base (...) like a ground where to be (...) don’t go a lot like out of here.”  
(Miguel, current agent)

Tina expands on Miguel’s point and says one has to improvise around it because one talks to humans not machines.

Extract 6.49

“I can remember because like the teaching job is, is you don’t have a script, you just have a book but you have to improvise the books. Well it’s the same way I would say, (...) you have to put your own ideas in it, make it more human, humane, because you’re talking to people not talking to a machine.”  (Tina, former agent)

It is the awareness that they are dealing with people that makes several callers talk of the need to adapt one’s script to the context and the individual on the other end of the phone. The way proposed for doing this is to listen to the person’s response and then improvise accordingly. Alex, like many others, states that it is therefore not possible to have one standard format (script) for everyone.

Extract 6.50

“It’s about understanding the script and being able to go adlib, so just freestyling you’ve got to make it interesting for them (...), and...You’ve just got to understand it and not every one person’s the same; there’s not one standard format for everyone.”  (Alex, current agent)

Akash, a nurturing caller\(^{136}\), adds that one has to be flexible in one’s use of the script.

Extract 6.51

“So it’s always about improvising of course. So it’s more about understanding the situation. You come across loads of different types of situation; there is nothing like A, B or C. It’s not like only three types of people you come across. So it’s all about changing yourself according to the situation moreover I believe.”  
(Akash, current agent)

\(^{136}\) Nurturing callers, the ones who work on nurturing campaigns, are said to be very skilled in working on the phone and get paid more than BANT or Engagement callers.
We saw bits of what Akash and Alex mention in the consultative approach that I discussed in the previous chapter. This way of communicating encourages agents to engage the other person in a conversation but also connecting with him/her on a personal level. For instance, Yannick, also a nurturing caller, says the following about the script:

**Extract 6.52**

“Well you’re having a conversation with someone, put yourself in the shoes of the person that is listening to you. You adapt the voice on the speech and the person that you’re talking to. So you try to listen, you make it more a conversation.”

(Yannick, current agent)

We further saw that agents are trained on how to be consultative on the phone only for high-end campaigns because these are very expensive and there is pressure to produce quality lead remarks to justify the costs involved for the client. However, unlike the team leaders’ account of the strategy in chapter 5, callers such as Eric (extract 6.52) and Rabeya stress much more the need to build rapport with the other person on the phone and treat everyone as an individual. It is worth noting that none of the team leaders mentioned the word “individual” in their explanations.

**Extract 6.53**

“I think you have to be a real friend, you have to a people person, you have to be talkative, communicate (...) you have to speak to them as if you are speaking to a work colleague; that’s what they really like, they start to enjoy the conversation more. And ask them about their day when you’re speaking to them.”

(Rabeya, current agent)

Rabeya adds that ‘mirroring’ is not only a way to convey to the other person that one is an individual, but also a means to accommodate him/her.

**Extract 6.54**

“You have to be empathetic (...) it depends on the situation, who you’re speaking to, their mood as well, because they might not always be the most cheerful people that you speak to and also they’re really busy people, and if you just sound as if you’re really hyperactive, very happy, a bit too enthusiastic, you know, that just puts them off automatically (...) : you have to sound real, you have to sound very real; you can’t just be smiley, smiley.”

(Rabeya, current agent)

It is perhaps also consistent with agents’ understanding of scripts, that they talk of making theirs sound unique. Like David says:
Extract 6.55

“You have to try and make your script unique (...) You’re more selling yourself.”

(David, current agent)

According to Anand, Alex and Jonas, one’s script needs to make an impact on the other person and therefore has to be interesting.

Extract 6.56

“The thing is that you edit. You take out the important parts and I think it would vary from individual to individual. What I do is that I see what’s the important thing and I, like I choose the key words which I feel are going to have an impact on the person I’m speaking to, so he might be interested and listening to me. It depends on the script, on the campaign, on the individual person how you want to change it.”

(Anand, current agent)

Extract 6.57

“But you have to be colourful with the scripts. You’ve got to use like the kind of poetic language that give you (...) and you’ve got to make it interesting.”

(Alex, current agent)

In the remaining part of my empirical account, I examine strategies related to country and gender that influence script enactment.

Country specific strategies:

Several agents, many among them not nurturing callers, state that they draw on their cultural knowledge of the specific countries/regions they call to make the script interesting, but they are adamant that these strategies are not universal. As Alex notes:

Extract 6.58

“I think different countries need different approaches.”

(Alex, current agent)

For instance, they note that in some cases, one can make one’s script interesting by saying that they are calling from London (and in English)137. As Miguel explains:

Extract 6.59

“I think this, if you are calling to maybe in South Africa or to Asia and you are calling in English and [from] London, you are making an impact because in their social imagination to speak in English and being from the West means being sophisticated. (...).”

(Miguel, current agent)

---

137 In other countries, the opposite might be the case and calling in English is avoided at all costs.
Alex confirms this in the case for Portugal. When he calls in Portuguese, he always includes that he is calling from London.

**Extract 6.60**

“You just say, ‘I’m calling from London,’ [when calling Portugal] they’ll do anything. They’ll transfer me to a person’s house just ‘cause I’m calling from London.”

(Alex, current agent)

Similarly, Gavin comments that mentioning the location he is calling from when contacting the Middle Eastern countries usually has an impact on the other person:

**Extract 6.61**

“[When I call the Middle East and say I call from London they say] ‘Ooh, this is a guy calling from England; this must be important’. There’s a bit of a fear there as to why they’re being called.”

(Gavin, team leader)

Other callers think adding country specific jokes to the script helps. So, Yasmin, a Belgian agent, says when phoning France she starts by making jokes about her nationality given that the French like to laugh about their neighbours.

**Extract 6.62**

“[Calling France] if I see like they’re so strict I know they like to laugh about Belgium, they say you’re Belgian so... because I have so many jokes about Belgian, so I will break this coldness and saying, you know, I’m from Belgium (...) like that’s how I lead.”

(Yasmin, new agent)

Some interviewees told me that being from the country targeted could also help. As Akash notes:

**Extract 6.63**

“I love talking to Indian people, they are my people, you know, I do understand what they think when you talk, you know, so it’s pretty much simple for me.”

(Aakash, current agent)

Equally, Paulina thinks that when she calls in her native tongue, Polish, she is more flexible in her use of the script and can establish a better rapport with the other person than in English.

**Extract 6.64**

“Because of the language barrier I might not be so good, like for example calling to my country [Poland]. Because sometimes maybe I would like to say something and I would not say because I would start to think how to say (...). So I’m a little bit disgruntled I cannot, you know, to cooperate more with them.”

(Paulina, current agent)
However, the majority of agents believe that being a native speaker or being from the country targeted is not necessarily that important for success on the phone nor does it help in making the script interesting. For example, David and Gavin make the following observation:

**Extract 6.65**

“There be certain people like Reza for example, who speaks very quickly that’s it. The speed that is his tactic (...) but he receives good feedback [meets his target]. And then there will be other people who are well spoken who speak calmly smoothly and they will just get no interest whatsoever (...) [and then there are other people with] the posh accent (...) trying everything (...) but they do not manage and (...) then the next person with poor very poor English (...) they will mispronounce half the words and they’ll still get like achieve the goal [target].”

*(David, current agent)*

**Extract 6.66**

“Having seen people achieve results from all different genders, all different backgrounds and all different ages, I think now possibly from pure practical experience, maybe it [nativeness] is not as important.” *(Gavin, senior team leader)*

Similarly, according to Barbara, “nativeness” is just one variable out of many.

**Extract 6.67**

“Nativeness? I don’t know if that helps every time, because, you know, I have sometimes seen that sometimes having a different accent can go your way as well. (...) I don’t know if research has proven that certain accents have a better result than certain other accents, but I’ve seen that certain accents, you know, get more leads (...) like a mild African accent (...) but just that one variable, you know, there might be other things going into it as well. Like at the same time native speakers are also good, reason being, because they are very confident in their manner of speaking.” *(Barbara, substitute team leader)*

Miguel also believes that being good on the phone is a skill that is unrelated to being a native speaker.

**Extract 6.68**

“[Nativeness does not matter] I think it’s just to do with being a natural speaker, that helps. I’m not talking about being a good public speaker because you are behind a phone, but certain people is good at words, simply good at words, (...) there are so many ways to express something that sometimes you put things in such a way that sounds better and sounds more appealing.” *(Miguel, current agent)*

Beatrice, a Galician from Spain, who has always called in English, told me she is not sure whether she could do this in her mother tongue Spanish.

**Extract 6.69**

“When I start[ed] here I was thinking I couldn’t do this in Spanish (...) it’s like it would take me ages to do anything in Spanish.” *(Beatrice, current agent)*
Other agents, like Yannick, suggest that it may be more important to draw on one’s cultural knowledge of the market (country/region) you are calling and to integrate that into one’s script.

**Extract 6.70**

“The market [country] that you’re calling, you have to understand the market.”

(Yannick, current agent)

For Juan, an agent from Colombia, this may mean using region specific greetings in one’s script, for instance, in the context of contacting Spain.

**Extract 6.71**

“Sometimes you have to adopt everything for a single person. For example it depends on the region [in Spain]. Where you have to say ‘hello’ in some places you say to (appure) or another kind of word for them (...) something in Basque they like [or] in Catalan.”

(Juan, current agent)

Others mention politeness as an important additional ingredient to the script. Nonetheless, the notion of what is considered polite varies greatly among callers, perhaps illustrating the sheer number of backgrounds that can be found in the call centre and the differences between countries/regions/cultures and languages. For instance, Linda, a Swedish agent from Finland finds people in the UK polite, whereas Roberto, an Italian, describes the British as rude.

**Extract 6.72**

“People are really polite here compared to Scandinavia people but compared to India they (...) are rude compared to India (...).”

(Linda, current agent)

**Extract 6.73**

“I’m calling South Africa, which is an amazing country, while in UK the people are quite rude.”

(Roberto, current agent)

Alex told me that what in Italy is polite is considered rude in the UK.

**Extract 6.74**

“There’s someone (...) very strong like Italian accent, (...) he says in Italy it’s perfect, like it’s how they do things, but in England definitely not and it is rude ((laughs)) it’s very rude.”

(Alex, current agent)

Finally, sounding authentic and applying that to a script is also mentioned as a strategy. Piia says she adapts the script to her local dialect, taking advantage of the fact that other Finns perceive people speaking this variety as funny and relaxed.
Extract 6.75

“’The reason I got quite, quite easily the leads [in Finland] was because I come from East Finland, we have a funny dialect, so whenever I was pitching them I was actually pitching in my dialect from East Finland and ([laughs]) they found it really funny. They were like really listening ‘cause they want to understand what I’m saying. And they were like... it’s people who come from East Finland are usually really friendly and laid back and if they contact someone from West or South they’re like ‘Wow’.”

(Piia, former team leader)

Alex and Tom believe that British people like being called by someone who sounds genuinely British.

Extract 6.76

“I think what made him [a British agent] really successful, he sounded very British. (...) it’s like the analogy of walking into a pub and you have an oriental person serve you, it’s not the same. If you walk into a Chinese restaurant and you have an Indian making your food it’s not the same; you want authentic. So if you’re receiving a call from a British number, you want a person on the line to sound British. It is a bit racist as well, (...) it’s just the British mentality of thinking I’ve grown up here and I know that things get a lot tougher if you’re not British and I do know that. (...) It’s just a nostalgic thing.”

(Alex, current agent)

Extract 6.77

“I keep to the English accent, because I think that I’ve got quite a, you know, naturally reasonably well spoken accent. (...) because I’m quite like a classically middle class person, put their hands up and say it. That’s why I think it works, because they don’t usually get calls from people with that kind of voice, if you know what I mean, but I think that’s why it works – especially for events. Because for events it sounds like, oh wow, god, it sounds like maybe Tony Blair’s invited me along or something. So, you know, it works. The Hugh Grant thing seems to pull [it] off.”

(Tom, new agent)

Overall, these alterations seem to concern small variations, such as accents, integrating more politeness formulas or adding one’s location to the script. Callers also draw on their knowledge or first-hand experience of ideological representations and (stereotypes) in their countries of specific groups or accents and try to take advantage of them. Yasmin tells Belgians nationality jokes, whereas Piia talks on purpose in her popular dialect and Tom speaks with his posh accent. The extract below suggests that Roberto also plays with stereotypes, such as the capacity of a strong Italian (Napolitanean) accent to evoke connotations of Mafia among the British.
Extract 6.78

“Like the guy with the Italian accent, Roberto half the time I don’t understand a thing he says, but he talks to the managers for ages. They are interested in talking to him just because he is so funny [David imitates his accent and repeats what Roberto always says on the phone] (...) ‘My name is Provezano’ (...) it’s just sounds like the mafia films Provezano (...) I had a discussion with him today, I was like: ‘why do you always say Provezano [Roberto uses only his surname on the phone instead of introducing himself by his Christian name Roberto]’? He was like ‘I don’t like Roberto. It’s too common’ [David imitates Roberto’s Naples accent with his very high-pitched voice]. He was like ‘if I say Roberto it’s like he is my friend or something’ [again imitates the accent]. (...) I was like ‘fair enough’.”

(David, current agent)

Let us turn now to strategies related to gender.

**Gender related strategies:**

Almost all the female callers agreed that gender is important, for they believe it is easier for a woman to make the script interesting when talking to a male than a female. For example, Siiri and Sonia say:

**Extract 6.79**

“If you call as a woman to men, men will listen to women. It’s just that gender thing. I don’t care, you know, what country you’re from, it’s the same. It’s the same in Finland and it’s the same in the UK.”

