Working Papers in

Urban Language & Literacies

_____

Paper **215**

Call center agents
and the experience of stigma

Johanna Woydack
(*Vienna University of Economics & Business*)

2017

Call center agents and the experience of stigma

Johanna Woydack

(Vienna University of Economics and Business)

Abstract

Call centers have been widely critiqued in academia, and by extension the media, for their widespread standardization. This paper argues that while this critique of working conditions has been well-intended, it has led to unwanted, widespread stigmatization of not just call center work but also of call center agents. While much has been published on call centers, the stigma this kind of work entails and the effect this has on agents on and off the phone has been overlooked so far. This paper applies Goffman's notion of stigma to data collected through long-term ethnography and interviews with over seventy call center agents in a London call center. It shows how agents experience stigma, manage, and resist it. The analysis reveals that agents attempt to hide where they work by adopting different accents and avoiding specific lexis associated with call center language. The paper concludes by suggesting potential avenues for reducing the stigma of working in a call center, e.g. shifting the dominant discussion in academia beyond debates surrounding standardization.

1. Introduction

Many people take or receive phone calls as part of a typical work routine. Most likely they will not be subjected to abuse and rudeness over the phone because they operate a telephone. This is, nevertheless, the common reality of individuals working in call centers. Call centers are understood here to be a workplace where employees, whom I shall refer to as "agents," spend the majority of their time operating a telephone, either to take incoming calls or making outbound calls. For instance, Cameron (2000a, p. 112) writes the following about agents in call centers: "informants stressed it was commonplace to encounter rudeness or even abuse."

To illustrate call center employees' poor reputation, I would like to add a personal anecdote here. I recently attended a friend's wedding and mentioned to five people seated with me, all barristers in their thirties, that I do research on call centers. They were surprised. After an awkward pause, they admitted with some embarrassment that they had all worked at one point in a call center. However, they stressed they would never mention this in their résumé as they are ashamed of it and since in their words "working in a call center is still so stigmatized."

Thus, it can be said that while much - mostly critical - has been written about call centers as the so called "communication factories" of the 21th century, surprisingly little has been published on the stigmatization agents face for working in "the low-skilled workplace" (Holtgrewe, Kerst, & Shire, 2002) of the new economy. Although the fact that agents get stigmatized is often mentioned in passing in the literature, there has not been a thorough analysis of how agents cope with this.

This paper applies Goffman's ideas on stigma to ethnographic research, involving seventy interviews with call center agents and participant observation conducted for four years in an onshore multilingual call center in London. It is argued that Goffman's work can provide important insights into stigmatization of agents on and off the phone and how they cope with it. By applying Goffman's work to the call center context, this paper follows previous studies that have shown the continued relevance of Goffman's notion of stigma such as Flowerdew (2008) on the stigma writers of English as an additional language face or Kanuha (1999) on being LGBT. Moreover, this article interrogates some of the critical call center literature, arguing that despite its good intentions, the critical literature has in fact inadvertently contributed to the stigma call center agents suffer on and off the job because of the claims it makes about call centers. These critical claims were subsequently popularized by the media, as illustrated by common headlines comparing call centers to factories, such as *BBC News* (2011) "Are call centers the factories of the 21th century?". As I have argued elsewhere (Woydack, 2014; Woydack & Rampton, 2016), these academic discussions about call centers are and were rooted in a long-standing criticism in social theory about widespread implementation of standardization and monitoring. Although this critical approach has led to many important insights for the field, it may

have inadvertently portrayed call centers in an extreme light and may differ from the actual experiences of agents working in call centers.

The first part of the paper introduces Goffman's [1963] (1986) ideas on stigma and managing stigma. The second section explores what has been written previously about call centers and their stigma in the call center literature. Applying Goffman's concepts to the ethnographic data collected in the call center, the main body of the paper highlights the continued relevance of his conceptualization of stigma. This is done by presenting agent experiences along three themes. These are: a description of instances surrounding their stigma, how they manage the stigma, and resisting the stigma. At each step, the analysis refers back to how their actions compare with Goffman's stigma typology and theory of stigma management[1]. The analysis shows that agents attempt to hide where they work by camouflaging their stigmatized profession to pass off as "normal" by adopting different accents and avoiding specific lexis associated with call center language. The paper ends by suggesting potential avenues for reducing call center's stigma such as by shifting the discussion away from debates surrounding standardization in academia and the media. As the first stage, I would like to introduce Goffman's work on stigma and stigma management.

2. Understanding stigma and stigma management

In his seminal work on "stigma," Goffman [1963] (1986, p. 3) offers a definition of stigma as "an attribute that is significantly discrediting." The origin of the term "stigma" comes "from the Greek tradition to designate tattoo marks or other physical blemishes on the body" (Kanuha, 1999, p. 29). An analogy in today's world, Kanuha (1999, p. 29) writes, would be expressions such as "marked" or "branded" to describe various aspects that make a stigma an aspect that lowers the value of a person who possesses it in the eyes of society (Goffman, 1986, p. 3). In Goffman's conceptualization, stigma thus describes an attribute that an individual possesses which has "more or less abiding characteristics, as opposed to moods, feelings or intents" (Goffman, 1986, p. 43).

Goffman developed a typology for his theorizing of stigma that ranged from *physical deformities* such as hearing impairments and sight or abominations of the body, to *blemishes of individuals' characters* that are "perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty these being inferred from, a known record of, for example mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment [...]" (1986, p. 4). Lastly, the other type of stigma he names is *tribal stigma*, which are affiliations of nationality, race, or religion (also cf. Kanuha, 1999, p. 30). In line with this typology stigmas tend to be either "ascribed" or "achieved." Goffman names as an example of an "ascribed stigma" tribal differences such as "ethnicity" that one cannot change. Conversely, "unemployment" - and by this logic, low class status employment - are "achieved" stigmas. These are "blemishes of individual character" and it is believed that these can be changed. For instance, working in a low status call center job despite having a graduate or post-graduate degree might be considered a blemish of individual character and by extension seen as a sign of that person's laziness, lack of ambition, and inability to succeed in the labor market (also see Flowerdew, 2008). Call centers often employ non-L1 speakers who may also receive abuse for their non-standard language and accent. The latter could be considered both as a blemish of character, since they are not educated enough to speak like an L1 speaker, or as a tribal stigma, in the sense that it reflects upon the circumstances of their upbringing.

