

## Telling My Side: "Limited Access" as a "Fishing" Device

If an interactant wants to find out something from a co-interactant, one of the ways of doing so is to directly ask about it. Sometimes this is done, but sometimes what is done is more indirect. Illustrations of both directly asking for information and indirectly soliciting it are contained in the following transcript excerpted from a telephone conversation:

[TC:I:1:2]

- G: ...dju j'see 'me pull us?=  
 +S: ='hhh No:. I wz trying you all day.en the line wz busy fer like 'hours  
 G: Ohh:::,, ohh:::,, 'hhhhh We:::ll,hhh I'm

*Note:* Brackets following citation to transcript materials identify the source of the material for future reference. Transcription symbols were developed by Gail Jefferson, and are explained in the Appendix to this special issue. Arrows point to the location of that material for which the segment is first cited.

- g'nna c'm over in a little while help yer brother ou:t  
 S: Go,:d  
 G: 'hhh Cuz I know he needs some he::lp,  
 ((mournfully))  
 S: 'hh Ye:ah. Yeh he'd menth'that tihday.=  
 G: =M-hm,=  
 +S: 'hhh Uh:m, 'tlk 'hhh who wih yih ta:lking to.

S's turn, "I wz trying you all day.en the line wz busy fer like hours," may be seen as a first attempt to have G disclose the party she was talking to. One way of characterizing that attempt is as a telling or reporting of an experience. If the telling is an attempt to have G volunteer information, it fails to succeed. A few turns later, S directly asks for that information with "Who wih yih ta:lking to."

This paper is concerned with instances such as the first attempt in which a telling of an experience serves as a possible elicitor of information. It will examine instances in which a speaker, in reporting an experience, is providing for the recipient to possibly volunteer some *particular* information. The aim of this paper is to describe the shared orientations that are relied on in producing talk that is designed to elicit just that information that the speaker might want to know; its further aim is to describe the analyses that the speaker makes and assumes the recipient will make for the talk to elicit what is wanted. Finally, the paper will address the question as to why an indirect form of soliciting information may be used instead of a more direct one.

### Participant Orientation to Knowables

Information-eliciting tellings operate with respect to the participants' orienting to two types of knowables, designated in this paper as type 1 and type 2.

Type 1 knowables are those that subject-actors as *subject-actors* have rights and obligations to know. For example, one's name, what one is doing, and so on are assumed to be available to a competent subject-actor.

Type 2 knowables are those that subject-actors are assumed to have access to by virtue of the knowings being occasioned.

Where your friend is, what she or he did yesterday, and the like are accountably available by virtue of the subject-actor's having been told, having figured it out, having seen the friend, and so on. A similar distinction has been described by Sacks (1975): "[We can] notice a difference between the way two different sorts of statements are dealt with. For the first, if, e.g., a little girl comes home and says to her mother, 'Mama, I'm pretty' or 'Mama, I'm smart,' the mother could say, 'Who told you that?.' For the second, if someone says 'I'm tired' or 'I feel lousy,' etc., no such thing is asked. One is responsible for knowing some things on one's own behalf in contrast to the situation in which one is treated as likely to be repeating what another has told him about himself" (p. 72). What Sacks has described as what one is responsible for knowing on his or her own behalf by "monitoring" fits with type 1 knowables. The second sort of assertion about oneself that he described, that is, an assertion hearable as "repeated," would be included in type 2 knowables inasmuch as "being told" is one sort of occasioning circumstance.

In what is called fishing, a speaker makes an assertion of a type 2 knowable that refers to an event about which there is a type 1 knowable for the recipient. The "fishing" assertion is essentially to be recognized as situated—that is, built out of particular, circumstantial details of an other's activity available to the asserter—and as a product of limited access relative to the recipient's type 1 access as subject-actor. Several instances of "fishing" assertions will be used to show the features of situatedness and limited access.

[Fieldnotes]

→S: I saw you drive by last night.