(Siiri, substitute team leader)

**Extract 6.80**

“I think gender makes a difference. I think it’s easier for girls (...) because (...) I think maybe 90% of the IT managers are men.”

(Sonia, current agent)

Many female callers, such as Vanessa further state one should take advantage of one’s femininity when talking to a male and integrate “flirting” into one’s script.

**Extract 6.81**

“One flirts with men. Flirting makes life a lot easier. If you realise that it might work, then by all means use that strategy.”

(Vanessa, current agent)

The vignette below also illustrates how flirting may be used as a strategy by female agents on the phone:
Fieldnote entry 6.3 (06/04/2010) ‘Laughing and flirting on the phone’

It was a tradition among female team leaders to advise female agents whenever talking to men to ‘laugh on the phone’, whenever they are not sure what to say, the situation is awkward and/or to break the ice. That day there was a new cohort of female German speaking callers from Austria, Switzerland, and southern Germany. Ada had trained and instructed them to laugh and flirt with men on the phone as much as they could. The next day, I overheard how they did exactly that. Most of them were laughing hard on the phone. There was in particular one agent, who told me she was a ‘Swabian Bavarian’[usually one is either or not both], who had a bit of a funny and exotic accent in German [I had never heard it before and it made me chuckle a bit] combined with a friendly high-pitched voice. But she used it to her full advantage. I could tell that men really enjoyed talking to her and even started a personal conversation with her. One person even asked her out. At times, however, considering the high dial rates it can be problematic, for female callers to have personal conversations and then having to end them because of the time constraints they face, even though the other person on the phone seems to enjoy themselves.

On the other hand, calling women is described as difficult and they may not even give one the chance to pitch the script:

**Extract 6.82**

> “Whenever I have called a female IT manager, oh my goodness, ... why do they always slam the phone? (...) There are very few, and even those few they treat us quite badly.”

*(Suganthi, current agent)*

Linnea is scared of women answering the phone:

**Extract 6.83**

> “I think women to women is about the worst combination. (...) Because we’re still, you know, we’re still not on the same level as the men. (...) it’s always been quite difficult to get through to women. It’s a bit like stuck-up bitches. I’m still feeling a bit scared when they answer the phone.”

*(Linnea, current agent)*

Daniela tries to sound like a man to avoid the problem described by Linnea and Suganthi:

**Extract 6.84**

> “I once tried to call with a male voice but I really did not manage. I think that a male voice comes across as more serious for women.”

*(Daniela, current agent)*

On the other hand, the majority of male callers do not believe that gender matters or is disadvantageous. There is only one male agent, Miguel, who thought that women might indeed have an advantage.
Extract 6.85

“I never thought about that [gender but] I remember that one of the girls here that is really good at calling...when she was asked why she was good she just said because I’m young and I suppose my tone of voice was (high) and she could be right. It could be that she’s young and a girl, and that’s one of the most appealing (...) tones of voice in our society I guess.”  

(Miguel, current agent)

6.3 Conclusion

As part of the enactment and use of the script, the master script undergoes further transformations. For most agents, their script is a ‘work in progress’, which constantly changes depending on a variety of factors such as their own disposition, the context off the phone and the other person’s reaction. Callers’ transformations to the script are monitored as much as it is possible through data entry, statistics, and the skeleton approach, but the agents are encouraged to personalise their scripts, use the consultative approach, and other strategies to meet their targets and obtain specific information.

Despite agents’ many modifications to the script, they claim that the essential content and message of the script remains intact. Whether or not this is the case is a complex matter and considering that even the corporation’s own sophisticated monitoring system struggles with making the distinction, it is also beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the matter at hand. Nonetheless, what has emerged is that at the callers’ level there is more emphasis on producing a record after every call, such as lead remarks or data entry, than conveying a verbatim message from the client. For callers, the record is believed to constitute the end product for the client. Accordingly, the script again obtains a different significance and function from those observed at the team leaders’ level and upstairs. Callers now talk of it as a tool they need to refashion to be able to do data entries and deliver the product the client desires. For them it has become more of a means to an end than the product itself. Consequently, similar to the team leaders, they talk of standardisation as an abstract ideal that is not bound to oral verbatim performance of the script, but more linked to the standardisation of the meaning of the script’s essential content and a written typed record on the
organisations’ database. So where does the description of the script’s enactment and use leave us?

As mentioned in the previous chapters, sociologists and sociolinguists writing from a neo-Foucauldian or neo-Marxist perspective, tend to take a critical view of the practice of scripting. An exception to this is Leidner (1993: 5), who instead suggests “rather than assuming that workers who do not resist routines are either miserable or duped, it would seem more fruitful to consider whether there are circumstances in which routines, even imposed routines, can be useful to workers.” As I have argued in chapter 1, she is one of the researchers who explicitly points out the advantages of standardisation and scripting. Leidner bases her more positive evaluation of standardisation on her ethnographic study of McDonalds, in which neither staff at McDonalds nor service recipients oppose the use of scripts or their controlling nature. Cook-Gumperz (2001: 123) summarises some of the reasons why the staff in Leidner’s study supported scripts:

"With possession of a script most situational risks are neutralised or made safe, so allowing workers to do their job by merely keeping to the script itself. The result is that the built-in politeness tokens create a completely routinised interactional environment where the exchange design assures both equal treatment for the customer and also provides for the customers managed compliance in cooperating with the worker. Workers find that politeness eases their own vulnerability to personal exposure. Thus, politeness routines solve a structural problem of service encounters by creating an interactional ‘safe zone’ in which worker and customer come together in a clearly defined situation with a goal (Cook-Gumperz 1991). It is this which explains their readiness to adhere to the script although it only permits minimal personalised variations." (Cook-Gumperz 2001: 123)

Yet it is important to point out a vital difference between the script of the McDonald franchise Leidner studied and my fieldsite. That is, the script her informants were given did not have to be translated and was designed with an American audience in mind, most likely being primarily used in this capacity. On the other hand, the call centre job at CallCentral, by definition, involves dealing with multiple countries and languages. Thus, we saw that the master script is originally written in English for a British audience (chapter 4), but after agents’ training, they are then asked to translate it into other target languages and adapt it accordingly. This adaptation includes the politeness tokens and other pragmatic features relevant to the local contexts (e.g. extract 6.10; 6.58; 6.59, 6.70). However, as noted in this chapter the
translation process is often chaotic (see fieldnote entry 6.2: ‘Translating master scripts’), leading agents to complain that they need to re-translate the script (e.g. extract 6.16 and 6.17) before they can personalise it.

From the discussion so far we have seen that agents support scripting and one of the reasons for this being the case is that they consider it a tool that helps them carry out their job better. But despite their clear advocacy for scripting and a desire to do their job well, at first sight their changes appear to be at odds with Cook-Gumperz’s explanation that service sector workers support scripts because of politeness tokens and the protection these entail. That is, it would appear that if agents personalised the script, which is said to involve “selling yourself” (David extract 6.55), flirting with men on the phone (e.g. extract 6.81), and revealing personal things about themselves, there is a risk that their script may lose its neutral feel and the built-in politeness tokens. They may thereby make themselves more vulnerable to personal insults from the other person on the phone. We have seen from the description of the script’s last career stage that agents are aware of the differences in cross-cultural politeness and realise that getting politeness tokens right eases their own vulnerability to personal exposure. The fact that several of my informants discuss and generalise ‘rudeness’ cross-culturally, based on their calling experience, suggests that they have experienced it first-hand (e.g. extract 6.72 and 6.73). So personalising the scripts and re-writing them can be in their own interest. Nevertheless, the question emerges whether agents’ recontextualisations of the script then represent acts of resistance against the script and the management. Similar to my observations on the team leaders in the previous chapter, based on the data presented in this chapter I suggest that for three reasons agents’ changes to the script do not seem to be acts of resistance.

Firstly, agents are not only unaware of upstairs’ contractual agreement with clients but are also trained within a set framework to modify the script and how to do this. In the interview extracts, they express a strong conviction that any of their hand-written or oral alterations to the script happen within this allowed framework. In essence, they stress that despite their rewording they still mention the key points (and the eight sections), thus doing their job properly (e.g. interview extract 6.47).
Secondly, the effort agents make to improve the script is also a sign of their commitment to their job. This becomes evident in the great variety of strategies they apply to improve the script and their even helping each another. They clearly are not just ‘animators’, but have in some sense become ‘authors’ on the phone with some partial agency, with the script becoming more of a tool that they refashion. It is further worth mentioning how many of my informants used ‘own’ in reference to the script, for several said, for instance, you “make the script your own”. This feeling of owning the script also emerged from chapter 5, where we learnt how they look after their paper copy of their own script and there is thus a bond between the script and the agent. Consequently, if it is their own now, there is unlikely to be such a need to resist it.

Thirdly, while agents are supportive of the script and do not perceive it as a problem, they complain about the inflexible, mandatory, and unrealistic targets, which they feel, impede them from doing the important data entry. As a result, they ask for lower targets so that they can include all the essential content from the script in their speech on the phone and do proper data entry. Several callers argue that it is in their best interest to do data entry after every call and that only inexperienced and new agents resist it. Equally, in the previous chapter it emerged that when the dial rates were raised to impossible levels, agents responded by reluctantly cutting important sections of the script in an effort to cope. The team leaders then stepped in to tell agents what they could and could not leave out. Even in this case, it was not resistance as steps were being undertaken to cause the least damage possible to the quality of the script and record (cf. chapter 5 fieldnote entry 5.3). This is even more remarkable as the incentives given by upstairs are target rather than quality-oriented. Therefore, to downstairs’ dismay agents are not be rewarded for the quality of the leads they generate but only quantity and this, following the script and doing high quality data entry, therefore, may mean losing out financially in the short run, but not in the long run, as some agents explained (e.g. extract 6.5-6.7).

In the next chapter, I will summarise the discussion on the career of the script so far and frame it within a larger context.
Chapter 7

Discussion and conclusion

7.0 Introduction

This thesis began as a project that set out to develop through ethnography a better understanding of managers’ and workers’ perceptions and practices towards standardisation in call centres. In chapter 1, I argued that the sociological and sociolinguistic findings from call centre studies, to date, tend to evoke a negative image of call centres as the digital communication factories of the post-industrial service economy (cf. Belt 2003: 127). For instance, Holman and Fernie (2000: 1) have noted that the majority of call centre studies “conjure up an image of oppressive, stifling working conditions, constant surveillance, poor job satisfaction”. Moreover, I have argued that in the literature call centres are intrinsically linked with standardisation, and that the increased use of scripting is considered to represent a significant development in the intensification of Taylorisation of white-collar work. This has further contributed to their negative image.

In fact, a negative approach can be found in studies of standardisation in workplaces more generally, and there are three reasons for this. First, as Timmermans and Epstein (2010) suggest in a review article on standardisation in sociology, there has been a long history of social theory dating back to Marx and Weber that uses standardisation in a derogatory sense - leading to homogeneity, deskilling, and dehumanisation. They believe that this tendency still persists today and is evident, for instance, in Ritzer’s McDonaldization (cf. chapter 1 section 1.1). Second, as Leidner (1993: 22) and Mumby (2005: 25) have proposed, because of the researchers’ epistemological positioning as either Foucauldian or neo-Marxist, most studies overstate the employer’s success in imposing standardisation routines, supposing that such practices inevitably serve the goals intended by management. This is particularly the case with previous call centre studies informed by a Foucauldian perspective. I discuss this in more detail below. The third reason stems from the methods that have been employed so far to
research call centres. That is, since researchers have found it difficult to gain access, perform participant observation or conduct interviews with any of the call centre staff, they have had to rely, in the main, on questionnaires and surveys.

“At the time of my research there had recently been a number of critical press reports about working conditions in British call centres, and some managers were wary of my approaches. Often they were eager to show me their centres which they felt had been unfairly criticised, but reluctant to let me talk to their staff unchaperoned, and insistent on approving what I wrote in advance of publication” (Cameron 2000a: 184).

“Given sensitivities regarding the issues of conflict which emerged, it proved impossible both to conduct formal interviews with management or to gain access to the organisation for the purpose of observation” (Bain and Taylor 2000: 8).

Hence, many could not observe first-hand how standardisation is implemented and how it works on a daily basis. In fact, though, this type of observation of standardisation in practice (including the background stories) is required not only for obtaining a more balanced view, but also for a complete picture of the situation. The fact that standardisation in practice is not always what it seems from the outside has been shown repeatedly in ethnographies of factories, where often a vivid ‘underlife’ is exposed on the shop floor with workers and lower managers working their way around the standardised routines designed by upper management (e.g. Burawoy 1979; Linstead 1985; Warde 1992).

So in this thesis, I have proposed that it is necessary to obtain a more subtle understanding of standardisation in call centres beyond the position that standardisation of call centre work is only negative. I suggested that this could be achieved by drawing on qualitative methods, most importantly long-term ethnography. As far as I am aware, the latter has only been used in two call centre studies (Houlihan 2003; Brannan 2005) so far. Both of them were on inbound and not outbound call centres. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this dissertation has sought to answer the following questions that have been marginal in previous research:

a) To what extent are standardisation practices common and implemented in call centre work?
b) What are the agents’ and team leaders’ perceptions, perspectives, and strategies towards standardisation practices?

c) What are the managers’ perceptions, perspectives, and strategies towards standardisation practices?

d) How adequate are the previous accounts in the sociological and sociolinguistics literature?