It is also important to point out that Goffman's analysis of stigma is set in a context of social relationships (1986, p. 3). He notes that it is only in the context of social relations that it emerges how we relate to other individuals and we realize that our own personal identity, as Goffman calls it, may differ from our "social identity" (1986, p. 7). Simultaneously, a particular attribute might be considered "normal" in one context, but stigmatized in another. For instance, many jobs that are similar to call center work and involve lots of working on the phone and cold calling, such as being a broker, are not stigmatized at all, while call center work is. Likewise, it has been suggested that working in call centers is prestigious in India (e.g. Mirchandani, 2012), while it is stigmatized in the

---

[1] In line with Goffman, stigma management and resistance to stigma are considered two separate, though related, themes. In my understanding, stigma management implies that agents try to minimize the negative effect of stigmatization. Unlike with resistance, management means they do not try to change the status quo, but accept it.

West. Once Indian call center agents start dealing with clients in the West, they will realize how stigmatized their work is in Western societies and how the stigma is projected onto them. In Goffman's writing, stigma is thus something that is mapped onto people, who because of their difference (e.g. low-status because of a certain type of job) are viewed negatively by society. Goffman further notes that "the stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity" as mainstream society (1986, p. 7). Accordingly,

> "his deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a 'normal person,' a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore, who deserves a fair chance and a fair break. Yet he may perceive, usually quite correctly, that whatever others profess, they do not really 'accept' him and are not ready to make contact with him on 'equal grounds'" (1986, p. 7).

Having discussed the notion of stigma, let us look at the management of stigma, which is also extensively discussed by Goffman and subsequent theorists. In fact, Goffman notes that "stigma management is a general feature of society" (1986, p. 130). Kanuha (1999, p. 28) notes that "passing" has become widely considered one of the key stigma management strategies. In this case, the stigmatized individual may try to avoid feelings of embarrassment by attempting to "pass" as a normal person as they are acutely aware of how society discredits or devalues them due to their differentness. They have been various definitions of "passing." Goffman defines passing as "the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self" (1986, p. 42). Hitch (1983, p. 124) understands passing as a "process whereby the individual attempts to conceal her origins or else play them down" while Rohy (1996, p. 219) notes that the act of passing is "a performance in which one presents himself as what one is not (cf. Kanuha, 1999, p. 28)." Perhaps among the most frequently used passing strategies according to the literature are the following two. *Dissociation or camouflaging* (Spradlin, 1998) is where one acts as he or she does not belong to the stigmatized group and *omission*, which refers to the process of leaving out key information. As Kanuha (1999, p. 34) notes the use of each of these respective passing strategies will depend on the stigmatized individual's skill to carry off "the act" of passing. Let us see next, according to the call center literature, what agents face in terms of their work being stigmatized and low-status.

3. The literature on the low status and stigma of call centers

Most of the literature in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and management studies draws on data from onshore call centers in the UK (e.g. Bain & Taylor, 2000; Cameron, 2000a, 2000b, 2008) or from India (e.g. (Mirchandani, 2004, 2012; Poster, 2007), which serves as the offshore destination par excellence in the minds of most people. While several references are made to call centers being a low status job, rarely do they examine the implications of low-status work in terms of social stigma. In what follows, I am going to explain firstly why the literature considers call center work a low-status job and secondly considers agents to be low educated. Lastly, I will explore what has been written so far about stigma and call centers in the existing call center literature.

Call center work as a low-status job

When it comes to call center work itself, the first thing that comes to mind are metaphors. I have already mentioned that Cameron (2000a, p. 93) refers to call centers as the "communication factories." She also likens them to the production line: "At first sight, too, the work of a call center looks and feels more like offices than factories […]. But what call centers do is apply to those tasks the logic of the production line." (2000a, p. 93). Other factory metaphors or factory comparisons have included "sweatshops" (Holman & Fernie, 2000, p. 3), "assembly line" (Mankekar & Gupta, 2014, p. 24), "deskilled Tayloristic factory conditions" (Belt, Richardson, & Webster, 2002, p. 22) and "electronic panopticons" (Bain & Taylor, 2000, p. 3).

In line with this, the literature argues that Neo Taylorist management methods are applied to call center work similar to what has been described about factories (for more details see Cameron, 2000a). These methods, the literature argues, include extensive standardization through scripting (see for a

more detailed discussion Cameron, 2000b) and constant monitoring. The scripts supposedly tell agents how to talk to customers and what to say (e.g. on call centers in Canada see Roy, 2003). According to Alarcón & Heyman (2013), the degree of autonomy employees enjoy at the workplace and in terms of their work task is often taken as a one of the yardsticks of low-skilled versus high-skilled work. The standardization through scripting and monitoring, and the resulting little autonomy for agents, can lead to the conclusion that call center work is a low-status job, easy for anyone to do even if they did not finish school, attended university or have had previous stretches of unemployment.

In fact, in the wake of increasing offshoring, scholars such as Mankekar & Gupta (2014) have reemphasized that call center jobs are low-skilled, low-paying jobs without career prospects:

> "Call centers in the West historically tend to be relatively small (around 250 people) and hire employees with low levels of skill. Call center jobs are perceived by most employees to be dead-end positions, with few prospects for learning or advancement. Thus, when call center jobs first started moving to India to take advantage of discrepancies in labor cost (an Indian worker starts at approximately one-tenth the minimum wage paid to a worker in the U.S.), one would not have anticipated the outcry that followed. The jobs that were being 'lost' were low-skill, low-paying jobs without career prospects." (Mankekar & Gupta, 2014, p. 5)

Considering that call center jobs are described to be "low-skill, low-paying jobs" by the literature, it is perhaps not surprisingly that agents are also described as having low qualifications. Let us see what the call center literature says about individuals working the lines.

