Preface

When we first started planning to write a book on how people would be able to talk in a natural way to their smartphones, devices and robots, we could not have anticipated that the conversational interface would become such a hot topic.

During the course of writing the book we have kept touch with the most recent advances in technology and applications. The technologies required for conversational interfaces have improved dramatically in the past few years, making what was once a dream of visionaries and researchers into a commercial reality. New applications that make use of conversational interfaces are now appearing on an almost weekly basis.

All of this has made writing the book exciting and challenging. We have been guided by the comments of Deborah Dahl, Wolfgang Minker, and Roberto Pieraccini on our initial book proposal. Roberto also read the finished manuscript and kindly agreed to write the foreword to the book.

We have received ongoing support from the team at Springer, in particular Mary James, Senior Editor for Applied Science, who first encouraged us to consider writing the book, as well as Brian Halm and Zoe Kennedy, who answered our many questions during the final stages of writing. Special thanks to Ms. Shalini Selvam and her team at Scientific Publishing Services (SPS) for their meticulous editing and for transforming our typescript into the published version of the book.

We have come to this book with a background in spoken dialog systems, having all worked for many years in this field. During this time we have received advice, feedback, and encouragement from many colleagues, including: Jim Larson, who has kept us abreast of developments in the commercial world of conversational interfaces; Richard Wallace, who encouraged us to explore the world of chatbot technology; Ramón López-Cózar, Emilio Sanchis, Encarna Segarra and Lluís F. Hurtado, who introduced us to spoken dialog research; and José Manuel Molina and Araceli Sanchis for the opportunity to continue working in this area. We would also like to thank Wolfgang Minker, Sebastian Möller, Jan Nouza, Catherine Pelachaud, Giusseppe Riccardi, Huiru (Jane) Zheng, and their respective teams for welcoming us to their labs and sharing their knowledge with us.

Writing a book like this would not be possible without the support of family and friends. Michael would like to acknowledge the encouragement and patience of his wife Sandra who has supported and encouraged him throughout. Zoraida and David would like to thank their parents, Francisco Callejas, Francisca Carrión, Amadeo Griol, and Francisca Barres for being supportive and inspirational, with a heartfelt and loving memory of Amadeo, who will always be a model of honesty and passion in everything they do.

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