Drawing on my ethnographic fieldnotes and interviews with agents, in chapter 3 I have described the fieldsite from the point of a view of a new agent. It emerged that for the management, the script is an important means to achieve predictability, calculability, efficiency, and control on the one hand, but maintain flexibility on the other. We further saw how scripts underpin many aspects within the call centre’s organisation and are an agreed reference point for: i) communication between agents and people on the phone, ii) training of new and current agents, iii) qualitative and quantitative measurement (generation of statistics) of the agents’ and scripts’ successes, iv) hiring practices and v) agents’ pay and bonus structures. In view of this discovery, in chapters 4, 5, and 6, I decided to pursue the career of a script from its production to its use on the phone in more detail, but following the script’s trajectories has other advantages. Firstly, in the literature, the script is often regarded as the symbol of ‘standardisation’ per se in the service sector. Secondly, in the case of my fieldsite, all participants are involved with it at some point. Thirdly, this cross-hierarchical involvement allowed me not only to explore managers’, but also team leaders and agents’ perceptions and their handlings of it. Before I summarise and discuss the findings, in view of the importance of the methodology used in this thesis, it is worth reiterating briefly: i) what ethnography is, ii) its methodological benefits, and iii) how I have drawn on this method for addressing the research questions.

7.1 Methodological contributions

As noted in chapter 2 section 2.1, ethnography has been defined as “the deep immersion into the life of people. (...) One learns their language and tries to learn the mode of life. One learns by participant observation, by living as well
as viewing the new patterns of life” (Keesing 1981: 6). My thesis is not an ethnography in the traditional sense, because I did not focus on a small-scale distant village in a developing country or was an outsider. In fact, having worked alongside agents has made me an insider, which can have benefits, as O’Reilly summarises:

“Insiders (...) blend in more, gain more rapport, participate more easily, having more linguistic competence with which they can ask subtle questions on more complex issues, and are better at reading non-verbal communications. [...] They get beyond the ideal to the real, daily lived, and back-stage experiences. Rather than describing the conscious grammar of the community, their ethnographies are expressions of it, the result of a superior insider knowledge gained through primary socialisation” (2009: 114).

So let us see how O’Reilly’s quote applies to my thesis.

As an employee, I had none of the access problems that so many other researchers have had. In fact, the first contribution is that this is the first ethnographic study of an outbound call centre.

The second contribution is that with the benefit of being an insider and having being granted full access, I did not have to rely on questionnaires on what the issues might be in the call centre. Instead, I could observe my participants and their activities initially and then ask them informed “and subtle” (O’Reilly 2009: 114) questions during the interviews, because of “my superior insider knowledge gained through primary socialisation” (ibid: 114).

Thirdly, we have gained insights into types of participant that have been marginalised and overlooked in previous non-ethnographic studies. These new insights emerged through the mapping of a script’s textual trajectories encompassing the entire organisation, and through fieldnotes on the surrounding “real life back-stage” activities during the script’s career (O’Reilly 2009: 114). Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 have shown that campaign managers and team leaders are important figures whose interpretations and actions influence proceedings on the floor downstairs. With the exception of Houlihan’s (2003) unpublished PhD thesis, written from a human resource perspective, no research has addressed how the middle management or team leaders in call centres perceive standardisation or work with it on a daily basis. If there has ever been any discussion of team leaders or middle managers in any of the previous call centre studies, it is only as ‘supervisors’
who are part of a system, but not as a significant interest group with the capability to act differently from their line managers.

Fourthly, the trajectories of the script and many of the fieldnotes have not only highlighted the actual existence of different interest groups within the organisation, but have also, shown that in real time all these participants (agents, team leaders or campaign managers) have agency, for example, when they recontextualise the script into a new context. We have seen that this recontextualisation can happen orally or through hand-written annotations. This is an important form of agency that may have been overlooked in sociological or sociolinguistic studies drawing only on interviews or questionnaires, since these are based on researchers’ preconceived notions of call centres and do not take into any account what outsiders may have mistaken as marginal backstage activities. Furthermore, as I explain in more detail below, many of these “backstage activities” (O’Reilly 2009: 114) put team leaders’, campaign managers’ and agents’ actions and perceptions into a new light, thus affecting our understanding of key themes such as resistance and rationalisation.

Fifthly, the qualitative methods used in chapters 4, 5, and 6 have shown that it is not the sole purpose of a script to regulate activities of the organisation as institutional ethnographers claim. Only upstairs and the client believe that no changes will be made to the script and imagine it to be static. Accordingly, in chapters 5 and 6 I have suggested that participants further down the hierarchy, who are away from upstairs, conceptualise the master script to be part of a ‘textual trajectory’, which is transformed throughout its journey. Hence, because of the unusual perspective that ethnography and mapping of the script’s trajectories provide, it has emerged that the script and standardisation do not mean the same thing upstairs as they do to the participant groups downstairs. Against this background, the notion of what ‘standardised’, ‘standard’ or ‘standardisation’ means becomes more difficult too. If the understanding depends on the hierarchical position of the participant, whose understanding do we take? It is because of this difficulty that I argued i) that it is important to look at the views participants display towards the script across a trajectory of the organisation and surrounding activities, and ii) to explore standardisation by looking at themes
traditionally used for understanding standardisation in organisations, such as: resistance, deskilling and rationalisation. This section has been about the methodological contribution of this study, but what can we conclude about standardisation practices in this particular outbound call centre based on the discussion of each career stage of chapter 4, 5, and 6?

7.2 Summary of the discussion on scripts and standardisation

7.2.1 General points

Let us begin by briefly remembering the key points from chapter 1 on call centre standardisation. As we saw, the literature agrees that in the new economy, businesses draw on Taylorist standardisation, also referred to as scripted Taylorism, when language comes into focus (cf. Heller 2010). This is said to be best illustrated by call centre scripts that function as a system of control over speech and discourse (Cameron 2000a; Hannif et al. 2009: 278; Taylor and Bain 1999: 109). These scripts “are carefully structured to manage the transaction in the most efficient way not only to achieve organisational targets, and also to present a branded corporate persona” (Houlihan 2003: 150). At the same time, according to Houlihan (2003: 150), “such scripting is designed to achieve process goals of sequencing, clarity, rapport building, branding, and task goals that include information gathering, information giving, information accuracy, and sales”. ‘Scripted Taylorism’ is said to be coupled with strict high tech monitoring recording agents’ calls and any click they make on their computers, similar to Foucault’s panopticon (cf. Taylor and Bain 1999). As previous studies see call centres as emblematic panopticons, they hunt for agents making changes to the script, which is framed and celebrated as their individual heroic attempts to resist the always watching computer system.

Moreover, taking a Foucauldian or neo-Marxian approach, as most studies do, coupled with the lack of long-term ethnographic fieldwork, it is easy to miss the hand-written changes to the script, to overlook their systematicity, and to overestimate the power and use of electronic monitoring
in call centres (also compare cf. Lankshear et al. 2001). So not surprisingly, according to the call centre literature, even if the script is resisted, this action does not affect the script itself, with the latter being portrayed as something inflexible and static. Houlihan (2003) for example, explains that a slightly subversive ritual played by agents at the call centre she researched was the ‘banana game’, whereby agents vied with each other to see how many times they could get in the word ‘banana’ during a call, unbeknownst to the customer. She writes, “this mocked the inanity of the script while providing light relief and another way of coping with tedium” (Houlihan 2003: 137). Yet, despite this game, the script remains intact, and agents still follow it. She also does not investigate how scripts may be adapted or annotated in the course of their lives. Equally, Cameron only says that her informants “reported taking liberties with their scripts and ignoring instructions to smile” (2000a: 113). In discussing her and Taylor’s call centre studies, she suggests that script alterations are made in response to sounding fake and agents’ desire to sound more natural when interacting with customers (Cameron 2000a). However, she does not go into detail or analyse how the script is changed.

It is often reported that agents are forced to continuously recite the script in a smiley voice, and are being monitored to ensure whether they meet the prescribed standards. For instance Mirchandani claims that “call centre workers (...) experience scripts as de-skilling, repetitive, and tedious” (2004: 361). Cameron also blames them for turning a call centre into a “deskilling and disempowering workplace” (2000a: 124). Also along these lines, scripts are said to turn workers into robots and oppress them by reducing their opportunity to develop a capacity to make decisions on their own or solve problems (cf. e.g. Korczynski 2002; Ritzer 1998).

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, we have seen that scripts, and by extension standardisation, have different meanings across the hierarchy of the organisation. Upstairs and the client demand and require textual fidelity from agents, since a verbatim performance of the script with every call is needed for the production of statistics, making agents’ performance measurable and transparent. On the other hand, downstairs’ view is different, with textual fidelity becoming less of a concern for the campaign managers.
and team leaders. They believe it is more important for agents to obtain reliable and unique information that can only be gained over the phone and that meets the clients’ specific needs. Being aware of the agents’ desire to be flexible with the script and notwithstanding the need for monitoring them, downstairs allows some leeway concerning the wording of the script as long as the referential topic is standardised and follows the eight-section approach. With the script imagined as a scaffolding or skeleton, agents can a) personalise it and b) be consultative within an agreed frame through hand-annotations. The agents themselves are unaware of upstairs’ stress on textual fidelity. In line with what the team leaders will have told them, they understand standardisation as referring to the standardisation of the referential topic, not as literal wording. Acutely conscious of the need to obtain good leads and data over the phone, they describe in detail how they annotate their scripts by hand in order to personalise them. In an effort to do so, some callers talk of using “poetic language” (extract 6.57) and “making it sound like a love letter” (extract 6.48). Thus, the hand-annotation and rewriting of the script by hand indicate that at the agents and team leaders’ level the script is not static or inflexible, as has been argued in the literature. In fact, one of my informants even described it as always “a work in progress” (extract 6.29). More specifically, chapters 5 and 6 have outlined the sheer variety of strategies agents apply in changing the script and the steps involved in re-writing them during the training sessions, debriefings or on the phone in search of the “perfect script” (extract 6.31). But the literature also claims that scripts are deskilling (cf. chapter 1 section 1.3.2).

7.2.2 Scripts, standardisation and the issue of deskilling

The data in chapters 3, 5 and 6 suggest that neither agents nor team leaders find scripts deskilling (cf. chapter 3). Similarly, none of the agents or team leaders complained about the existence of scripts. In fact, the majority of agents describe them as helpful, beneficial, and even upskilling, for several reasons. For instance, it is often only thanks to the script that callers are able to work in an IT call centre despite not having any prior technical knowledge or fluency in another foreign language. Consequently, the call centre often
constitutes a stepping-stone for agents as it is often their first job in London and they can gain valuable work experience for other more prestigious jobs.

In terms of the job itself, agents suggest that scripts help them as they boost their confidence. Agents further seem to enjoy personalising scripts and changing them. One of the reasons why I described the career of a script at agents’ level in such detail was to highlight how much crafting, knowledge and skill continuously goes into reworking the script on paper, improvising around it, and tailoring it to individual people at the other end of the phone. For example, the reason why agents usually have to start calling on the script-based engagement campaigns is to learn different types of listening and how to use the script as a resource on the phone. Only then, can they be trained in the more demanding consultative calling for BANT and nurturing campaigns. In general, agents’ abilities to personalise scripts on paper and phone and to do consultative calling are other examples of skills that are easily overlooked by an outsider, being either summed up in the generic and indiscriminate term ‘communication skills’ or equated with personality or gender (cf. chapter 1, section 1.3.2; Muller 1999).

Eight of my interviewees evoke the image of human vs. machine, but then they talk of their struggle with targets and numbers (e.g. extract 3.28). Agents and team leaders do not talk of scripts turning them into robots (e.g. extract 5.29) nor do they believe that this is the goal of the call centre management. Nonetheless, they sometimes feel the danger of becoming robotic because of the high number of repetitions, as Daniela (extract 6.44) for instance notes. Her solution is to keep changing the script with every call to prevent monotony.

Besides becoming proficient script users, several of my informants report that the translated script has also helped them to improve their knowledge of a foreign language (extract 3.5-3.9). Considering that many of them report changing the script to beat monotony but do not seem averse to its use, what can we summarise about ‘resistance’, another other key theme in the literature on standardisation?
7.2.3 The question of resistance against scripts, standardisation, and control

As mentioned in chapter 5, the general literature on organisational resistance tends to discuss resistance as part of a dualism between control and resistance, with the majority of call centre studies taking this approach hunting for instances involving individual cases of an agent’s resistance against scripts. Probably the most famous analysis of resistance in organisations is Burawoy’s (1979) neo-Marxist study of a factory in Chicago that, according to Mumby (2005), also suffers from the aforementioned dualism. Burawoy (1979) argues that the conflicts on the shop floor need to be explained as a struggle and political game between the shop management and higher management. In the factory where he conducted his research, machine operators took regular shortcuts, so called “chiselling practices” (1979: 58) and the game of “making out” (1979: 60), to meet their targets. However, these practices also meant that workers would not produce the standardised quality the products required. The inspectors and the middle managers from the shop floor were aware of this issue but tolerated the workers’ behaviour. In a regular cycle, their subversions were discovered and higher management, being concerned with profit margins, tried to reinforce their authority by imposing new limits on costs and quality. However, since they were distant from the floor they could only exercise control over the floor by imposing “new rules” (Burawoy 1979: 176). These rules turned out to be incompatible with the shop floor labour process and thus had to be relaxed again by the management downstairs. Burawoy (1979) further explores the question of why the higher management imposed rules that were unworkable. He argues that it is not because they were ignorant of what happened on the shop floor, but because each group was motivated by different concerns. In the end, however, his analysis focuses on how “the game of making out”, symbolising instances of workers’ individual attempts to resist (against machines), ends in their ‘manufacturing their own consent’ to the hegemonic management policies (cf. Mumby 2005: 26-27).