Call center agents as having low qualifications

What we learn about call center agents and their social economic status is two-fold. Firstly, we have a persisting division between on and offshore call center agents. Onshore call center workers in the West are said to be low-skilled and female. In a series of articles about women and call centers, Belt (2002) makes several observations. For instance, she does not only talk of "a substantial 'female underclass' within the industry" (Belt, 2002, p. 54) but also that

> "call center work seems to bear many of the old hallmarks of these traditional female employment 'ghettos', defined as places occupied mainly by women and offering low-skilled, low-status, undemanding jobs which employees find extremely difficult to move on from." (Belt, 2002, p. 52)

Moreover, Belt writes (2002, p. 51) that a lot of the call centers featured in the academic literature are in former industrial sites with many "unskilled" workers who have been unemployed before the arrival of the call center industry (e.g. the north of England).

Mirchandani points out that in the Indian context, the local call center industry tries to portray call center jobs as "a desirable and highly skilled occupation and workers" (2004, p. 367) but this is unsuccessful. Despite attempts by employers to make them believe the contrary, Mirchandani's (2004) informants in India know that their jobs are low-status and low-skilled, especially in comparison to professional software jobs, even though it pays much more than others in India. It is also worth pointing out that software developers in India might not have to work nights and are less likely to be subject to regular abuse over the phone by Western customers.

> "While they [call center agents] are paid high salaries in comparison with other service sector jobs, workers note that call center salaries are far lower than professional ones [software developers]." (Mirchandani, 2004, p. 368)

> "Many of the workers interviewed talked about the results of their mathematical calculation of the differences between their salaries and the amounts companies would need to pay if the customer service were provided within the USA. [..] such awareness allows workers to challenge employer definitions of their work as privileged, skilled and desirable." (Mirchandani, 2004, p. 369)

The other point to make is that Mirchandani's comment also implies that agents often join the call center because of a lack of other opportunities available to them (cf. Mirchandani, 2004, p. 368), similar to the case described above by Bell in England. Mirchandani's (2004) and Poster's (2007) observations further show that even call centers that are moved "offshore" are still considered under

the same conditions as they were when they were "onshore." It does not matter that agents are now mostly graduates. The jobs are still considered to be repetitive and low-status in India. It may also be considered unhealthy, dangerous, and abnormal that one needs to work nights. In the end, agents offshore are only employed to serve "Westerners." In line with this, Mirchandani notes that agents in India are often the recipients of a racist backlash on the phone as well as resentment and nationalism for jobs being offshored from Western countries to India. If we apply Goffman's typology of stigma to the Indian case described here, we see that for Indian call center agents, the source of stigma is twofold. When it comes to their social position in India, it might be considered a blemish of an individual's character such as being not smart enough, not having studied enough that they only work in call centers instead of being a software developer. If they work on the phone and get abused over the phone because of their strong Indian accent or use of Indian English by a Western customer, the source of the stigma could be a tribal stigma, for speaking not with an L1 accent and vocabulary and/or again a blemish of an individual's character for not being able to speak intelligently. However, of course intelligibility is obviously a matter of perspective and other prejudices might be in play, too. When it comes to the case of (female) British call center agents in the North of England described by Belt and others, most likely working in a call center is considered a blemish of an individual's character. They might have been unemployed for a sometime prior to finding employment in call centers. Agents could move to areas where there are more jobs or try to apply for graduate jobs, but they do not do so. They may of course suffer from other types of tribal stigma too, such as having a strong regional accent, which could further add to their stigma and prevent them from finding more prestigious jobs outside the call center industry. But this is unfortunately not discussed anywhere in the literature. It is only often stated that for women with young children, call centers' flexible working hours are very attractive (e.g. Belt, 2002, p. 53).

Let us look next at concrete examples of stigmatization in call centers mentioned in the literature.

Examples from the literature of call center work being stigmatized

As mentioned earlier, it is often incidentally noted in the literature that call center agents regularly get abused. For instance, Cameron (2000a) writes the following:

> "[…] informants stressed it was commonplace to encounter rudeness or even abuse. Telephone interaction with a stranger has some of the same features that lead to the much discussed problem of 'flaming' on the internet: the physical separation and invisibility of the parties has a disinhibiting effect on impolite behavior and the expression of strong emotions, especially anger. As one operator remarked, 'People say things on the phone they would never say to your face.'" (2000a, p. 112)

Equally Taylor and Bain (1999, p. 110) acknowledge that: "Nuisance and abusive calls and, worse, sexual harassment, are widely experienced by both inbound and outbound operators and are a source of incalculable stress." Poster (2007, p. 284) quotes an agent who says the following: "I get calls - on some days up to five in a shift - from people who are calling only to abuse." While many academics acknowledge that call center work is stressful, authors such as Cameron (2000b, p. 334, 2008) and Mirchandani (2012, p. 87) mostly blame extensive standardization, in particular, top-down scripting and extensive monitoring, as the source of this. It is those elements, Cameron (Cameron, 2000a) argues, that make call centers a "deskilling and disempowering place to work" (2000a, p. 124). There has, however, been little discussion about how agents cope, manage, or try to resist the stigma that their work entails.

A rare example of a study addressing stigma in call centers and how agents cope is Matos's (2012) of a Portuguese call center. She writes that agents interviewed expressed "shame about what they do, a consequence of a form of labor, which is socially stigmatized as unskilled, degrading and inferior, and in which workers are considered disposable" (2012, p. 233). Matos writes that call center agents in Portugal have very low wages and often do not have any other employment choice despite being graduates. Agents in Matos's study felt resentment for "being mistreated by clients" (2012, p. 232) . Another source of resentment for agents is that their parents disapprove of them working in call centers because of the stigma and job insecurity leading agents to feel incompetent about themselves

and their work, despite their middle class aspirations. Referencing Goffman (1986, pp. 12–13) she writes that,

> "call center workers are seen by others as having acquired through their work a set of discredited attributes which diminish them, which imply inferiority, and which are to be synonymous with what the whole person actually is (Matos, 2012, p. 234)."