S here proffers a telling in which the recipient played a part as the object of the reported seeing. The knowing that is asserted is the recipient's driving by last night. That knowing is a type 2 knowable for the speaker: J's driving by last night is a knowable to S by virtue of an occasioning—in this case, explicitly formulated as "I saw. . . ." S is speaking as a witness to the event reportedly witnessed and is understood as such. The relevance of an assertion's

situatedness involves the participants' producing and understanding the asserted knowing as relative to the speaker's position of access.

[NB:II:2.-1]

→A: Yer line's been busy.

B: Yeuh my fu(hh)! 'hh my father's wife called me...

A produces a telling in which the recipient's phone state is reported on. The knowing that A asserts is that B's line has been busy. The knowing is a type 2 knowable for the speaker: warrantably knowable to A by virtue of occasioning. The situatedness involves the production and understanding of that telling as a report of one speaking as a party who attempted to call the recipient. When a speaker asserts a type 2 knowing, the recipient may warrantably infer, inquire about, puzzle over, and so forth the occasioning of the knowing.

[Rahmen II]

→Jenny: ...I rahng yehrlier b'tchu w'r ou:t,  
(.)

Ida: Oh: ah musta been et Dez's m:m's.

Jenny produces an assertion in which the recipient's whereabouts are reported on. The knowing that is asserted is glossed as the recipient's having been "out." It is a type 2 knowing for Jenny: Ida's being "out" is a description bound to and occasioned by Jenny's trying to reach her earlier. In and through the telling, Jenny is recognizably speaking as one who attempted calling the recipient.

[Fieldnotes]

→A: You were in Room 252 for a long time this afternoon.

The knowing that is asserted is a type 2 knowing for A: the recipient's reported whereabouts are knowable to A by virtue of occasioning, for example, by watching the room. In and through the telling, A is recognizably speaking as one looking, listening, and so forth from the outside of the room.

[SF:2]

- M: 'hh- 'hnhhh We:11 I talked to: JoAnne  
Rogers uh:hh long distance last night?  
B: Uh huh?  
M: 't·hnhhhhh A:nd uh,hhh she said that uh:  
you guys were having a party Friday.h

The knowing that M asserts—that B is giving a party on Friday—is a type 2 knowing for M. The occasioning, that is, the circumstances of having been told, is described in the telling. In and through the telling, M is speaking as one who “found out” about the party.

The above tellings have as a feature the recognizable situatedness of the speaker. A second related feature of “my side” tellings is that they are oriented to as limited or less than best access relative to the recipient's access.

In producing a telling as a *situated* report—a from-my-point-of-view description—the description intendedly refers to more than what it describes. It is a reference or gloss for an “objective event” on which the reported description gives only a perspective. It is a telling to a recipient who is assumed to have different access to that same event.

We propose that type 2 access is oriented to as “limited” with respect to type 1, subject-actor access, which is treated as authoritative. The witness's or outsider's version is treated as a report of an appearance, as evidence; the final say as to what the event was, however, rests with the subject-actor. Several examples are discussed below to illustrate that feature.

[NB:II:2.-1]

- A: Yer line's been busy  
→B: Yeuh my fu(hh)! 'hh my father's wife  
called me...

In and through the saying of “yer *line's* been busy,” A invokes a counterpart event in correspondence with that which she asserts. “Yer *line's* been busy” references an event to which that which was reported will correspond; for example, the phone was off the hook, you were speaking on the phone, there was trouble in the circuits, and so on. The initial description, produced by a caller trying to get through, is a report of an appearance or manifestation; a search is embarked on for an event that would have that manifestation.

### Corresponding Event

The recipient's work, as subject-actor, involves finding an event that will fit with and account for that which was reportedly experienced by the prior speaker. B's next turn is a telling of an event that corresponds with the prior “my side” telling; B is talking as the one who was within, or part of, the conversation on the phone. The event, then, is authoritatively described by the recipient of the “my side” description, a recipient who is the subject-actor. The prior “my side” description is dealt with by B in finding an event that would manifest itself to A in just the way she described it.