The question whether ‘game playing’ among workers should be, indeed, considered ‘resistance’ is controversial in the general literature on
workplaces. Since in the literature on resistance in call centres, the term resistance is taken for granted and not further discussed or questioned, with the exception of Houlihan (2003), I have also not looked more closely at this term in chapter 1. However, now at this stage, I think it would be beneficial for the concluding discussion to reflect on how this term has been discussed in the organisational literature and what potential alternatives there are beyond the dualism of control and resistance. I also will examine the suitability of alternative conceptualisations to my findings.

Unlike Burawoy (1979), Roy (1960) does not consider game playing in a factory as resistance to managerial control. Instead, he views these practices as practical solutions to coping with a 12-hour monotonous work day and to kill time. In fact, similarly Marchington (1992: 157) argues that most workers avoid conflict behaviour. In this sense, Roy’s game playing with his colleague could be conceptualised as what Marchington terms as ‘getting by’ strategies and not as ‘disruptive actions’. With these strategies, workers draw on competencies and tacit skills they use to mediate their work. Moreover, since the majority of employees take pride in their work and want to meet a certain standard of professionalism, Marchington suggests that they use not only no-conflict ‘getting by’ but also ‘getting on’ strategies. He conceptualises the latter as ‘pragmatic instrumentalism’ (1992: 157), workers wanting to contribute with their competencies to the organisation’s success rather than sabotaging it (also cf. Houlihan 2003: 18-20). In fact, there is some agreement in the literature that ‘resistance’ usually involves participants who know and are aware of their ‘disruptive actions’.

Goffman (1961) has put forward an alternative theorisation of ‘disruptive practices’. He proposes that the fundamental issue is not whether or not ‘disruptive practices’ are about resistance. Instead, he considers them an “essential constituent of the self” (1961: 279). In Asylums, Goffman looks at the underlife of ‘total institutions’\(^{138}\) and provides a framework for uncovering the dialectic between self-definition and the “official self” (1961: 170). He distinguishes between a) the implicit contract of the organisational

\(^{138}\) Although the call centre is not a totalitarian institution (barracks, monasteries, prisons and mental institutes) in the way Goffman has defined it, it has been repeatedly argued that it shares some aspects with one because of the believed extent of monitoring (the panopticon).
relationship with certain incentives to perform well, negative sanctions, and b) ‘joint value’. That is, membership of an organisation entails both the externalised discipline of actions and a “discipline of being” (Houlihan 2003: 23). As such, Goffman contends, in so far as the member of the organisation consents to this (he refers to this as primary adjustment), “the individual is tacitly accepting a view of what will motivate him, and hence a view of his identity” (1961: 165). Having an official along with a self-identity enables the individual subsequently to create boundaries and participate in deviant behaviour, whereby the individual can bypass the “organisation’s assumptions of what he should do and get and hence what he should be” (ibid: 172). This is what Goffman terms “secondary adjustment” (ibid: 172). Regarding this, the author makes a distinction between “disruptive secondary adjustment” (ibid: 180) that is “intentions of the participants are to abandon the organisation or radically alter its structure” (ibid: 180) and “contained secondary adjustment” (ibid: 181), with the latter basically being part of the status quo and not disruptive, but it is through which an individual can mentally tune out from the organisation. What is notable about this second type is that it is semi-authorised and tolerated, thus being brought into the primary contract between the member and the organisation (cf. Houlihan 2003: 22).

At first sight, my data presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6 suggests Burawoy (1979) is right, and that struggles and political games between the shop floor management and upstairs as well as the resulting conflict on the shop floor play a key part in the organisation. Similar to the factory, in the call centre agents may also have to compromise the quality of the product (‘the script’ and answers to the script’s questions) in order to meet their targets. Team leaders and campaign managers are aware of what upstairs would label agents’ ‘subversive’ practices and even seem to encourage them. Equally, from time to time, downstairs’ subversion may become evident to upstairs. However, if we agree for the moment that these practices are indeed ‘resistance’ there are several important differences. The ‘resistance’, if there is

\footnote{Goffman (1961) contrasts secondary adjustments with “Messing up”. He writes that “The staff and inmates will be clearly aware of what, in mental hospitals, prisons, and barracks, is called “messing up”. Messing up involves a complex process of engaging in forbidden activity, getting caught and receiving something like full punishment” (1961: 55).}
any from downstairs, is collective, whereas in Burawoy’s case it always
remains individualistic and ineffective, because the management always wins
the fight. However, the question also emerges whether these script changes
are indeed disruptive or whether it is more the target avoidance that is the
disruptive action. In fact, drawing on the points made in the conclusions of
chapters 4, 5, 6 I argue that for several reasons the notion of resistance does
not fully explain the oral and hand-written changes to the script that occur
from upstairs to downstairs.

First, it appears as if the upstairs – downstairs relationship is more
about co-operation than about resistance. Campaign managers know that not
only does the client want to see certain things, but also, ultimately, upstairs
likewise has to present a certain product and image in order to sell a
campaign for there to be further employment for agents. For example, Laura
says:

**Extract 7.1**

“When we write the script we need to think about the client as well so the client
wants to see something in the script, that someone on the phone might not
necessarily want to hear.”

*Laura, campaign manager*

As the vignettes in chapter 4 show this arrangement further includes what
Houlihan describes as “rules within rules” (Houlihan 2003: 277). In the case
of campaigns, downstairs has to manage the stipulations of the contract
(fieldnote entry 4.2 ‘Problems with a campaign and Jenny’s secret solution’;
fieldnote entry 4.4 ‘The new campaign manager’s faux pas in front of
upstairs’). The secrecy around script changes downstairs is part of this. For
instance, when the new manager Eva accidentally revealed these practices to
the operations manager from upstairs, she was neither aware that these must
not be mentioned to him nor that they could bring downstairs into trouble.
The script changes are not deemed ‘disruptive behaviour’ either, for they only
become so when upstairs are explicitly told about them.

In view of Jenny’s importance downstairs, her behaviour and
comments in fieldnote entry 4.2 and 4.4 are also interesting. In fieldnote
entry 4.2 (‘Problems with a campaign and Jenny’s secret solution’), she talks
of her conscious ambivalence towards script changing practices depending on
to whom she is talking and where. As the boss downstairs, perhaps more than
her colleagues, she has to understand the “rules within rules” in the organisation to keep upstairs happy. This arrangement may collapse temporarily as during Eva’s faux pas, but in general, she knows what upstairs (and the client) want to hear and see from downstairs and she delivers that. From what we have seen, she manages to keep upstairs contented by telling them that downstairs follows the script verbatim and by meeting targets and deadlines. Meeting targets is very important for campaign managers, as it will not only keep upstairs happy but also at a physical distance, thus allowing more liberty to downstairs. This freedom implies that, unless the operations manager visits, a number of non-disruptive activities are allowed backstage while agents work the lines (cf. fieldnote entry 5.2).

Second, campaign managers respect the script and the clients’ wishes and do not frame hand-written changes to it as resistance (e.g. fieldnote entries 4.2 and 5.5). A justification for these changes provided by Gavin (cf. extract 4.7) and Jenny (in fieldnote entry 4.2 ‘Problems with a campaign and Jenny’s secret solution’) is that the client and upstairs may not know what is best for them and the campaign. So campaign managers, team leaders, and agents think that hand-written script changes are in reality in the best interest of the client and the company. Another reason for the changes, given by Jenny in fieldnote entry 4.2, is that sometimes the circumstances may not permit downstairs to follow the script verbatim, as meeting targets and deadlines is more important. In any case, the script alterations are not a heroic act of an individual but part of the system, and regulated by campaign managers. They are meant neither to be an act of sabotage against the company, upstairs or the client nor to be disruptive. In fact, the campaign managers’ and team leaders’ motivations seem to be pragmatic instrumentalism and part of a ‘getting on’ strategy.

Third, in a similar vein it could be argued that using the script and the eight-section framework for monitoring purposes is downstairs’ desperate attempt to maintain upstairs’ expectation for rationalisation and to ‘get on’ with the sheer diversity, such as the number of languages called in and transient nature of outbound call centre work (cf. chapter 3). For instance, Jenny told me in response to why the script is important:
Extract 7.2

"Because it [the script] regulates what everyone does. We try and regulate what everyone does. It’s not always easy, you know, to make sure everyone’s doing the right thing because we speak 300 languages in here so having someone that understands all those languages isn’t possible but at least it’s a guideline.”

(Jenny, senior campaign manager)

Similarly, the control dimension of the monitoring apparatus, which is stressed to such a degree in the Foucauldian inspired call centre analyses and is supposed to make the management “powerful” (cf. e.g. Taylor and Bain 1999; Fernie and Metcalf 1998), is rather ineffective at CallCentral. We have seen that there are two explanations for this. One is that monitoring, especially listening in silently, is very labour intensive, a fact that is acknowledged by only a few studies, such as Lankshear et al. (2001).

The other is related to diversity. Even if upstairs wanted agents downstairs to follow the script word by word, how could this be possibly enforced and monitored with all the languages spoken in the call centre, let alone with the lack of manpower, resources, and funds? The call centre management already struggles with recruiting certain language speakers for campaigns and thus often has to resort to using second, third or fourth language speakers. Therefore, it is almost impossible to find someone who can monitor all the languages called in only for monitoring purposes. In addition, there are often more than 60 agents calling with three permanent team leaders who still have to work the lines, too. Even if they did undertake full-time call monitoring, it would not be possible to monitor everyone simultaneously. Agents, often not knowing the actual extent of monitoring, did not describe the experience of electronic monitoring and surveillance as “tight” as, for instance, Holborow (2007: 68), claims. Equally, Fernie’s widely cited assertion that “the tyranny of the assembly line is but a Sunday school picnic compared with the control that management can exercise in computer telephony” (1998: 7) does not seem to hold true for the CallCentral call centre. Therefore, the more relevant question is whether taking a Foucauldian perspective with its focus on control/resistance is helpful considering that there may not be enough control to incite agents’ resistance in the first place.
Fourth, agents and team leaders do not frame the changes to the script as an act of resistance either. They are not even aware of upstairs and the clients’ position on textual fidelity. This emerges, for instance from the fact that none of my informants mentions that there could possibly be a problem with them changing the script, and they happily explain in detail how they do so. Therefore, any opposition to upstairs’ position on textual fidelity would be unconscious and thereby not an act of resistance.

Fifth, the efforts they make in personalising the script to obtain useful data over the phone also suggest a concern and commitment on behalf of the organisation that makes resistance even more unlikely.

Sixth, agents and team leaders are reluctant to leave out sections of the script when under pressure to meet targets (see fieldnote 5.3 ‘The impact of monitoring on the script at the end of the quarter’). In fact, they consider leaving something out a breach of their professional standards and damaging to the quality of the end product delivered to the client.

So, if it is not resistance, how can we characterise the script changes? As I have already suggested, they could be a ‘getting on’ strategy of instrumental pragmatism. Campaign managers suggest them, as they believe they are in the best interest of the company and the client, and in line with their professional ethics. But the other question is whether the script changes downstairs are an example of non-disruptive, semi-authorised ‘secondary adjustment’. However, here we need to distinguish between the practices of the campaign managers, on the one hand and agents/team leaders on the other, since the notions of primary adjustments seem to be different for the respective participant groups. Campaign managers know and accept upstairs primary adjustment of a script that is static and needs to be read verbatim. Conversely, team leaders and agents are unaware of upstairs’ notion of primary adjustment and the stress they place on textual fidelity. For them, in line with what the campaign manager and leader will have told them, the primary adjustment is to follow the script and adapt it using the skeleton approach.

Overall, the Goffmanian concepts of ‘primary and secondary adjustments’ seem to be more applicable to the campaign managers and team
leaders/agents working together around the targets than script changes. That is, all participant groups, not only the campaign managers, are not only aware of but also accept the primary adjustment of upstairs that the targets set by them have to be met. More importantly, in chapters 5 and 6 there are several examples of implicit semi-authorised ‘secondary adjustments’ to targets. The voicemail strategy advocated by team leaders may be a good example of this.

### 7.2.4 Rationalisation, scripts, and standardisation

Another important strand of discussion in the literature is the relationship between rationalisation and standardisation. In fact, several authors, such as Cameron (2000a), have argued that it is the believed need for rationalisation among call centre managers that has led to the employment of scripts. So let us see what we can conclude about rationalisation and scripts.

In chapter 1, we saw that in the literature on call centres, it has been argued, for instance, by Cameron (2000a) that call centres are characterised by four rationalising characteristics (cf. chapter 1 section 1.3.2): ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘control’. This theorisation follows Ritzer’s neo-Weberian ‘McDonaldisation’ paradigm that views rationalisation as a continuation of the Fordist project.

In this line of thought, it is believed, as Watson (2003) summarises, that:

> “industrial manufacturing principles of mechanisation, rationalisation and routinisation are not only applied to fast-food service work, but also to banking, retailing and other service work, in a way that means that service work is tending to extend ‘manual industrial labour’ rather than erode it” (2003: 72).

Noneetheless, Ritzer (1999) acknowledges that although McDonaldisation (rationalisation) or neo-rationalisation is increasingly common in the

---

140 Allen and du Gay suggest that interactive service work is different from industrial work. They argue that service work cannot be understood “within the discourse of manufacturing, even when many of its constituent elements have been subject to standardisation and routinisation” (1994: 267) (cf. Edgell 2012: 127).