Although she does not apply Goffman's stigma typology to this case study, she appears to say that for call center agents working in a call center is considered a blemish of character because of their middle-class aspiration. Agents are, as Matos writes, well educated so they could have tried harder to find a "proper job." Moreover, she writes that working in call centers in Portugal is not considered "proper work" and is thought to be characterized by repetition, lack of creativity, monotony, and lack of autonomy (an infantilizing condition), all of which have an impact on the perception of agents and not compatible with a high profile job. Matos writes that agents must confront negative stereotypes about call centers every day when they deal with customers. Agents believe the absence of face-to-face conversation is one of the reasons for abuse and rudeness by clients. It leads clients to be less careful about the language they use. The fact that agents are obliged to follow a script causes customers to not only have less respect for the agent but also to believe that "they can act as if they were talking to a machine" (Matos, 2012, p. 234). By talking to customers on the phone and hearing their critical comments and insinuations about call center work, agents are reminded of their shame and internalize it (Matos, 2012, p. 234). As a result, many lie about where they work and negate their work in a call center. When it comes to managing the call center stigma (see section 2), she writes that many agents use what Goffman termed "passing strategies." For instance, to avoid stigma they may omit that they in a call center. She writes: "workers say they work in firm X but not that they are working a call center. Workers are aware of the meanings attached to this specific workplace and their 'impression management' is anchored by a strategy of silence" (Matos, 2012, p. 234). The strategy of silence represents an omission, and as such, constitutes a passing strategy.

To summarize, some of the key themes that have emerged in the literature are the following: call center work is low-status and according to the literature stigmatized because of extensive standardization and Neo Taylorist management policy which makes agents disposable workers. Those practices supposedly also deprive agents of any autonomy which further adds to the stigma of the job, in the view of outsiders. To my knowledge there has been little if no discussion about how influential critical call center publications may have negatively affected how call center work is viewed by the mainstream media and in turn unwittingly contributed to the call center stigma. For instance, according to Bain and Taylor (2000, p. 3), Fernie and Metcalf's (1998) thesis that call centers are Foucauldian panopticons was widely taken up by the mainstream media. They quote a call center union organizer who laments that whenever the mainstream 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 & Taylor, 2000, p. 3)

Bain and Taylor (2000) polemically take on the critical call center literature in their article. But they do not discuss the effect on agents that the negative imagery used so widely by the literature and media can have. Few agents will have the luxury of the call center trade union representative to be able to talk to the media and dispute the negative imagery directly. In Matos's study, agents seem to be widely accepting the status quo and resort to managing the stigma by hiding where they work to pass as "normal." Let us see next how the themes related to shame, stigma and the work being low-skilled discussed in the literature review compare with the data collected as part of this case study. Moreover, how do agents manage their stigma and is there some resistance on their part?

4. The field site and methodology

This paper presents a case study of an onshore call center in London which I shall refer to as "CallCentral" (not its real name). It is one of many outbound multilingual call centers located in London and the South East. On average about twenty languages were used in the call center. The work

ranges from marketing to customer service, and it is usually IT-related. The call center itself has on average sixty seats. I worked in the call center for four years, conducting participant observation for three years as part of my PhD. I also interviewed over seventy staff members, including call center managers (3), team leaders (6), and current and former agents, approaching them with consent forms and information sheets ratified within the university's ethics procedures. All the interviews were semi-structured and included questions about their general perceptions of the call center, experience of call centers off the phone, their background and career plans. Interviews were either conducted in a room in the same building (but outside the call center), or at venues chosen by the informant (e.g. at home or in a café). The interviews were later coded according to themes on *NVivo*. The extracts here are based on the themes of perception of call work, experience of call centers, their background, and stigmatization they may have experienced.

In the following, I am going to address of how agents talked about their experience of stigma in their jobs.

5. Agents discussing stigma and the low status of call center jobs

Three common themes arose after agents were asked to share their experiences working at call centers. The first is an open admission to the abuse, discrimination, and stigma they face from outsiders. The second theme is the management of stigma: how they avoid being subjected to abuse and discrimination on and off the phone. The third theme covers attempts by agents to resist and fend off the negative stereotyping they experience.

In most cases, call center agents who felt ashamed of their job, especially those with middle class aspirations, considered it to be a personal failing or shortcoming. To revisit Goffman's stigma typology mentioned above, the stigma of call center work appears to be predominantly a blemish of character. On the other hand, a tribal stigma may also come into play for agents who do not take calls in their L1 when dealing with people who pass judgement on their accent or speaking ability.

Describing the stigma: Feeling shame, being treated as a disposable worker and disrespected by outsiders

Subjects frequently did not hesitate to identify the low status of their job and the stigma attached to it. As perhaps expected with a stigmatized job and in line with the Goffman's understanding of stigma, agents mention numerous instances about how their work is viewed negatively by others. James for instance describes the stigma he feels when he goes to work every day the following way:

Extract 1

```
There's something… you know, even standing in the lift and you've got
people, you know, with the special cards that go up to level four or
whatever. When you're in the lift and you press level two you'll notice
that, you know, everyone knows exactly where you are going and what you
are doing. So there is an automatic kind of… That's why I take the
stairs nowadays because I refuse to do it. (James, current agent)
```

He continues:

Extract 2

```
[…] I'll aim to get a different job. Maybe in a similar kind of… I
wouldn't mind going into advertising in some way or another but
definitely not on this kind of side of it, because there's such a…
there's a taboo with call centers because it's…and… and it's not… it's
not on the same level as say, you know, a traffic warden or anything
```

```
like that, but when you say you work at the call center, there's
something... (James, current agent)
```

Having myself also entered the call center in the same way James describes here for over a year, I also remember standing in the lift and feeling awkward. I recall pressing the number for the floor on which the call center is located, knowing that everyone else all knew where I was going and where I was working since there is nothing else on that floor but the call center. I like that James admitted to avoiding the lift completely, taking the stairs instead.