[SF:2]

- Mark: 'hh- 'hnhhh We:11 I talked to: JoAnne  
Rogers uh:hh long distance  
last night?  
Bob: Uh huh?  
Mark: 't·hnhhhhh A:nd uh,hhh she said that  
uh: you guys  
were havin a party Friday.h  
(0.6)  
→Bob: That's corre:ct,h

Mark's relating to Bob the occasion of being told about Bob's party is talk by a speaker with type 2 access to a recipient with type 1 access. In and through the description, Mark is speaking as one who has found out about the party to the one who is giving it. The “as I know it” version delivered by Mark is presented as evidence to suggest that Bob is giving a party; its veracity, though, is for Bob to

confirm or disconfirm. As party giver (subject-actor), he has the final say, the right and obligation to know of his party.

The recipient's orientation to finding an event in correspondence with the "my side" telling is particularly visible when there is a bit of trouble. The following two examples illustrate the recipient's searching for a counterpart event that would account for and fit with what the prior speaker reported.

[Rahmen II]

Jenny: ...I rahng yehrlie b'tchu w'r ou:t,  
(.)  
→Ida: Oh: ah musta been et Dez's mu:m's.

What suggests that Ida was engaged in the proposed search are her slight pauses both before answering and in answering, indicating that what she has come up with is a guessed solution ("musta been").

[N.T.1:1]

A: What time didju guys get back  
(0.8)  
B: We got back (·) it must a bee::n (2.0)  
uh:::mmm (ya) close up et probaly  
five y'probably got back at about (1.0)  
hhhhhhh hhhhhh twunny tuh six.  
(1.0)  
A: I calledju at six thirty.  
(0.5)  
→B: You called at six thirty?=  
A: =Yeah  
B: An nobody was there?  
A: Right  
→B: ·hhh That's strange.  
(0.8)  
→B: Oh I know what it was. Steve came  
there...

A's telling, "I calledju at six thirty," is a type 2 knowing of B's whereabouts through A's attempt to reach him. It is presented as evidence that is discrepant with B's prior report of getting back at twenty to six. The type 2 knowing is heard as a matter to account

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for. The recipient B puzzles over the discrepancy between A's report and his own subject-actor report. The puzzling is satisfied with B's "recalling" an event that would account for A's reported experience.

Telling "my side" when the recipient is an object in the told experience is a speaker's device for casting the recipient into the position of speaking as a subject-actor in the referred-to event. The talk that the recipient does as subject-actor is given the format of a telling as well, that is, it is volunteered. In other words, when a conversant tells "what I know," "my experience," or "my side," the recipient may voluntarily talk about the event. The design, then, of a "my side" telling provides for the recipient to volunteer information, perform a service, make an offer, extend an invitation, remedy an offense, answer an accusation, and so forth without his *directly* being asked, requested, accused, or complained against.

When a conversant tells "my side," the import of the telling, the concerns motivating it, and its treatment are for the recipient to determine. Several examples will be given to illustrate the recipient's work of determining the import and sequential implicativeness of a telling:

[Rahman:1:2:JT:1]

Desk: Hello G \_\_\_\_\_,  
Janet: Ehm good mohrning. eh it's Missiz  
R \_\_\_\_\_ heuh, I called in on  
Thuhrsday: tih see: if uh I c'd  
make en appointment t'see  
Mistuh T \_\_\_\_\_,  
(1.2)  
→Janet: An', I haven't huhrd anything'n I  
wz wondring if: uh:m I c'd possibly  
see in one day next week.

Through the formulation "I haven't huhrd anything" Janet is referring to an event by describing it "as I know it," that is, giving "my side." The event that that description is recognizably referring to is one that would fit with and account for that which Janet reports, one formulated from a subject-actor perspective.