141 According to Edgell (2012: 129-134), there is some disagreement in the literature as to how to classify McDonaldisation. Ritzer considers it neo-Fordist (and neo-rationalisation), thus stressing the continuities with Fordism. However, others such Taylor et al. (1998) argue that McDonaldisation is an example of post-Fordism. Not only is its production system an example of flexible specialisation, with its ability to respond quickly to the demand of a greater variety of products, but it also draws on new techniques such as teamwork. In this thesis, I consider McDonaldisation as part of post-Fordism.
service sector, post-Fordism (flexibility and flexible accumulation) and McDonaldisation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they increasingly occur simultaneously (see chapter 1) and this can lead to tensions. In the call centre context, Korczynski (2002) has theorised this under what he dubs the ‘consumer-oriented bureaucracy’. He has argued that not only are call centres governed by logic, but also the demands of the customer (demanding flexibility) and those of the management (rationalisation). Accordingly, in this ‘customer-oriented bureaucracy’ with the two contradicting logics, tensions are normal and inherent in the system.

On the whole, the data in chapters 4, 5, and 6 supports Korczynski’s (2002) account of the customer-oriented democracy. Although the logics may be different, because CallCentral is an outbound and not an inbound call centre, the participants in my fieldsite seem to struggle with the tension between quality and quantity. Thus, I have pointed out that the script’s first career stage, its production, involving the negotiation of the contractual agreement with the client, is characterised by the four rationalising factors of: calculability, predictability, efficiency, and control. Although downstairs seems to operate on another kind of rationalisation, underpinned by a different pragmatism and not by the four rationalising factors from upstairs, team leaders and agents feel the stress of meeting predicted targets and their inability to do so, because of the unpredictability of their work. The constant tension they experience, because of the rationalising characteristics upstairs and the different pragmatism downstairs, can never be resolved and is expressed in the interviews (e.g. Siiri extract 5.2.5). At particular moments of the quarter, these contradictions may become more pronounced; this is also reflected in the team leaders and agents’ use of the script (e.g. fieldnote entry 5.3: ‘The impact of monitoring on the master script at the end of the quarter’). At the same time, the tensions could be an example of the ‘official’ primary adjustment and ‘unofficial semi-authorised’ secondary adjustments competing with each other and thus causing stress among the workers.

So far, from the discussion we can summarise the following. I have suggested that in the case of CallCentral, scripts do not contribute to deskilling. Moreover, I have argued that ‘resistance’ is not an adequate term for describing the written and oral changes that happen to the script from
upstairs to downstairs, most importantly because they are not disruptive and actors are unaware of ‘resistance’. Instead, I have proposed that it is more accurate to conceptualise these actions as ‘getting on’ strategies by the different participant groups or as ‘contained secondary adjustment’. The practices around the targets seem more resistance like, and contain disruptive as well as contained secondary adjustments. Finally, I have drawn on Korczynski’s theorisation of the call centre as a consumer-oriented bureaucracy to explain the tensions and contradictions between rationalisation, on the one hand and flexibility on the other.

Beyond this thematic discussion of standardisation through rationalisation, resistance, and deskilling, an alternative line of enquiry on standardisation in sociology is by drawing on ‘Systems Theory’. This is in particular Niklas Luhman’s brand of Systems Theory. In the latter, standardisation in organisations is analysed as a case of theory or presentation vs. implementation. In the next section, I draw on this alternative theorisation, as it is helpful for two reasons. It not only leads us back again to the general literature on standardisation, but also allows us to discuss the wider relevance of this study’s findings.

7.3 The wider issue of scripts, scripted Taylorism, and standardisation

In their review article “Towards a sociology of standards and standardisation” Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 71) cite Brunsson and Jacobssen (2000) that weak organisations have to rely on standardisation. Brunsson and Jacobssen further elaborate on this in their in depth study of standardisation A World of Standards. In the book, they discuss standardisation and standards as a soft form of regulation. More specifically, they suggest that for the standard to be ‘implemented’ or practiced, it has to be ‘translated’ first. This translation involves two aspects i) “from talk to action - what the standard says is translated into what the follower does” and ii) “from the general to the specific - the general requirement of the standard is translated into the follower’s own specific practice” (2000: 128). They give the example
of schools, which often have to follow the standard of self-evaluations, with parents and students being asked to fill out the self-evaluation forms. This is nonetheless not enough, for the schools will have to show to other parties that they act on this standardisation. They are likely to initiate new projects, “citing them as examples of evaluation to parties such as politicians, parents, and audit offices” (Brunsson and Jacobssen 2000: 3). In this case, they summarise “standardisation involves the translation from action to talk, from specific to the general, from own activity to categories that can be understood by others”. They note that this does not always have to be the case and that often “the follower of a standard only changes the presentation of the practice, but does not change the practice itself”. So, for example, to show compliance a school may just rename “grading”, planning days etc. that has always been carried out to “forms of evaluations”, which follows the modern standard but it does not change the practice.

Brunsson and Jacobssen (2000: 130) further cite extensive research on individuals and organisations (e.g. Brunsson 1995) that has indicated there may be significant “differences between presentation and practice, between formal structures and actual operations, and between what people say and what they do (...”). They explain it on the basis that actors possess dual systems that are detached from one other; consequently actors may claim that they abide to a standard although in practice not doing so. According to Brunsson and Jacobssen (2000), standardisers rarely appear to note this phenomenon, or at least rarely discuss and acknowledge it in public. Conversely, they conclude standardisers appear to suppose “that standards, which change presentation, always change practice” (2000: 130).

If we compare this theorisation with the call centre, it is notable that downstairs, too, has to show that they comply with the script. In this case, this is done through monitoring, call outcomes and ultimately through the various forms of statistics. These practices are then understandable to outsiders, such as the client and upstairs, and they demonstrate compliance. Nonetheless, there is clearly a mismatch between presentation and practice, which ranges from monitoring to the reading of the script verbatim.

Following my discussion, however, we have seen that there may be pragmatic reasons why there is a contradiction between presentation upstairs and
practice on the call centre floor. In the end, it is both in upstairs and downstairs’ interest that the concept of agents reading the standardised script on the phone is maintained. Without this presentation of textual fidelity and of strict monitoring control (including the accurate production of statistics and meeting of targets) to outsiders, upstairs would probably be less able to attract clients and there would be less work for downstairs (cf. chapter 5 and Smith 1996: 181-182). Viterna and Manyard (2002: 367) also suggest this, noting that with standardisation today being prized across the world, it is difficult for businesses and organisations to ignore it. However, they point out regarding the history of survey interview research, that it was only from the 1950s that standardisation of wording was introduced. Previously, interviewers were expected to “standardise the meaning of the question”, but given the freedom to “modify the wording of the question” (Viterna and Maynard 2002: 366). Moreover, they found in their study of call centres that there is a remarkable contrast between standardisation (standardisation in theory) and what agents are trained and permitted to do (standardisation in practice). So, from downstairs’ perspective the standardisation of the script is in terms of meaning and agents are allowed to change the wording.

It has further emerged that unrealistic targets, more than scripts, are the main stressor and potential source of resistance. This is in line with previous studies on workplace standardisation, especially research on factories, such as by Burawoy (1979). Ironically, what is praised in many management textbooks today as a motivational tool to improve productivity seems to have the opposite effect, in particular, in relation to the quality aspect. From the interviews I conducted with team leaders and managers, there was an awareness that unrealistic targets have the opposite effect from the one desired. Even upstairs seems to have understood this and tries to gear the call centre away from engagement campaigns and increasingly towards nurturing campaigns. Gavin, the team leader for nurturing campaigns, elaborated on this point during the interview:
Extract 7.3

“Nurturing is the future for many, many reasons. (...) in terms of a caller, they’re the skills now I think that are going to be prized above any other is the consultative approach. (...) we need guys that can sit on the phone for a quarter of an hour, 20 minutes. I would say it’s going to move away from that [high targets script based engagement campaigns]. It’s going to be far more knowledge based, if you know what I mean, for the agents. (...) we’re trying to swing it back in the other way [away from engagement campaigns] because we’ve just... we’ve done it to death and people. (...) In terms of standardisation and stuff of the scripts, perhaps that’s where the problem comes in. But that’s business. You saturate to a point where you’ve made all your money on that [and that’s why sales and upstairs move to nurturing now].”

(Gavin, senior team leader)

Nurturing campaigns do not have targets as such and there is more stress on quality than quantity. In addition, the contracts tend to be for longer, meaning that agents will not only be paid more, but also have longer guaranteed employment. It is worth pointing out, however, that in the literature on call centres researchers are more concerned about scripts and the effect these have on employees, including homogeneity and turning them into robots, whereas there is little mention of the issue of having unrealistic targets or the spaces and options offered by nurturing campaigns.

However, what has become evident from this thesis is that despite the script and monitoring, workers do not believe their talk is homogenised or that they lose their agency. Although some do mention their struggle with monotony and the fight with the repetition (chapter 3), they overcome this by re-personalising and varying their script. In this respect, the thesis’s findings are similar to what has been observed in anthropological and sociological ethnographic studies of factories. For instance, Timmermans and Epstein (2010: 83) claim that workers successfully resisted the Taylorisation of the assembly line and the Fordist production regime. In a similar vein, Edgell points out “there is widespread agreement that the dominance of Fordism, especially in the most advanced industrial capitalist societies, has come to end, with it the security of standard work (...)” (2006: 100). It has been replaced by neo-Fordism or post-Fordism or more specifically through new production lines, such as those of Toyota or Volvo, involving de-standardisation and team working. These have been shown to be more successful than Taylorisation, inciting less resistance from workers, less absenteeism, higher work satisfaction and productivity (cf. Edgell 2006: 85-
87; Watson 2003: 114). Although the question why supposedly failed Taylorist and Fordist practices are now being introduced into the public sector is an interesting one, this issue has been discussed in other fields, e.g. under the term ‘audit cultures’ or ‘audit society’ (Shore and Wright 2000; Strathern 2000; Power 1997; Moldaschal 2005) and is beyond the scope of this thesis. The other more relevant question concerns why ‘standardisation’ in the call centre is often framed in a discussion about the problematic side of scripts instead of targets? In other words, why is there such a concern over the use of scripts, standardisation and the negative sides of call centres?

In this study, I have suggested that there are three reasons i) history of standardisation in social theory, ii) the epistemological framework, and iii) the methods used. By taking the view that standardisation is not merely negative and that call centres are not inherently problematic, it has emerged that there are some positive aspects as to call centre and scripts, and that working there might also help some people. For instance, Cook-Gumperz (2001) suggest based on Leidner’s (1993) study that a scripted environment provides an ideal site to bring together a culturally diverse workforce” and that “the scripted communicative work environment makes a good learning context for interactional exchange” (2001: 125). My study supports these conclusions.

Although my thesis’s findings are only based on the data from one call centre, many of my informants have worked in several call centres, allowing their evaluations of call centres work to be generalised more widely. For instance, a few interviewees compared their call centre experience to the retail sector and reported, in contrast to the commonly held view in the literature (e.g. Cameron 2000a and Bain and Taylor 2000), that call centres are ‘much more relaxed’:

**Extract 7.4**

“When I first I got here [call centre] I just was amazed at like how much more relaxed it was. So obviously at Sainsbury’s it was always like high tempered. I used to be in charge of the customer service. So I just had people shouting at me the whole day.”

(_David, current agent_)

**Extract 7.5**

“I am coming from retail and retail is pretty bad you know. (…) This [call centre] is not so bad. It’s actually pretty relaxed.”

(_Stephen, new agent_)
Several of them also commented on the gulf between representations and stigmatisation of call centres in the media and reality (e.g. extract 3.13-3.15). The fact that in 2013 this discourse is still prevalent in the media, emerges from an article on the Observer website (24 March 2013) supposedly written by an anonymous call centre worker, which generated hundreds of comments by readers. Apart from the negativity and not a single positive comment on call centres, the article like almost all related subsequent comments is noteworthy for the need readers and bloggers seem to feel to provide an excuse for working or having worked in one.

“Working in a call centre, every minute of every day is an awkward conversation. You're in a room of strip lighting, structured like a classroom, full of people fuelled on instant coffee, trying to stay upbeat while constantly being told they're arseholes. You're trained to gesticulate while you talk (it's meant to make you sound more convincing) so everyone's walking round like politicians. It's a really strict environment, strict on punctuality, on socialising. (...) It's exhausting. Sometimes on the phone you feel heartbroken, sometimes you hate them. (...) The worst are the self-righteous men who feel they've won by putting you down. (...) There are lots of educated people there who can't get a job elsewhere. It made me realise you shouldn't judge someone by the job they do. Call centre workers aren't cartoon baddies - it's rare that they've chosen to do this job. (...) After a shift you crave a normal conversation. All day you've been having these prostitute conversations, where you're not saying the things you want to say (...). You crave realness.”

(cited from the Observer 24 March 2013 “Jobs confidential-15 People reveal the truth about their work”)

Furthermore, no distinction is made between different types of call centres, such as inbound vs. outbound, highly paid vs. poorly paid\textsuperscript{142} or industry types. This is even more remarkable considering that now a greater number of people in Britain work in ‘call centres’ than in manufacturing, construction, and mining combined (cf. Fernie 1998).

Perhaps surprisingly, in the comment below, a reader stresses that although she is working in a call centre she is not selling anything but doing academic research, thus showing she feels the need to provide a justification for working there.