Based on my own fieldwork and what agents told me, the people from the parent company, referred to inside the call center as "upstairs," would not interact with agents from "downstairs" the call center and looked down on the agents from the call centers. "Upstairs" contained the other divisions of the multinational company. Everyone working upstairs was permanently employed and had high profile graduate jobs.

Field note 1 The relationship with upstairs

```
When it comes to moving agents upstairs because the call center is full,
most agents do not want to go, preferring to stay in the main call
center 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 center 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 center managers.
```

The field note suggests that highly qualified graduate agents, simply by working in call center, in the view of those working upstairs, gain a stigma and are tainted. I have often heard agents complain on the floor that the call center does "the dirty work" for "upstairs", how upstairs needs the call center and that it is unfair that agents are not considered for recruitment upstairs although they are qualified for those jobs.

Siiri, another team leader describes a case of what she perceives as disrespect by outsiders. This time it is on the phone and not within the same employer:

Extract 3

```
I think I've learned a lot of respect [for people working in call
centers] because, you know, people who come here and do this kind of
job, to the other person who answers the phone, you know, they don't
have that kind of... similar kind of respect, they put you a little bit
down, you know. So the next time someone calls me I definitely will
respect that person because I know that you're doing a hard job. (Siiri, team
leader)
```

Moreover, Franziska complains that because she has worked in a call center, all her other qualifications are now voided and she is permanently regarded as a call center worker by recruiters. At the time I interviewed her, she was working for a major third party recruitment agency in London which offers various kinds of jobs and assignment not just in call centers but in many other industries. However, she explains that ever since she started accepting assignments within a call center, she only receives job offers and assignments for call center work now and nothing else, much to her frustration.

Extract 4

```
I have completed an apprenticeship and I have a degree. But ever since I
worked in a call center, I only ever receive job offers from call center
jobs. No one cares about the fact that I have done an apprenticeship as
well. I find this very depressing. (Franziska, current agent)
```

Several agents justify their shame of working in a call center in detail during the interview. They make clear that this is not what they envisage to do in the long run. There is some overlap with what Matos described for the Portuguese call center in that they were also all graduates. In Matos's description, they fell short not just of their own career expectations but also that of their parents.

Extract 5

```
This is not where I want to be for the next 30 years or anything like
that, I want to be because my calling is the film industry. I'm a
director and producer like for film […] (Siiri, team leader)
```

Extract 6

```
I don't… I don't see my future as being a call center clerk. It's not
something I want to do. (Yannick, current agent)
```

Extract 7

```
No-one actually would say they see a career in call centers. […] But at
the end of the day the whole call center thing, if there's room for… as
in room to like go higher, that's cool. But in most call centers there
isn't really room to go up, so… (Ada, current agent)
```

Extract 8

```
No, certainly I won't [be working much longer at a call center].
Honestly because I've got much more higher goals than just working in a
call center. (Akash, current agents)
```

Extract 9

```
Well, ever since I've actually started working in a call center,
especially here, I've always said to myself I can never ever work here
for, you know, a certain amount of time or work here full-time for
example, because I've always felt I can never just like… I'm very
ambitious, I'm a very ambitious person, so I like to go beyond that.
[…]it's always been a temporary job. (Rabeya, current agent)
```

Extract 10

```
Well I guess that it's the best thing that you can get hold of so long
as you don't get the thing that you are really striving for because it's
not really a permanent job; not many people are here to make a career.
Yeah, because there are like 50-60 at least people working here and most
of them are working here because they can't find something that… a field
in which… I mean a job in their particular field, so they come here
because it's available, yeah. (Annand, current agent)
```

Andreas also points out that it made him feel better that he was not the only educated individual who failed with his career progression and ended up in a call center.

Extract 11

```
It helped a lot that I've seen that other people with, you know, similar
education or or uhm also worked down there and and and did a great job
and and so, you know, that, you know, London summer 2009 was not an easy
place, you know [...].
```
(Andreas, former agent)

As emerges from the quotes all the agents confirm that they do not see call center work as a career. It is more of a stepping stone to a better paid and more prestigious job outside the call center industry. It is also noteworthy that agents only earn a few pounds more per hour than the national minimum wage, such as at a place like Starbucks.

I observed how agents were almost daily subject to abuse on the phone by various people they called. One could see some turning red after a phone call and needing a minute to recompose themselves after a call ended. Sometimes, I also saw agents cry after a phone call. How did agents cope with this then and tried to manage the stigma?

Managing stigma: Trying to pass a normal person (hiding one's identity as a call center agent)

Three agents mentioned creating an alter ego when they worked on the phone. For instance, Frederica said that working on the phone is like acting and creating an alter ego helps with that.

Extract 12

```
When I used to talk with someone I would say, "Hi, good afternoon, this
is, Frederica calling…" actually I used to change my name. Many people
in call center use… change their names. For, for one thing I think makes
you… there is an alter ego, you know, creates an alter ego and, is… I
don't know why, it makes you faster, it makes you, more creative maybe.
((laughs)) Is an act: at the end of the day it's an act, you know.
```
(Frederica, former agent)

Besides call center work being considered a low skilled job, uneducated people working in them, stereotypes also surround the language used by agents, i.e. it being scripted making them sound robotic and boring. Accordingly, agents tell me during the interviews that it is important "to make scripts more colorful." Agents also talk about the need to speak more "real" and "emphatic" so that they do not sound like a call center agent or be mistaken for one:

Extract 13

```
But you have to be colorful 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*)

Extract 14

```
You have to try and make your script unique […] You're more selling
yourself.
```
(*David, current agent*)

Extract 15

```
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 very real; you can't just be smiley
[…]. (Rabeya, current agent)
```

Other strategies to camouflage their profession include trying to sound posher and more eloquent by adding sophisticated words to the script.

Extract 16

```
I keep to the English accent because I think that I've got quite a, you
know, naturally reasonably well spoken accent. I know 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. The Hugh Grant thing seems to pull off. (James, current
agent)
```

Creating jokes to break the ice is another strategy considered to make themselves not sound "call center like" and robotic.

Extract 17

```
[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, current agent)
```

Women may also employ flirting as another strategy to make their script non-robotic. As Vanessa acknowledges:

Extract 18

