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Chat for Cash - Asian Voices Needed for Study

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Volunteers from the Asian community in the Birmingham region who are willing for their phone conversations to be recorded are needed for a University of Birmingham study where researchers are developing better automated systems for telephones.

Automated systems are already being used by some companies, but they do not take into account the way in which English is spoken throughout the British Isles and currently work best for people with standard British southern accents.

Researchers need real examples of how people talk when they use the telephone and want to record 200 hours of conversation between people who live in the Birmingham region. They want recordings of speech which represent all of the different communities in the city and are particularly keen to record people from the Asian community as they are currently under-represented in the study. Participants will be paid 50p per minute of their conversation and will earn a bonus of £5 if they can reach a full hour.

Professor Martin Russell, lead investigator from the School of Electronic, Electrical and Computer Engineering, says, 'The applications we are looking to improve are in telephone-based speech recognition. The ultimate goal is to enable people to talk to systems over the phone in the same way that they would talk to other people.

'At present most phone based applications ask the user to press a button on the phone or say single words in response to prompts. Some systems already allow free speech, but they is not always successful.'

The recordings will be stored anonymously on a computer. Participants will be asked to call a free phone number and enter a PIN number, followed by the number of the person they want to call. Callers will be reminded to ask the person they are phoning to confirm that he or she is happy to have the conversation recorded. The call is free and callers will be paid 50p for each minute and will receive a bonus of £5 if they talk for an hour.

Those wishing to take part should either: visit www.thespeechark.com/VaB.htm, or register by SMS by texting 'VOICES' plus their name and address to 07765 972212, or call freephone 08000 789384 and leave their name and telephone number

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Notes to Editors

Speech Ark, a spin-out company of the University of Birmingham's School of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering, is carrying out this research.

For further media information

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