It is of particular interest that there are a collection of possi-

ble events that could fit with and account for the "my side" report; for example, Mr. T deliberately did not attempt to return the call, Mr. T negligently did not return the call, Mr. T tried to reach Janet but could not get through, Mr. T left a message for Janet that she never got, Mr. T never heard about Janet's attempt to reach him, and so on. With respect to their status as "complainables" or "offendables," those possibilities are not equivalent. We would argue that the design of the "my side" telling poses this problem for the recipient: to determine what the co-interactant is suggesting or meaning in and through describing "my side." What the "I haven't huhrd anything" is being said for is a determination made by the recipient. Since what Janet says provides the relevance of what is *not* said, it is what is inferred or suggested that Mr. T responds to.

The recipient's determination of what is not being said uses the fact that it has not been said. A "my side" telling is intended to be heard in terms of an unformulated event that is being treated as appropriately referred to in that manner, that is, as better unsaid.

"Presenting the evidence" is a participant's way of having the recipient respond to a complaint that never need be made explicit. If Janet suspects that Mr. T neglected to return her call, she may opt to give "her side"; rather than voicing her suspicion; that provides the recipient a chance to give his side with no accusation or complaint on the floor.

Shortly thereafter in the above phone conversation, the receptionist transfers the call to Mr. T. He starts the conversation with Janet (J) as follows:

T: Hello::,  
 J: Hello?  
 →T: Ah tried tuh ring you on: Thuhrsdih  
 evening.b't ah couldn' get'ny  
 reply::.

After the greetings, T immediately reports his attempt to call Janet. In describing his attempt, he is proffering an account that is compatible with the prior 'evidence' (Janet's "my side" telling) but clearly alternative to the event "suggested" by the telling, that is, that he didn't attempt to call her. The event that he reports has a

different status with respect to a charge of irresponsibility and in that way seems to be orienting to the implicit charge in the "my side" telling. That Janet was possibly complaining or accusing is for the recipient to see and respond to. Accusing and complaining, then, when they are done with "my side" tellings, are treated as "sensitive" activities, that is, they are better left unsaid though not undone.

The matter of determining what is being said in "my side" telling may be such that the recipient comes up with the *possible* rather than the definite concerns of his or her co-interactant. Take, for instance, the following "my side" telling:

[NB:II:2.-1]

B: Hello::,  
 A: HI:::  
 B: Oh:hi::'ow are you Agne::s,  
 A: Fi:ne. Yer line's been busy.

What motivates the saying of "Yer line's been busy" is a determination that the recipient makes. Certainly one possibility is that it is "merely" A's sharing of her experience of trying to get through to B. Such a telling may also be done as an elicitor of information, for example, Were you talking on the phone and with whom. Those possibilities do not exhaust what can be heard as possibly "behind" the telling. This telling, which formulates the "my side" report as a product of the speaker's *repeated* attempts to get through (note the tense of the description), is hearable as a comment on the length of time the line was busy, as a kind of mild complaint. With a "my side" telling, what a recipient may find as even possibly suggested may be responded to in his or her own telling.

[NB:II:2.-1]

A: ...Yer line's been busy.  
 →B: Yeuh my fu(hh) .hh my father's wife  
 called me. .hh So when she calls  
 me::, .hh I always talk fer a long  
 time. Cuz she c'n afford it'n I  
 can't. hhhh heh .ehhhhhh

In the course of describing the phone call, B, speaking as a party in the conversation described (a subject-actor), not only provides the information of whom she was speaking with but accounts for the length of the call. The accounting is done as part of the elaboration within her telling.

To say that the recipient makes determinations of what may be concerns behind the "my side" telling is not to say that those concerns will necessarily be satisfied. For example, if information is being possibly sought, the recipient has options. One option involves speaking as a subject-actor to the action referred to in the prior "my side" telling. But rather than elaborating on the circumstances, the subject-actor "merely" confirms and indicates that there is a corresponding event that accounts for that which was presented by the prior speaker without describing what it was:

[Fieldnotes]

- A: I tried reaching you last night after your seminar but you weren't home  
 →B: Oh yeah. That's right.