```
One flirts with men. Flirting makes life a lot easier. If you realize
that it might work, then by all means use that strategy.(Vanessa, current agent)
```

The field note below indicates another strategy an agent may pursue to disguise his job is finding a quieter place for calling.

Field note 2

```
This morning I sat next to Thomas, originally a lawyer from Austria with
a PhD. He had been working in the call center for a few months now. He
preferred sitting on the left-hand side of the call center like I did
because there were fewer seats and thus the noise would be less. The
noise level is crucial as one does not want the other people on the
phone to hear all the people talk and realizing that one is calling from
a call center and to be able to understand the other person well. The
```

headsets on the other side are also better in that one can actually chat to the person sitting next to you. Thomas had told me how he dropped his career as a trial lawyer back in Austria to move to London. The only job he could find right away was in a call center and he was fine with it. However, today he had to call Austria (instead of Germany). He told me he would change his name as he was worried they might recognize him or his father (who used to be a mayor of an Austrian town.) In fact, he did not even call his home town. Thomas used to tell me that it is okay to work in a call center in London, but he would never do this in Austria. He also told me that when he first went to a job center looking for a job and he showed them their CV. He was asked whether the PhD is a form of disability.

Five agents told me that they would reword their CVs when it came to call center work. The latter, they agreed, would not get them employment as employers would think they are unskilled as call center workers.

Extract 19

Well, what I, what I have on my CV now is sales staff. I've been doing training and like contacting clients in IT campaigns obviously. So it's not just like… it's the way how you put it on your CV. [..] [Writing that you are] Working in a call center… [is] not probably getting [you] jobs… once you have got the job then it might be helpful because of these people skills what you have learned. *(Piia, former team leader)*

Extract 20

I don't know if I've put this on my CV [the call center experience] yet. […] There's good key words to go on there like 'target driven' you know. Communication, development obviously. Yeah, I've got to find the right way to spin cold calling. I'm sure there's a businessy word for that. I don't know. There's like sexier way of saying it. *(Michael, current agent)*

Extract 21

It's all about what you call it. You don't have to say 'call center' […]you can put say that you have been doing telemarketing [instead of using the word call center] just to rewrite it. *(Linda, former agent)*

We have seen how agents try to manage the stigma in this section. Let us explore next at how they might try to resist the stigma.

Resisting: Trying to fight the negative stereotyping of call centers

Several agents try to defend their choice of work and say that "the job itself is okay" and "someone has to do it" (Brian, current agent). Four of them also point out that they were positively surprised that call centers were not as bad as they were led to believe. For instance, James and John say the following:

Extract 22

When I got the job I Googled like telemarketing and like all these forums, better don't do it all these reasons people complaining and I thought I made the worst choice in my life, but 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.
```
(James, current agent)

Extract 23

```
Actually I'm rather positively surprised. Call Center jobs have a very
negative connotation and one hears so many bad things about them in the
media. I was very positively surprised about the pleasant atmosphere in
the office.
```
(John, current agent)

There are also several attempts to point out the positive aspects of working in a call center. Ten out of the seventy agents I interviewed mention that they appreciate the fact that they speak to a variety of people on the phone as part of the job, something they would never have the opportunity to do otherwise. For instance, Melvin says:

Extract 24

```
It can also be enjoyable because you get to talk to a variety of people.
```
(Stephen, current agent)

Moreover, all the agents I interviewed talk positively about the egalitarian atmosphere in the call center.

Extract 25

```
You get to know people. So everyone is pretty they get along pretty well
considering this mixed nationalities and everything. Everyone seems to
get along pretty well, don't they?
```
(Benjamin, current agent)

Five agents even state that they met their best friends at the call center and are still in contact with them long after having left the job. All agents note that their colleagues at the call centers are very interesting people, "incredibly educated" (Gavin, team leader) and that it is a pleasure working with them. In fact, out of the seventy agents I interviewed, sixty-eight held at least an undergraduate degree with only two agents still attending university. About forty had also attained postgraduate degrees, with five of them having PhDs and five MBAs. There generally appears to be a feeling that everybody is in the same boat and on the same level socially and educationally.

Extract 26

```
You can get people with PhD, with very good, level of education, people
that are studying at university, people that have got background in
finance […].
```
(Frederica, former agent)

Extract 27

```
I would never look down on a call center again. […] The mix, just the
mixture of people that we get as well; these are not stupid people.
These are not… and maybe we wouldn't get these people if there wasn't a
recession on, possibly, but a lot of these guys were here before that.
```
(Gavin, team leader)

All agents also stress that they are grateful for the job, as it often allows to work in between jobs, to pay the bills, learn new things, and to settle into London.

Extract 28

```
I mean it's just a means to an end in a way for me. […]People are just
here because they're looking for all types of work. (Sonia, current agent)
```

Extract 29

```
I believe working in a call center, as in so many opportunities in the
center… if you are made redundant for example, if you have some
particular skills they don't have to go to waste. If you come to a call
center you don't have to have that gap in between your not having work
and things like… just creates opportunities I believe and it's actually
a very good thing. (Ada, team leader)
```

Extract 30

```
It's completely different because my background is dentistry and, you
know, I've always been in the medical side of things so it's just
another world altogether. […] working in a call center, you know, find
there is like a stigma around it now […]. But I think it helps you in,
in a lot of ways. As I said, every situation I have has positive and
negative sides, and if you are in that situation then why not take the
positive from it. I mean look at so many other corporate jobs, they're
so stressful, people are like… look at banking jobs, you know, I mean
people are miserable. There's so many people I know in banking jobs,
they're just, you know, working like 14 hours and, you know, they're
stressed all the time and they have to hit targets as well. But I think
in a call center, working in a call center is stressful, but at the same
time I think it's fun; it's… it's a very interactive hustling bustling
place. (Barbara, team leader)
```

About twenty of the agents interviewed were recent immigrants to London who were very appreciative of call centers. They joined the call center because they could call in their L1 and the job also allowed them to improve their English and potentially find another job outside the call center industry later, which was permanent and often relatively well paid (cf. Woydack, 2014).