\textsuperscript{142} Batt, Doellgast and Kwon (2004: 338) distinguish between two types of call centres: “The professional service model includes a set of employment practices based on high skills and training, employee discretion and collaborative problem-solving, and high relative pay. This approach to service management is typically found in business-to-business centers and information technology (IT) help desks or technical service centers. By contrast, centers that focus on simple transactions, such as telemarketing, reservations, or credit card handling, require relatively low skills, and jobs are likely to be highly routinized with low pay” (2004: 338).
Like this reader, there are several other reader comments that equally suggest that ‘call centres’ play an important role by providing employment to young people and graduates.

In fact, this important role of call centres in socialising different groups of people has also emerged from this thesis.

### 7.4 Further research

In summary, through my ethnographic description of the backstage activities in a call centre other questions and areas worth researching have emerged. Since the majority of previous call centre research has been focused on standardisation especially in outsourced locations, other issues and themes have not been investigated in detail.

The first aspect that has emerged from this research that requires closer study is the working conditions in call centres. Today, there is unprecedented global unemployment among youths and recent graduates. Europe seems to be especially hard-hit, the record currently being held by Spain, Italy, and Greece, exceeding 40%. The situation in the UK is slightly better but it still currently stands at a record 20.3% (Eurostat 2011). The concern over the situation in Europe urged European leaders including François Hollande and Angela Merkel to hold a summit (28.05.2013) to
combat the causes of this malaise. The majority of my informants were more than familiar with the problem. Several had immigrated from Spain and Italy to the UK to escape the precarious situation in their respective countries; others were recent UK graduates who had struggled to secure their first job, despite having an expensive master’s degree from a prestigious Russell Group university. Many of them have successfully overcome initial employment problems with their job in the call centre (see appendix D for table of agents’ job destinations after the call centre work) and this fact seems to be important and encouraging.

At present, call centres tend to attract highly qualified staff, most likely because of graduate unemployment. Although the literature on UK call centres does not attend to agents’ backgrounds in detail, Deborah Cameron acknowledges in a footnote in *Good to Talk* that most of her call centre informants were in fact graduates who “drifted into this industry because they fail to find occupation of a status commensurate with their educational qualifications” (2000a: 196). *The Guardian* further cites a study by the recruitment agency *Hayes* that every third call centre agent now has a degree (Snowdon 2010). Equally, the recent BBC class survey (Savage et al. 2013) considers call centre workers part of the “emergent service worker class”, who despite holding a degree and having a middle class background are “…‘making their way’ in a range of relatively insecure occupations” (Savage et al. 2013: 23).

Call centres have received a very bad press, partly because of the standardisation associated with them, the insecurity of the jobs involved and critical negative academic studies, like Fernie and Metcalf’s (1998). On the whole, the British media tends to describe such positions as poorly paid standardised dead-end jobs (e.g. cf. Burgess and Cornell 2006), depriving young people of the chance of living a good life on an adequate salary despite their qualifications. This characterisation stands in contrast to this study’s finding that call centres hold an important role in socialising a wide range of groups, ranging from highly skilled immigrants to former asylum seekers, recent graduates as well as students. They provide them with the work experience, skills, linguistic capital, and funds necessary for finding a better position in London’s labour market. That is, they seem to function as a refuge
or ‘port of call’ for predominately young people from different social and ethnic backgrounds, the majority of whom cannot find any other job despite their qualifications. Simultaneously, they appear to offer prospects to groups with a disadvantage in the labour market, such as former asylum seekers or immigrants, whose knowledge of English may not be good enough, yet, for the regular job market.

Thus, there is a need for in depth research of this phenomenon. For despite expected significant expansion of call centres in the UK (cf. ContactBabel 2012) and the media linking them to youth and graduate unemployment, there is almost no new academic research on the topic. Equally, there has been no research so far on ‘language agencies’, which assess agents’ linguistic capability and their suitability for potential call centre employment. Extending this case study to other such centres and language agencies drawing on participant observation as well as interviews with managers and current and former agents could lead to re-evaluation of call centres, their workers, and their skills. Thus, a better understanding of the issues young people face today in the labour market, including stigmatisation (e.g. extract 3.15), immigration and unemployment, might emerge.

The second point is that the notion of control over workers’ speech in the new economy needs closer scrutiny. We have seen that the call centre literature suggests that new linguistic demands are placed on workers that “entail new (or at least newly intensified) forms of control over their linguistic behaviour, and thus a diminution of their agency as language users” (Cameron 2000b: 323). This is often the case, because the agents’ speech is considered part of the company’s branding process. According to Cameron, the control over their speech through a script drafted by other people and being imposed ‘top-down’, reflects a “significant intensification, both of the desire of organisations to control employee’s language use and of their ability to do so” (2000b: 341). As noted before, scripting of talk and control over employees’ speech as a phenomenon is not limited to call centres – it is of wider significance beyond the interactive service sector. Even school teachers are now said to be provided with ‘best practices’ similar to scripts they should follow during their lessons (Leftstein and Snell in press).
My research has shown that agents have some freedom to change scripts from within the system. Following this research, questions that need to be considered include:

• What is the motivation for agents to spend so much time and effort on reworking and personalising the script? Why are they using conventional strategies, such as flirting and laughing, for a job they are supposedly not heavily invested in and only do for two weeks? Is providing employees with some (limited) freedom over their speech potentially in the interest of businesses as it motivates even casual employers to do their job well?

• How far-reaching are the changes agents make to the script once they are on the phone and the scripts have been translated into other languages? To what extent is it still possible to talk of managements’ control over employees’ speech or even ‘standardising’ it?

• Furthermore, considering the changes agents make to the script (‘making it their own’), the question arises whether one can still talk of their linguistic skills and their speech as being commodified or is it more about self-realisation?

Finally, this research raises questions about call centres as sites for language learning, co-operation among colleagues and learning from each other in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991). Furthermore, what does it mean to know and use ‘language’ in a multilingual workplace of the new economy?

In this thesis, I have observed:

• how agents use scripts to improve their knowledge of another language.

• call centres use ‘semi-fluent’ speakers, with the agents completing calls in languages that they are not fully fluent in and often, they only have low to intermediate language skills acquired during school education. The term ‘semi-fluent’ speaker is not used pejoratively or to delineate speakers as ‘deficient’. Instead, it describes a temporary state before agents have improved their language skills. It implies more work for them and signifies an opportunity to improve their linguistic skills and gain valuable linguistic capital on the job market.
• several agents also mention how they work in groups (e.g. extract 6.28, 6.39 and 6.40) or with the person sitting next to them, drawing on each other’s linguistic repertories, pooling all their resources together in improving the (foreign language) calling scripts and rehearsing for the real calls.

• scripts are constantly being edited in real time spontaneously, while agents are calling based on the feedback they are getting on the phone and what they are hearing from their fellow callers.

• semi-fluent agents, like all other agents, are trained on how to work with the script (e.g. be consultative with it) and hide their use of it on the phone, thus potentially passing as fluent speakers. Regarding this, they make use of whatever resources are available to them to complete the calls successfully. As a result, fluency is not measured solely in an agent’s individual innate ability to speak ‘a language’, but how well they are able to draw on these resources (most importantly scripts) to improvise convincingly on the phone.

Several connections to these observations can be found in the literature. In their paper outlining a sociolinguistics of superdiversity, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) propose moving beyond taking “(named) languages and (native) speakers as pre-theoretical givens” and call for attending instead to “internally differentiated speaker repertoires,” and to “linguistic resources deployed to various effects in various contexts of use” (Moore 2013: 60). Blommaert and Rampton (2011: 15) further point out that little is known about “language and literacy socialisation of individuals in superdiversity (...) both in – and outside formal education”. Responding to their call, Moore describes the context of language learning for an endangered language in a classroom on a reservation in the United States. There, he notes that once you move beyond the “concept of the unitary fluent native speakers” and instead focus on “how the role of the speaker can be decomposed (...) different kinds of speakers and semi-speakers (based on the differential degrees of fluency observed) (...) can be observed in the classroom”. According to him, the “collaboration and pooling” that is characteristic of “language learning in contemporary settings of globalisation and
superdiversity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011)” has only become apparent now with this pragmatic shift. He argues that processes linked to globalisation, “have redistributed the rights and obligations associated with language forms to new kinds of participants, and new frameworks of participation, to none of which the inherited model of the fully fluent native speaker is adequate” (Moore 2012: 72).

The fact that agents and team leaders are using scripts as linguistic resources and pool their resources to pass as ‘fluent speakers’ on the phone is in line with the superdiversity agenda. This calls for research on language and literacy socialisation of individuals outside formal education. It is notable that the call centre management and language agencies seem to have “redistributed the rights and obligations associated with language forms” (Moore 2012: 72), who is allowed to call in which language “to new kinds of participants” (ibid). The fact, that this appears to go against upstairs’ pledge to clients that only “fully fluent native speakers” are used raises questions about ideologies, intra-hierarchical tensions and contradictions similar to the ones discussed in relation to career of the script.

7.5 Summary of thesis findings

In this thesis, we have seen that standardisation in the call centre is predominantly reliant on the script.

This enables the management to have some control over the organisation with respect to the amount of languages spoken, the mobility of the workforce, and the unpredictable nature of cold-calling. It is the only form of regulation possible that allows some needed flexibility. Campaign managers, team leaders, and agents generally are supportive of scripting stating that it: i) allows employment in the call centre, ii) encourages language learning and iii) makes them more confident on the phone. It is because of this support that I have argued that neither team leaders nor agents perceive scripts to be deskilling. We have further seen that agents do not seem to resist scripts, but rather use them for ‘getting on’. In the career of the scripts, they become reconceptualised from being static to fluid
constructs where the wording can be changed. One of the key findings is that they have a different significance for different groups, also making the question of what standardisation means problematic, for they are not perceived to cause homogenisation but more as a helpful tool. By contrast, unrealistic targets are considered the real stressor that makes the lives of the agents difficult.
Appendix A – Glossary of terms

Asset: Another term for collateral. A selection of media, e.g. reports or e-books, used to support sales or services.

BANT (Budget, Authority, Need, Timeframe) campaigns: Agents need to ask several (profiling) questions regarding a potential project (including Budget, Authority, Need, Timeframe). These types of campaigns are more expensive and technical than the Engagement campaigns, but not as technical as Nurturing campaigns.

Call to Action: In marketing, the concept of prompting people to do something (e.g. click on something) through the use of texts and graphics (e.g. an email or script).

Call Outcomes: Predicated outcomes calls agents make and then are required to log. The logging of call outcomes is necessary to generate statistics, such as the dial report.

Collateral: A selection of media, e.g. reports or e-books, used to support sales or services.

Campaign Managers: They are the management of the call centre and in charge of managing campaigns.

Closing Statement: Agents are required by law to close a successful call by stating that the client will call back the person contacted over the phone.

Convergence Rates: A range of formulas used to calculate the success of the composition of a script based on the statistics and the actions (opened the email told about, opened the attachment etc.) of the people who were sent the email.

Dial Report: The statistics that detail how long individual agents spent on the phone and the call outcome they logged after the call.
**Dial Sheet:** A quick summary showing how many dials and leads all agents on all campaigns have made. The summary can be refreshed and updated every minute (online) and is accessible from upstairs and downstairs.

**Engagement Campaign:** The cheapest and least technical campaigns which have no profiling questions on the pitch, the main part of the script.

**Nurturing Campaign:** They are the most expensive and technical of all campaigns run in the call centre. There are usually many long and detailed questions on a script that may be five pages long.

**Lead:** When the contact agrees to all the questions on the script and his/her company matches the campaign criteria for the lead definition, they must also agree to speak to the client after our initial call.

**Master Script:** The final script approved by the client.

**Operations Manager:** The operations manager is the call centre’s big boss from upstairs.

**Pitch:** The most important part of the script, which is campaign specific and will have been approved by the client.

**Sales Brief:** A summary of the client’s needs and wishes, which gives a preliminary view of the: type of leads, lead criteria and the collaterals. The sales brief will then become the agents’ brief.

**Whitepaper:** A collateral report that is emailed to the contact.
### Greeting to Receptionist

Good morning/afternoon this is <TM name> calling on behalf of BIS.
May I speak with <IT contact’s name>?
Or someone within your IT dept if no contact supplied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Go to Q1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IS IT IN REGARDS TO?</td>
<td>Go to Objection Handling #1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>- continue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>- thank you anyway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good morning/afternoon this is <TM name> calling from on behalf of BIS. Can I confirm you are involved in the IT at <company name>?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>- continue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>- ask to be transferred to the correct contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction of the client**

**Pitch:**

The reason for my call today is that BIS has put together a complimentary report on AUP (Acceptable Use Policy). The AUP is the bedrock of any organisation’s management of employee use of corporate IT systems. This whitepaper is written by an external company that looks at the legal implications of making sure your AUP is solid. By reading this whitepaper you will learn about:

- Common mistakes and myths when creating an AUP
- What should be in an AUP
- Provide practical tips to maximise compliance and minimise risks.
- Explain how to create and enforce an AUP effectively

Other IT personal have received it and found it to be very useful. Can I send you the whitepaper it is completely complimentary?

(Objection handling: We do not send any spam or give your email out to third-parties.)

**Yes** - Great I just need to get a few details to be able to send it through to you

**No** - thank you for your time today (not interested)

### Details

- Company name
- Contact Email (no info@ etc)
- First Name
- Last Name
- Job Function
- Telephone Number
- Company Size 50-750 within UK
- Industry - no healthcare or education
- Address - pls confirm

### Closing

Thank you for your time today. You will shortly receive an email from a representative from BIS will be in contact shortly to see what you thought of the information we have provided.

Good Bye!
BANT Script

**Greeting to Reception:**
Good morning / afternoon this is <TM name> calling on behalf of YZA. May I speak with <It contact’s name> or person responsible for the security please?