Another strategy available to recipients is to treat the "my side" telling as a telling of an experience and respond to it as news:

[TC:I:1;2]

- S: ...I wz trying you all day,en the line wz busy fer like hours  
 →G: Ohh:::,,, ohh:::,,, ...

In this option, the recipient does not speak as a subject-actor in the event but as if he were not a party with access.

I would argue that a "my side" telling provides for the relevance of "your side" and that when such a telling is not elaborated on or employed as a perspective in the answering, it can be inferred that a "withholding" has occurred. That kind of withholding is, of course, as implicit as the "my side" telling is.

### Social Organization of "My Side" Tellings

What social organization is being reflected when interactants produce "my side" descriptions to elicit information, to beget invitations and offers, to confront co-interactants with complaints, and so forth? What is behind treating such matters as requests, and complaints, as preferably not directly said but rather as delicately and circuitously handled? The use of this design, in my view, reflects the participant's orientation to a constraint bearing on what is *not* being said as preferably not said. With respect to proposing an operating constraint, the manifestation and power of such a constraint would be of prime importance.

Take, for example, what is known to be a "norm" in some circles: that the party giver and the party giver alone has the right and obligation to invite the guests to his or her party and that would-be guests should not invite themselves or ask to be invited. However, when the situated activity of asking to be invited to a party is considered, a range of possible orientations might be imagined. One possibility is that if someone found herself not invited to a party that a friend was giving, an orientation to the propriety of the host's inviting may allow no recourse but to be offended and/or not go. Another possibility is that if someone found himself not invited, he might call up the host and invite himself. In the first case, there is certainly a sense of "norm" or constraint, inasmuch as a course of action either is not even considered or, if considered, is seen as improper. In the second case (as it was characterized), there is no evidence of any oriented-to constraint on inviting oneself, that is, as it was exhibited in and through the action taken. What is suggested here is that a way of looking at norms or constraints is in terms of the way they are manifested and exhibited through situated behaviors.

Telling "my side" seems to fall between the two possibilities suggested above. That is, while a call may be motivated to get the caller invited to a party that he or she had not been invited to, in and through the fishing for the invitation the caller is orientating to the at least slightly inappropriate or improper character of "inviting oneself" on this occasion. In simultaneously not inviting oneself and providing multiple opportunities for the host to prof-

fer an invitation, the caller is displaying an orientation to the matter of who properly invites, while nevertheless "working around" that propriety.

Consider the instances presented in this paper in which "my side" tellings may be motivated by a concern to find out who the recipient was talking to, where the recipient was, and the like. We would argue that with respect to an orienting to privacy ("your business is your business"), this design lies somewhere in between absolutely respecting that right—for example, not considering asking, probing, or "fishing" ("if he wants to say, he will") and orienting to sharing ("your business is my business"). With the "my side" telling, the participant treats whom you were talking to, where you were, what you were doing, and so on as your affair, and your business to tell if you so choose, while also proposing that telling as a relevant next. The "my side" tellings display an orientation to and acknowledgment of your right to privacy while not fully respecting it to the extent of no recourse.

The use of this design, then, reflexively treats the implicit action as preferably not said. It reflects an orientation by the participant that the particular implicit social action performed by the speaker on this occasion is improper and/or it proposes that the appropriate action is performed by the recipient's initiating or voluntarily performing it.

A final point. Studying constraints by looking at situated behaviors opens up an important analytic possibility. That is, in examining extended sequences, we have noticed that successive attempts may employ formats and designs different from earlier ones (see first fragment cited). When we track interests as they are materialized, for example, attempts to find something out or to get invited, we may find that early attempts display the participant's orientation to propriety ("fishing"), whereas successive attempts may have that orientation relaxed and take the form of direct requests. Such studies would treat as problematic the actual relevance and power of proposed constraints.

#### Reference

- Sacks, H. "Everyone Has to Lie." In M. Sanchez and B. Blount (Eds.), *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Use*. New York: Academic Press, 1975.