The resistance to the stigma and abuse agents experienced was also possible to observe on the call center floor. Although agents were not allowed to talk back to people on the phone to let off steam, they often started cursing the other person once they hung up. It was so prevalent, that one day, a new Chinese agent, who had been living in England only for a few months, asked me what "wanker" means as she kept hearing it being used by her colleagues after they hung up.

The extracts here provide instance of how agents refuse the negative imagery about call centers. Goffman makes suggestions about how stigma can be resisted as nobody should have to feel shame about their stigma or go to great lengths to conceal it (see also Flowerdew, 2008). He lists two types of group that can fight to improve the situation of the stigmatized.

The first type would be a formerly stigmatized people, in this case call center agents, who are themselves no longer stigmatized. In this case, they would have jobs outside the call center industry and be considered normal (1986, p. 19). They would also act as role-models for current call center agents. In fact, during the interviews with ex-agents, many expressed sympathy with the agents. Unfortunately, they are not an influential voice and ex-agents are unlikely to be very vocal about their previous working experience out of fear of being stigmatized for it once again. A former agent told me the following story that illustrates this point. After leaving the call center he became a manager at a multinational corporation in the City of London. During a meeting, he unexpectedly met the call center's operations manager (from upstairs) who had just started working at the same multinational. The ex-call center agent said he pretended to have never met him as that was far better than admitting

to having ever worked in a call center. I often heard agents taking solace in the fact that well-known celebrities such as Jonny Depp and Jennifer Aniston also once worked as call center agents and have publicly admitted to this.

The second type working for the interest of the stigmatized are "normals" who have a good understanding of the stigma, particular sympathy with them, or have a certain standing within the group (Goffman, 1986, p. 19). Goffman refers to them as "the wise." Perhaps an example of this would be the trade union organizer cited in the Bain and Taylor (2000) article. Overall, however, call center agents do not seem to have been well provided with individuals/organizations fighting for their cause.

This section has shown that the negative image and stigma of call centers makes the jobs of agents even more stressful. Considering that more than a million people in the UK alone work in call centers (CFA Business skills @work, 2012; Department of Trade and Industry, 2004), their stigmatization is clearly an important issue in the British job market and society. Let's see what else we can conclude from the themes discussed in this section.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of how agents experience and cope with negative stereotyping of call centers and stigma by using Goffman's notion of stigma to analyse how agents talk about stigma during the interviews. To my knowledge this is the first study to attempt this. Agents described the stigma the work entails, talked about managing and then resisting it. Shame emerged as an important theme throughout the interviews. I of course never criticized agents for their choice of working in a call center. Yet they still felt the need to justify this choice. In fact, as Goffman writes (1986, p. 7) "shame becomes a central possibility [to the stigmatized], arising from the individual's perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one can readily see himself as not possessing." Moreover, according to Goffman, the shame can lead to self-derogation and self-hate.

In her work on working class individuals rising to middle class jobs, Walkerdine (2006) writes that they are always afraid of being "othered." The fear of being "othered" also seems to be a strong theme emerging from the interviews with the call center agents I conducted – they appear to be in constant fear of being "othered" (Walkerdine, 2006, p. 18). In extract 3, ("they put you a little bit down"), Siiri mentions the various ways they are "othered." In extracts 12-18 they describe the need to camouflage and also act to prevent possible "othering." In none of the interviews I conducted did agents explicitly say that working at a call center is horrible. Moreover, the call center experience has most likely provided agents with some new skills, e.g. good communication, which are in demand outside of the call center industry. But ironically enough, because of the low status of call centers, these important competencies are not adequately appreciated by the outside world. Agents say they hide their call center background to pass as "normal," become successful, and leave the call center industry behind them.

How do agents talk about acting and camouflaging their job? In extracts 19-21 they mention using euphemisms for call center work and presenting it differently. In his extract, however, James points out that it is almost impossible to camouflage oneself in the lift, hence he takes the stairs. In other extracts, agents create an alternative persona to that person that works in the call center. This other persona is "ambitious" (extract 9) and is almost forced to work (e.g. extract 11 and 27) in a call center due to the recession in 2008. Moreover, one informant talks about creating an "alter ego" on the phone (as opposed to off the phone) (Frederica, extract 12). When it comes to their acting repertoire, agents talk of "mirroring" (e.g. extract 15). That is, they need to relate, but also "sell themselves" (extract 14) to the person on the phone. This presupposes that the individual on the other end of the line must like the agent so much that they are ready to "buy into them." Some try to see the positive sides of the job (e.g. extract 22-25). In one instance, an agent talks about doing a posh accent (extract 16). Overall, agents style and camouflage themselves not to align themselves with company expectations as claimed by the call center literature, but to hide their identity as a call center agent (see also Woydack, 2014), avoid being stigmatized, and to pass as a normal person.

Besides the concept of "othering," Walkerdine & Ringrose (2006) have developed another concept, "makeovers," that is useful to the discussion of "passing." It overlaps with Goffman's concept of "passing" in various ways. Walkerdine & Ringrose developed the concept of "makeovers" to stress its function as a site of neo-liberal reinvention. Even though it has been a staple of women's magazines for years, she suggests that "these incitements have intensified and work in important ways to normalize the neo-liberal ethos of continuously maximizing, bettering and reinventing the self." In my understanding of Goffman's notion of passing, the notion is that key information is omitted in some sense. It represents social stigma management to mitigate the effects of social discrimination due to stigma. It could thus even be argued it constitutes an act of resistance. Conversely, my understanding of Walkerdine & Ringrose's concept of makeover is that the stress is more on assimilation and that the stigma is a problem for the individual's identity. Individuals have internalized their stigma and try to change it to permanently escape social discrimination. Interestingly, Walkerdine & Ringrose (2006) argue that in a neo-liberal world, stigma is now attributed to everybody that does not follow its ethos of "continuously maximizing, bettering and reinventing the self" (2006, p. 37). The call center job, as a dead-end job, with no room for going up, can thus be considered to go against the neo-liberal ethos per se and requires not just passing, but also makeovers.