**YES** - Go to Q1

**WHAT IS IT IN REGARDS TO?** - Go to Objection Handling #1

**Objection Handling #1:**
A complimentary Internet security report. It should only take a few minutes.

**YES** - continue

**NO** - thank you anyway.

Good morning/afternoon this is <TM name> calling on behalf of YZA

**Can I confirm you are involved with the IT security at <abc> company?**

**NO** - ask to be transferred to the correct contact

**YES** - continue

**Can I confirm**, are you familiar with YZA?

**Yes** - Go to pitch

**NO** – read below

YZA

**Pitch:**

The reason for my call today is that YZA has recently released its latest Resource Kit for IT decision makers.

The resource kit includes:

- An XXX Executive Brief - Discussing how midsize firms can
  - improve efficiency
  - reduce costs
  - achieve optimal coverage to support effective company operations by coordinating security and storage resources

- Put Data Growth in Its Place - a Solution Overview - which will take you through how to
  - Efficiently manage and secure information growth
  - Protect your business
  - Increase efficiently and productivity in your organization

You can also find more whitepapers:

- Your back up is not archive
- Building full IT Infrastructure Protection
- Getting the most of your data protection solution

Other IT decision makers have found the resource kit very useful, may I send it over to you?

**Objection handling:** You will only receive one email containing the resource kit and your email address will NOT be passed on to any other company than YZA.

- **Yes** - continue
- **screenout
- **No** - Thank you for your time today. Before I go is there anyone else in your team, that we should talk with, who might benefit from reading the report?

**Profiling Question:**

Q1. Do you have a security or backup related project coming up within the next 12 months?

- **Yes** – continue
- 0-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 6-12 months
- **No** – Screenout

Q2. May I ask at what stage is the project budget?

- **Planned**
- **Allocated**
- **Approved**
- In discussion - screenout
- **No budget** - screenout

Q3. What is your role in the decision making process within your organization?

- **Decision maker**
- **Influencer**
- Member of the project team
- **NONE** - screenout

**Go to details**

Details:

- Company name
- First Name
- Surname
- Address, City and postcode
- Phone
- Email Address - (no info@)
- Industry (exclude IT, Consultants and Resellers)
- Job function
- Job title (ITDMs)
- Company size
  - AAA - 260-2000
  - BBB - 100-1000

Thank you for your time today. You will shortly receive the whitepaper via email. A representative from YZA may follow up with you in the coming days to field any questions you may have around the information provided.

Finally... Could I take the first letter of the month you were born/in favourite colour -this is purely for security reasons.

Good Bye!
Nurturing Script

Nurturing Script- YCA Studio

Q2 Great Before I email you, I need to ask a couple of questions
Go to profiling questions

Resources Available

Package resource
- Eliminating Memory Errors and improving program stability (A1)
- Fixing hot spot guide(A2)
- Preparing serial apps for Multicore [A3]
- 30 day trial [A4]

XXX tools resources
- Quick tips on adding autovectorization [B1]
- Quick tips on interprocedural optimization [B2]
- Quick tips on Parallelization [B3]
- 30 day trial [B4]

If YCA Package doesn’t necessarily meet your current need, are you interested in features like auto-rectivization to introduce parallelism into your code [B1], adding interprocedural optimization using YCA’s high-performance compilers [B2], or incorporating auto-parallelization [B3]?

Q5 on 1

3) Not interested
- Focus on Hot Spots
OK. Well, perhaps you encounter more issues related to resolving hotspots. Hotspots can be a major challenge to creating reliable code. YCA Package simplifies and speeds the process by quickly finding and fixing hotspots, saving you time and headaches [A2]. To give you a chance to see how easily you can fix hotspots [A2] with YCA Package, may I send you one of our other evaluation guides?

30 day trial [B4]

If YCA Package doesn’t necessarily meet your current need, are you interested in features like auto-rectivization to introduce parallelism into your code [B1], adding interprocedural optimization using YCA’s high-performance compilers [B2], or incorporating auto-parallelization [B3]?

Pitch tools

X: May I ask you a technical objection?

If YCA Package doesn’t necessarily meet your current need, are you interested in features like auto-rectivization to introduce parallelism into your code [B1], adding interprocedural optimization using YCA’s high-performance compilers [B2], or incorporating auto-parallelization [B3]?

Q3 in which programming language and on which OS do you program?

C++ Windows
Fortran Linux
Visual Studio
Linux
C# MacOS
Java Unix
Other

Profiling questions Q1-Q5 on 1st call

That’s great. I will ask an YCA Software Specialist at one of YCA “Elite” Resellers to contact you immediately.

[Limit to one question at a time.]

Profit from YCA’s high-performance compiler and parallelizing code. YCA simplifies and speeds the process by quickly finding and fixing hotspots, saving time and headaches. To give you a chance to see how easily you can fix hotspots with YCA Package, may I send you one of our other evaluation guides?

Q1 In which programming language and on which OS do you program?

C++ Windows
Fortran Linux
Visual Studio
Linux
C# MacOS
Java Unix
Other

Profiling questions Q1-Q5 on 1st call

That’s great. I will ask an YCA Software Specialist at one of YCA “Elite” Resellers to contact you immediately.

Cover the costs of parallelization and improve application performance. To give you a chance to see how easily you can fix hotspots with YCA Package, may I send you one of our other evaluation guides?

Q1 In which programming language and on which OS do you program?

C++ Windows
Fortran Linux
Visual Studio
Linux
C# MacOS
Java Unix
Other

Profiling questions Q1-Q5 on 1st call

That’s great. I will ask an YCA Software Specialist at one of YCA “Elite” Resellers to contact you immediately.

Cover the costs of parallelization and improve application performance. To give you a chance to see how easily you can fix hotspots with YCA Package, may I send you one of our other evaluation guides?

Q1 In which programming language and on which OS do you program?

C++ Windows
Fortran Linux
Visual Studio
Linux
C# MacOS
Java Unix
Other

Profiling questions Q1-Q5 on 1st call

That’s great. I will ask an YCA Software Specialist at one of YCA “Elite” Resellers to contact you immediately.
Follow on pitch for [A2]

So have you had a chance to use the evaluation guide 'Locate a Hotspot and optimize it'

That's great. Now you know first-hand how quickly and easily YCA Package can optimize your serial applications. And locating and fixing hotspots [A2] is just the beginning—YCA Package is designed to support your entire development cycle. Are you ready to boost your application reliability and performance with this integrated product suite?

Follow on pitch for [A3]

That's great. Now you know first-hand how quickly and easily YCA Package can optimize your applications.

Nurturing Script: YCA Studio

[1] Do you face any challenges in the any of the following areas in your development?

- Memory leak detection
- Pinpoint hotspots
- Prepare your serial apps for multicore
- Concurrency and Locks & Waits Analysis
- Race conditions
- Performance
- Use auto-vectorization or auto-parallelization to add parallelism
- Use Interprocedural optimization
- Detect performance bottlenecks
- Other please specify

[2] What stage in your evaluation of developing applications for multicore processors are you at?

- Already developing parallel applications for multicore processors
- No plans/ No sure unknown
- Conducting research and gathering information
- Looking and evaluating vendors
- Wants more technical information
- Sent Package Evaluation and guides
- Sent XXX evaluation and/or guides
- Wants to know more about pricing and get a quotation

[3] Do you have any plans to purchase development tools such as debuggers, compilers, thread libraries, analysis and optimisation tools, etc in the next

- Within 1 month
- 0-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-12 Months
- 12-18 months
- No plans

[4] Do you have any plans to purchase development tools such as debuggers, compilers, thread libraries, analysis and optimisation tools, etc in the next

- Within 1 month
- 0-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-12 Months
- 12-18 months
- No plans

[5] What code analysis tools are you using?

- Performance
- Reliability
- Parallelism
- Functionality

[6] As a developer, what is most important to you?

- Developer
- Architect
- Developer QA
- Workflow designer

[7] Which job functions are on your team?

- QA
- Script
- Workflow designer
- Developer QA
- Architect
- Technical services

[8] Which job functions are on your team?

- QA
- Script
- Workflow designer
- Developer QA
- Architect
- Technical services

[9] Do you face any challenges in any of the following areas in your development?

- Debugging
- Optimization
- Testing and fixing hotspots
-... and more

[10] How do you prefer to get information on development?

- Print mag
- Digital mag
- Website
- Webcasts
- Podcasts
- Virtual trade show
- Email promos

Nurturing Script: YCA Studio

[1] Do you face any challenges in the any of the following areas in your development?

- Memory leak detection [Parallel] A1
- Pinpoint hotspots [A2]
- Prepare your serial apps for multicore [A3]
- Concurrency and Locks & Waits Analysis [A4]
- Race conditions [A5]
- Performance [A6]
- Use auto-vectorization or auto-parallelization to add parallelism [A7]
- Use Interprocedural optimization [A8]
- Detect performance bottlenecks [A9]
- Other please specify [A10]

[2] What stage in your evaluation of developing applications for multicore processors are you at?

- Already developing parallel applications for multicore processors [A11]
- No plans/ No sure unknown [A12]
- Conducting research and gathering information [A13]
- Looking and evaluating vendors [A14]
- Wants more technical information [A15]
- Sent Package Evaluation and guides [A16]
- Sent XXX evaluation and/or guides [A17]
- Wants to know more about pricing and get a quotation [A18]

[3] Do you have any plans to purchase development tools such as debuggers, compilers, thread libraries, analysis and optimisation tools, etc in the next

- Within 1 month [A19]
- 0-3 months [A20]
- 3-6 months [A21]
- 6-12 Months [A22]
- 12-18 months [A23]
- No plans [A24]

[4] Do you have any plans to purchase development tools such as debuggers, compilers, thread libraries, analysis and optimisation tools, etc in the next

- Within 1 month [A25]
- 0-3 months [A26]
- 3-6 months [A27]
- 6-12 Months [A28]
- 12-18 months [A29]
- No plans [A30]

[5] What code analysis tools are you using?

- Performance [A31]
- Reliability [A32]
- Parallelism [A33]
- Functionality [A34]

[6] As a developer, what is most important to you?

- Developer [A35]
- Architect [A36]
- Developer QA [A37]
- Workflow designer [A38]

[7] Which job functions are on your team?

- QA [A39]
- Script [A40]
- Workflow designer [A41]
- Developer QA [A42]
- Architect [A43]
- Technical services [A44]

[8] Which job functions are on your team?

- QA [A45]
- Script [A46]
- Workflow designer [A47]
- Developer QA [A48]
- Architect [A49]
- Technical services [A50]

[9] Do you face any challenges in any of the following areas in your development?

- Debugging [A51]
- Optimization [A52]
- Testing and fixing hotspots [A53]
-... and more [A54]

[10] How do you prefer to get information on development?

- Print mag [A55]
- Digital mag [A56]
- Website [A57]
- Webcasts [A58]
- Podcasts [A59]
- Virtual trade show [A60]
- Email promos [A61]
So, have you had a chance to try out the quick tips for incorporating interprocedural optimization [B3]? That's great. Now you know first-hand how quickly YCA high-performance computing products can help optimize your parallel applications. Adding auto-vectorization [B1], YCA compilers can speed that process. Or maybe you'd like to try “Best Scenario” for auto-parallelization and auto-vectorization [B3].

So, have you had a chance to try out the quick tips for incorporating interprocedural optimization [B2] for auto-parallelization [B1]? That's great. Now you know first-hand how quickly YCA high-performance computing products can help optimize your parallel applications. And adding interprocedural optimization [B2] for auto-parallelization [B1] is just the beginning—YCA’s high-performance computing products are designed to work together to support your entire development cycle. Are you ready to boost your application reliability and performance by integrating these powerful tools?

Hasn’t downloaded YCA Compiler Suite Pro – OK, let me email you a link and an exclusive serial number you can use to download a free 30-day license file of YCA Compiler Suite Pro. I’ll also include the tips for adding auto-vectorization [B1]. So you can experience first-hand how quickly and easily you can optimize your applications. I will then follow up with you in about 20 days to see what you think. Until then, thank you for your time. Good bye!

Downloaded but hasn’t tried tips – To ensure you have enough time to fully explore the benefits of auto-vectorization [B1], let me email you a link and an exclusive serial number you can use to download a free 30-day license file of YCA Compiler Suite Pro. Then you can experience first-hand how quickly and easily you can optimize your applications. I will then follow up with you in about 20 days to see what you think. Until then, thank you for your time. Good bye!

Not interested – Well, could I send you a different set of tips – maybe that focus on adding interprocedural optimization [B2]? I can email you a link and an exclusive serial number you can use to download a free 30-day license file of YCA Compiler Suite Pro so you can try out the tips. I will then follow up with you in about 20 days to see what you think. Until then, thank you for your time. Good bye!

So, have you had a chance to try out the evaluation guide “Optimize an Existing Program by Adding Parallelism” [A3]? And adding parallelism to existing programs [A3] is just the beginning—YCA Package is designed to support your entire development cycle. Are you ready to boost your application reliability and performance with this integrated product suite?

Nurturing Script- YCA Studio

Escalation procedure

- Where did you get my telephone number from?
  - I am calling on behalf of YCA Software Products from <location and organization>. We are following up with those people who have expressed an interest in YCA Package after downloading the evaluation version of the software suite, an eBook, or shared their information via some other interaction with YCA.
  - I would like to be removed from your list.
    - We can instantly remove you from our database now and make sure that you are never contacted by phone again. Removing you will mean you’ll never receive invitations to events or exclusive offers and discounts on new IT products. Shall I remove you now?
  - Escalation point – I would like to speak with your manager / the person in charge?
    - Certainly. <Campaign or call centre manager> is responsible <organization>. She is currently away from her desk, but I can alert her to call you back. If that is OK, can I please confirm your telephone number?
  - I want to speak to someone now.
    - Certainly. Can you please hold one moment so that I can find someone that can assist you now? (Campaign or call centre manager to field these calls.)
    - (Tag name as NOT FIT FOR CALLING.)

