

# **A Robust Natural Language Question Answering System for Customer Helpdesk Applications**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a restricted-domain question answering system which can be used in automating a customer helpdesk of a commercial organization. Even though there has been an increasing interest in data-driven methods over the past decade to achieve more natural human-machine interactions, such methods require a large amount of manually labeled representative data on how user converses with a machine. However, this is a requirement that is difficult to be satisfied in the early phase of system development. In addition, the systems should be maintainable by a domain expert who is less technically skilled when compared to a computer engineer. The knowledge based approach that is presented here is aimed at maximally making use of the user experience available with the customer service representatives (CSRs) in the organization and presents how true representative data can be collected. The approach takes into account the syntactic, lexical, and morphological variations, as well as a way of synonym transduction that is allowed to vary over the system's knowledge base. The query understanding method, which is based on a statistical classifier, a ranking algorithm based on Vector Space Model (VSM) and a pattern writing process, takes into account the intent, context, and content components of natural language meaning as well as the word order. A genetic algorithm-based method is presented for finding the domain specific ranking parameters. An evaluation of the approach is presented by deploying a system in a real-world enterprise helpdesk environment in the telecommunication domain. The evaluation shows that the system is able to answer user questions with an accuracy of 94.4%. Furthermore, maintenance of the deployed system is carried out by CSRs successfully.

### **Keywords:**

Question Answering, Automated Customer Helpdesk, Vector Space Model.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration .....	i
Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Table of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Abbreviations .....	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Automated Helpdesks .....	1
1.2 Question Answering .....	2
1.3 Hypothesis.....	3
1.4 Contributions .....	3
1.5 Outline of this Thesis.....	4
Chapter 2 Background and related work.....	5
2.1 Information Retrieval.....	5
2.2 Open-Domain QA versus Restricted-Domain QA .....	6
2.2.1 Ontological resources .....	7
2.3 Paradigms for QA.....	8
2.4 Early Work in Restricted-Domain QA .....	9
2.5 State-of-the-art Work in Restricted-Domain QA .....	10
2.6 Choice of the Text Classification Algorithm .....	11
2.6.1 Generative versus Discriminative?.....	12
2.7 Paraphrase Detection .....	12
2.8 Choice of the Ranking Algorithm .....	15
2.8.1 Vector Space Models versus Probabilistic Models .....	15

2.9	Main Considerations of Building the QA System.....	16
Chapter 3 : Philosophy of Approach .....		18
3.1	Understanding the User Query .....	18
3.2	The System Architecture.....	20
3.3	Pattern Writing .....	21
3.4	Data Collection.....	23
3.5	Service Type Detection.....	24
3.5.1	Rule based classifier for dataset formation.....	25
3.5.2	Incorporating prior knowledge to support vector machines.....	27
3.5.3	Exploiting user specific information .....	29
3.5.4	Follow-up dialogs.....	30
3.5.5	Outlier detection .....	31
3.6	Issue Identification .....	32
3.6.1	Usage of dependency parsing.....	32
3.6.2	Text processing.....	34
3.7	Ranking Algorithm.....	36
3.7.1	VSM (Vector Space Model) score .....	36
3.7.2	Bigram score .....	39
3.7.3	Trigram score .....	39
3.7.4	GA optimization .....	40
3.8	Portability to Other Domains .....	40
Chapter 4 : Results And Evaluation.....		42
4.1	Evaluation Metrics.....	42
4.1.1	Mean reciprocal rank (MRR).....	42
4.1.2	F <sub>1</sub> Measure .....	43
4.1.3	Accuracy .....	43
4.2	Results of Cross Validation.....	44
4.3	Service Detection Classifier Performance .....	45



4.4	Outlier Detection .....	45
4.5	GA Optimization .....	46
4.6	Effects of Text Processing .....	48
4.7	Performance of the Live System .....	49
4.8	Discussion .....	50
Chapter 5 : Conclusions .....		52
5.1	Future Work .....	53
Chapter 6 : References .....		54
Chapter 7 : Appendix A - Rule Based Classifier.....		60
7.1	Major Services.....	60
7.1.1	Major Wireless Services .....	61
7.1.2	Major Wired Services .....	62
7.2	Auxiliary Services .....	63
7.3	Control Strategy.....	65
7.4	Sub-dialog Models.....	68



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## TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1: A Question Answering System. ....	2
Figure 3-1: System Architecture.....	20
Figure 4-1: Fitness Landscape for the GA Optimization.....	47
Figure 7-1: Control Strategy of the Classifier.....	67



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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1: Commercial QA Systems Categorization .....	8
Table 2-2: Discriminative versus Generative Models .....	12
Table 2-3: Paraphrase Detection Algorithms .....	13
Table 3-1: Definition of Service Types of the QA System.....	25
Table 4-1: Results of Cross-Validation.....	44
Table 4-2: Classification Accuracies .....	45
Table 4-3: Performance of Outlier Detection.....	45
Table 4-4: Comparison of Text Preprocessing Techniques .....	48
Table 4-5: Categorization of System Responses for Randomly Selected 400 User Questions.....	49
Table 4-6: Success Rates of the Live System .....	49



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