I would argue that the interview data shows both male and female agents attempting to do makeovers. As outlined above, the constant passing which involves camouflaging and acting is one of the central themes in the interview data and this could also be understood as makeover. Based on the previous literature on call centers, we would expect that forms of scripting or accent training are imposed on the agents by the employer. In an ironic measure, in the call centers researched the employers' makeover is almost minimal (see Woydack, 2014), while the agents are engaged in voluntary and continuous makeovers of themselves, many of them linguistic. They are as one agent puts it "selling themselves" (extract 14). Moreover, mirroring the other person on the phone means constant makeovers, acting and restyling. Their efforts to hide that they work in a call center even adds more stress. The reason for the "makeover" is, however, not as often claimed by the literature because of seeing agents as part of a brand. They themselves fear being "stigmatized" and othered.

Overall, this paper raised the question whether constantly critiquing call centers, the work there and portraying call center agents as low-skilled is a helpful and adequate route for academics and for the individuals working in call centers. There are many reasons why call centers have been portrayed in such a negative light in academic studies and by extension the media. One of them is because of a focus on standardization practices. Shifting the focus away from standardization practices in call centers may lead to a different understanding of the call center and what kind of skills are required for working there. The skills needed for being successful may not differ to such a great degree from skills needed in higher profile jobs. Research like this can help to alleviate the stigma. Agents working in call centers should not have to be blamed for their employment choice, feel ashamed for having to work in a call center or having to go to great lengths to escape the burden of stigma.

_____

References

Alarcón, A., & Heyman, J. M. (2013). Bilingual call centers at the US-Mexico border: Location and linguistic markers of exploitability. *Language in Society*, *42*(01), 1–21.

Bain, P., & Taylor, P. (2000). Entrapped by the "electronic panopticon"? Worker resistance in the call centre. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, *15*(1), 2–18.

Belt, V. (2002). A female ghetto? Women's careers in call centres. *Human Resource Management Journal*, *12*(4), 51–66.

Belt, V., Richardson, R., & Webster, J. (2002). Women, social skill and interactive service work in telephone call centres. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, *17*(1), 20–34.

Block, D. (2013). *Social class in applied linguistics*.

Cameron, D. (2000a). *Good to Talk?* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Cameron, D. (2000b). Styling the worker: Gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *4*(3), 323–347.

Cameron, D. (2008). Talk from the top down. *Language & Communication*, *28*(2), 143–155.

CFA Business skills @work. (2012). *Contact Centre Operations: Labour Report*. London: CFA. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/download/145729_Contact_Centres_LMI_2012_.pdf

Department of Trade and Industry. (2004). *The U.K. Contact Industry: A Study*. London: Department of Trade and Industry.

Fernie, S., & Metcalf, D. (1998). *(Not) hanging on the telephone: payment systems in the new sweatshops*. Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Flowerdew, J. (2008). Scholarly writers who use English as an Additional Language: What can Goffman's "Stigma" tell us? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *7*(2), 77–86.

Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity* (26th pr). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Hitch, P. (1983). Social identity and the half-Asian child. In G. M. Breakwell (Ed.), *Threatened identities* (pp. 107–127). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Holman, D., & Fernie, S. (2000). Can I Help You? Call Centres and Job Satisfaction. *Centrepiece*, *5*(1), 2–5.

Holtgrewe, U., Kerst, C., & Shire, K. (Eds.). (2002). *Re-organising service work: call centres in Germany and Britain*. Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT., USA: Ashgate.

Hudson, A. (2011, March 10). Are call centres the factories of the 21st Century? *BBC News*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-12691704

Jaffe, A. (2009). *Stance: sociolinguistic perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kanuha, V. K. (1999). The Social Process of Passing to Manage Stigma: Acts of Internalized Oppression of Acts of Resistance. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, pp. 27–46.

Mankekar, P., & Gupta, A. (2014). *Intimate Encounters: Affective Labor in Call Centers* (Online:). Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/8136952/Intimate_Encounters_Affective_Labor_in_Call_Centers

Matos, P. (2012). Call center labor and the injured precariat: shame, stigma, and downward social mobility in contemporary Portugal. *Dialectical Anthropology*, *36*(3-4), 217–243.

Mirchandani, K. (2004). Practices of global capital: gaps, cracks and ironies in transnational call centres in India. *Global Networks*, *4*(4), 355–373.

Mirchandani, K. (2012). *Phone clones: authenticity work in the transnational service economy*. Ithaca: ILR Press.

Poster, W. R. (2007). Who's On the Line? Indian Call Center Agents Pose as Americans for U.S.-Outsourced Firms. *Industrial Relations*, *46*(2), 271–304.

Rohy, V. (1996). Displacing desire: Passing, nostaliga and Giovanni's Room. In E. K. Ginsberg (Ed.), *Passing and the fictions of identitiy* (pp. 218–233). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Roy, S. (2003). Bilingualism and standardization in a Canadian call center: Challenges for a linguistic minority community. In R. Bayley & S. R. Schecter (Eds.), *Language Socialization in Bilingual and Multilingual Societies* (pp. 269–285). Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney: Multilingual Matters.

Spradlin, A. L. (1998). The Price of "Passing": A Lesbian Perspective on Authenticity in Organizations. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *11*(4), 598–605.

Taylor, P., & Bain, P. (1999). "An assembly line in the head": work and employee relations in the call centre. *Industrial Relations Journal*, *30*(2), 101–117.

Walkerdine, V. (2006). Workers in the New Economy: Transformation as Border Crossing. *Ethos*, *34*(1), 10–41.

Walkerdine, V., & Ringrose, J. (2006). Femininities: Reclassifying upward mobility and the neo-liberal subject. In *The SAGE handbook of gender and education* (pp. 31–46). London.

Woydack, J. (2014). *Standardisation and script trajecotires in a London call centre: An ethnography of a multilingual call centre*. King's College London, London.

Woydack, J., & Rampton, B. (2016). Text trajectories in a multilingual call centre: The linguistic ethnography of a calling script. *Language in Society*, *45*(05), 709–732.