Nurturing Script- YCA Studio
Appendix C – Transcription conventions

[ ] inaudible word

(...)

Text omitted

[ text ] Words that are necessary for the text to make sense or any other additions

(word)

Word that I believe the interviewee said based on the transcription

((laugh))

Description of what the informant did

(sic)

Grammatical error produced by the interviewees which I did not correct

Appendix D – Agents’ and team leaders’ profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent’s Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Time worked at call centre</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Language(s) spoken</th>
<th>Types of campaign caller</th>
<th>Destination after call centre job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aafiya</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>MSc Science (Russell Group)</td>
<td>English, Italian, Urdu, Punjabi</td>
<td>Engagemenent BANT</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ada</td>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Nigerian, American (born in Egypt)</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BSc and MSc in Human Resource Management HR Consultant</td>
<td>English, Yoruba</td>
<td>Engagemenent BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akash</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Marketing</td>
<td>English, Hindi</td>
<td>Engagemenent BANT</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>British Portuguese</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Marketing and Economics</td>
<td>Portugues, English</td>
<td>Engagemenent BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in Journalism Experienced Newspaper Journalist</td>
<td>English, Hindi</td>
<td>Engagemenent BANT</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreas</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA in Economics (Oxbridge) MSc in Finance</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engagemenent BANT</td>
<td>Head of Business Development for Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent’s Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Time worked at call centre</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Language(s) spoken</td>
<td>Types of campaign caller</td>
<td>Destination after call centre job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Substitute Team leader</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Fully-qualified medical doctor; MBA from a top university</td>
<td>English, Urdu, Punjabi</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Doctor at the NHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Film and Media</td>
<td>Spanish, English, Italian, Galician</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Job in the Film Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc Economics, MSc IT (Russell Group)</td>
<td>Spanish, English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Tourism</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>MSc Marketing, Own business</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Started her own business again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Former team leader</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in Law</td>
<td>Italian, Spanish, English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>High Managerial position in sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA History</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Back in Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>British, Portuguese</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Media and Computing</td>
<td>Portuguese, English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Drama and Acting Actor He is involved in productions on TV and in the theatre</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT Nurturing</td>
<td>Managerial position at a major IT blue chip company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesca</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>English, Italian, Spanish</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BSc Engineering MBA Finance (Ivy League) Musician</td>
<td>French, English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Job in the Music Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BSc in Engineering Own business in property development</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engaged BANT</td>
<td>Runs his own business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent's Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Time worked at call centre</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Language/s spoken</td>
<td>Types of campaign caller</td>
<td>Destination after call centre job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Opera Singer</td>
<td>German English</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Journalist/</td>
<td>German English</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>Editor-in-chief in a publishing house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Spanish English</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Qualified sports teacher and experience in banking</td>
<td>English German</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadeem</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>British Asian (Mauritius)</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA in Media and Marketing</td>
<td>Creole English French Hindi</td>
<td>Engageme nt</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>MSc in Economics (Russell Group)</td>
<td>English German</td>
<td>Engageme nt</td>
<td>Teaches at Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Swedish/Finnish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA, MA (Russell Group) applying for a PhD in Social Policy at Oxbridge</td>
<td>Finnish Norwegian Swedish Danish English</td>
<td>Engageme nt</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linnea</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Media, Marketing and Languages</td>
<td>German Swedish French</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in German qualified teacher</td>
<td>Polish German English</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massimo</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>BA Economics MSc Management (Russell Group)</td>
<td>Italian Spanish</td>
<td>Engageme nt</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>MSc Economics (Russell Group)</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engageme nt</td>
<td>Job in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Argentinean/Spanish</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in Communication and Journalism</td>
<td>Spanish English</td>
<td>Engageme nt BANT</td>
<td>Online Editor and Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent’s Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Time worked at call centre</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Language(s) spoken</td>
<td>Types of campaign caller</td>
<td>Destination after call centre job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naida</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>Bosnian British</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA English Language MA TESOL (Russell Group)</td>
<td>Serbo-Croat English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>EFL/ESOL Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc in Economics</td>
<td>Polish English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piia</td>
<td>Former Team leader</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BSc and MSc in Media and IT Media and IT consultant</td>
<td>Finnish Swedish Norwegian Danish German</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabeya</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>British Asian (Bangladesh)</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Studying BSc in Sociology and Criminology</td>
<td>English Sylethi</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raul</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Spanish English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Works as a Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>MSc in Economics</td>
<td>English Italian Spanish Napolitan cano</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>New agent</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>British Caribbean</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>GSCE</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siiri</td>
<td>Substitute team leader</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Finnish, American (born in Germany)</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA and MA in Film Studies and Production Film Director and Producer She directs and produces movies. Sometimes she takes time off to go to Finland to shoot films</td>
<td>Finnish English Norwegian Swedish Danish German</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Ivorian Coast French</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Languages</td>
<td>French English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Studying BA in Communications and Media</td>
<td>English Punjabi Urdu</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Marketing / PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suganthi</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BA in English Languages</td>
<td>Hindi English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suhela</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>British Asian (Bangladesh)</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Studying BSc in Sociology</td>
<td>English Sylethi</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svetlana</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>German Russian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Degree in Law</td>
<td>German Russian English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Job in Law Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talat</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>BSc and MSc in Social Policy and International Relations</td>
<td>English Punjabi Urdu</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Phd Student (Russell Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiara</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>German Portuguese</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Job at Law Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent’s Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Time worked at call centre</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Language spoken</td>
<td>Types of campaign caller</td>
<td>Destination after call centre job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Lawyer including PhD</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Job at Law Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Ex-Agent</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Journalism MSc in Social Anthropology (Russell Group) PhD (Russell Group)</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Mandarin Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Studying BA in Art History (Russell Group)</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>N/I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Languages MSc Languages (Russell Group)</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yannick</td>
<td>Current Agent</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Belgian Zaire</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>BSc in Economics, MSc in Economics and Marketing</td>
<td>French, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT Nurturing</td>
<td>Job in Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmin</td>
<td>New Agent</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>BA in Languages</td>
<td>French, Arabic, English</td>
<td>Engagement BANT</td>
<td>Job in Marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E – Agents’ background mapped

Appendix F – Interview questions

1) Interview questions for current agents:

(a) Background
   (1) What encouraged you to work in a call centre?
   (2) How long have you worked here?
   (3) How does it compare to your previous/other working experiences?

(b) Standardisation and feedback on call centre work and management
   (4) What do you think about call centre work?
   (5) What do you think about monitoring, using statistics, targets and scripts?
   (6) What do you think of using scripts?
   (7) How do you use your scripts during calls?
   (8) In what ways if any do you add personal changes or animate the script (e.g. change of wording, voice, accent etc.?)
   (9) How does or does not the script/brief help you with your work?
   (10) How does the monitoring (quantitative and qualitative) help you with your work?
(10) How do you think call centre work could be improved?
(11) In what ways do you think scripts could be improved?
(12) How do you feel does the use of scripts affect the people you are calling?

(c) Skills and beliefs
(13) What skills do you think a good and successful agents need for this job?
(14) What does call centre level involve on a personal and emotional level?
(15) What emotional and psychological skills do you think this call centre work requires?
(16) In what ways do you think that these skills you have acquired in the call centre can help you in other jobs?
(17) In what ways do you think could the atmosphere of the call centre and management be improved?
(18) How do you perceive the training call centre agents require - do you deem it sufficient?
(19) How do you feel that agents who have certain previous working experiences benefit?
(20) What does make in your view make a successful agent?

(d) Future outlook
(21) Do you any plan in the future to work in call centres?
(22) How does the fact that you work in call centres will affect your future career choice? If it does
(23) How do you feel about the call centre management

(2) Interview questions for new agents:
(a) Background
(1) What encouraged you to work in a call centre?
(2) How long have you worked here?
(3) What is your first impression?
(4) How does it compare to your previous/other working experiences?

(b) Standardisation and feedback on call centre work and management
(5) What do you think about call centre work?
(6) What do you think of monitoring, using statistics, targets and scripts?
(7) What do you think of using scripts?
(8) How do you use your scripts during calls?
(9) In what ways if any do you add personal changes or animate the script (e.g. change of wording, voice, accent etc.?)
(10) How does or does not the script/brief help you with your work?
(11) How does the monitoring (quantitative and qualitative) help you with your work?
(10) How do you think call centre work could be improved?
(12) In what ways do you think scripts could be improved?
(13) How do you feel does the use of scripts affect the people you are calling?
(c) Skills and beliefs about call centre work
(14) What skills do you think a good and successful agents need for this job?
(15) What does call centre level involve on a personal and emotional level?
(16) What emotional and psychological skills do you think this call centre work requires?
(17) In what ways do you think that these skills you have acquired in the call centre can help you in other jobs?
(18) In what ways do you think could the atmosphere of the call centre and management be improved?
(19) How do you perceive the training call centre agents require -do you deem it sufficient?
(20) How do you feel that agents who have certain previous working experiences benefit?
(21) What does make in your view make a successful agent?

(d) Future outlook
(22) Do you any plan in the future to work in call centres?
(23) How does the fact that you work in call centres might affect your future career choice? if it does..

3) Interview questions for former agents:
a) Background
(1) What encouraged you to work in a call centre?
(2) How long did you work there?
(3) Why did you leave the job?
(4) How did it compare with your previous and/or current working experiences?

(b) Standardisation and feedback on call centre work and management
(5) What do you think about call centre work?
(6) What do you think of monitoring, using statistics, targets and scripts?
(7) What do you think of using scripts?
(8) How did you use your scripts during calls?
(9) In what ways if any did you add personal changes or animate the script (e.g. change of wording, voice, accent etc.?)
(10) How did or does not the script/brief help you with your work?
(11) How did the monitoring (quantitative and qualitative) help you with your work?
(10) How do you think call centre work could be improved in general?
(12) In what ways do you think scripts could have been improved?
(13) How did you feel does the use of scripts affect the people you were calling?

(c) Skills and beliefs about call centre work
(14) What skills do you think a good and successful agents needs for this job?
(15) What does call centre level involve on a personal and emotional level?
(16) What emotional and psychological skills do you think this call centre work requires?
(17) In what ways do you think that these skills you have acquired in the call centre can help you in other jobs or have helped you with other jobs?
(18) In what ways do you think could the atmosphere of the call centre and management be improved?
(19) How do you perceive the training call centre agents require - do you deem it sufficient?
(20) How did you feel that agents who have certain previous working experiences benefit?
(21) What does make in your view make a successful agent?

(d) Future outlook
(22) Do you any plan in the future to work again in call centres?
(23) Did the fact that you worked in call centres affect your future career choice?

Standardisation and management of call centres
(1) What do you think of monitoring, using statistics, targets and scripts?
(2) Why do you use scripts?
(3) Why and how do you use monitoring?
(4) What do you think of using scripts?
(5) How does the monitoring (quantitative and qualitative) help you with your work?
(6) What is the process of compiling scripts and briefs?
(7) What is the process of approving scripts?
(8) How do you use monitoring?
(9) What is important to you about the running of call centres?
(10) What is your management policy?

(c) Skills and beliefs about call centre work
(11) What skills do you think a good and successful agents needs for this job?
(12) What does call centre level involve on a personal and emotional level?
(13) What emotional and psychological skills do you think this call centre work requires?
(14) In what ways do you think that these skills you have acquired in the call centre can help you in other jobs?
(15) In what ways do you think could the atmosphere of the call centre and management be improved?
(16) How do you perceive the training call centre agents require - do you deem it sufficient?
(17) How do you feel that agents who have certain previous working experiences benefit?
(18) What does make in your view make a successful agent?
(19) Do you think it can be learned to become a good call centre agent?
(20) Does one’s nativeness, gender or age affect one’s success as a call centre agent?

(d) Future outlook
(21) Do you any plan in the future to work in call centres?
(22) How (if) does the fact that you work in call centres might affect your future career choice?
5) Interview questions for trainers:

(a) Background
(1) What encouraged you to work in a call centre?
(2) How long have you worked here?
(3) What is your overall impression of call centre work and this call centre in particular?
(4) How does it compare to your previous other working experiences?

(b) Feedback on call centre work and management
(5) What do you think about call centre work?

(c) Standardisation and management of call centres
(23) What do you think of monitoring, using statistics, targets and scripts?
(24) Why and how do you use monitoring?
(25) What do you think of using scripts?
(26) How is the script produced?
(27) How do you draw on the script during training/or a briefing?
(28) What are your steps in briefing someone?
(29) How do you monitor agents current and new?
(30) What is important to you about the running of call centres?

(d) Skills and beliefs about call centre work
(6) What skills do you think a good and successful agents need for this job?
(7) What does call centre level involve on a personal and emotional level?
(8) What emotional and psychological skills do you think this call centre work requires?
(9) In what ways do you think could the atmosphere of the call centre and management be improved?
(10) How do you train agents?
(11) What is the most important aspect to you about training for agents?
(12) How do you feel that agents who have certain previous working experiences benefit?
(13) What does make in your view make a successful agent?

(e) Future outlook
(14) Do you any plan in the future to work in call centres?
(15) How does the fact that you work in call centres might affect your future career choice?
Bibliography


