

## **FABRICATED IGNORANCE: THE SEARCH FOR GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY**

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### **Abstract**

In this article I examine a negotiating strategy observed in telephone calls made by (prospective) clients to the Latin American call centre operation of a multinational company specialised in holiday time-shares. Through this strategy, which I have termed 'fabricated ignorance', the (prospective) clients show an unawareness of how the system works in order to gain access to information, services, or benefits that they are not, in theory, entitled to. They do so, among other things, by formulating pre-sequences designed to address a gap in knowledge as a way of dealing with the possibility of their requests being rejected. Essentially, the callers approach the interactions displaying only partial knowledge of the system and manage the conversations in such a way that the agents will be induced to have a false notion of what is going on.

I contend that service operationalization, which positions the (prospective) clients as information-disadvantaged relative to the agents, coupled with unfair commercial practices leads them to pursue ways of counterbalancing such imbalances providing thus fertile ground for the emergence of this strategy. Fabricated ignorance is a (prospective) client's way of sizing up opportunities. Sizing up entails a participant's assessment of where the interaction is leading, an estimation of the extent to which is conducive to meeting the participant's goals and the steps that might be needed to achieve them. One avenue for achieving this aim is judging the moment in the encounter when it might be potentially more convenient to make their move and to act out an uninformed stance.

**Keywords:** Negotiating strategy; Commercial practices; Mediated service encounters; Interactional resources; Information-(dis)advantaged; Interactional pragmatics.

### **1. Introduction**

In this day and age when we think about unsolicited telephone calls to our landline, mobile or work numbers, telemarketing calls spring to mind - at least in the Western world. The picture many of us have is that of the pragmatically incompetent computerised call to which we can put the phone down straight away without any feelings of remorse. A more pervasive image is that of persistent telemarketers who are prepared to accommodate to our schedule, to almost any schedule, as a result of service offshoring and the culture of 'twenty-four-hours-a-day-seven-days-a-week' to sell us a product which we may not even be remotely interested in. A less common image, albeit not less important, is that of the (potential) consumers at the other end of the line and the resources they mobilise to deal with this and other type of service calls.

This article examines communicative behaviour from the other side of the coin. It analyses a strategy instigated by clients to obtain a service, product and/or benefit to which they are not entitled from a time-share company. The strategy was observed in 19 out of 36 telephone calls made by (prospective) clients to the Latin American call centre operation of the Company. The Company offers its services primarily over the phone and at a pan-Latin American level. The conversational participants are mainly native speakers of Spanish who typically come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different standard varieties of the same basic language. Communication between the agents and the clients is thus, mostly, intercultural. Service offers and their availability are principally stored in a computer network system to which the agents rather than the (prospective) clients have full access and client interface is primarily operationalized over the telephone. The agents' main interactional goal is to achieve as many telephone sales as possible by managing access to this information as they see fit. In the light of this, the (prospective) clients are information-disadvantaged with respect to the agents who have operational knowledge at their disposal and are thus in a position to guarantee or restrain access to the Company's services. With this in mind, the agents adopt a gatekeeping role as part and parcel of their ultimate role as salespersons.

Through this strategy, which, drawing on Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, I have termed 'fabricated ignorance', (prospective) clients show an unawareness of how the system works in order to gain access to information, services, or benefits that they are not, in theory, entitled to under their agreement. The clients do so, among other things, by formulating pre-sequences designed to address a gap in knowledge as a way of dealing with the possibility of their requests being rejected. Essentially, and as it becomes evident later in the conversations, clients approach the interaction displaying only partial knowledge of the system and manage the conversation in a way so that the agents will be induced to have a false notion of what is going on.

I have selected a strategy pursued by the (prospective) clients as the general literature on negotiation shows an orientation towards selling rather than buying strategies in the sense of the activities that clients pursue to obtain best value for money. The strategy I explore here is dependent on the environment in which it occurs, in this case mediated service encounters, where participants do not have access to paralinguistic cues. The absence of paralinguistic cues provides some of the right conditions for its emergence given that the risks of it being interpreted as a client 'fabrication' are reduced by the affordances of the medium. Similarly, if the Company operationalized its services differently, there might not be any need for customers to engage in it. I argue that fabricated ignorance is culturally framed. That it is embedded in a cultural context where it is not unusual to persist, where the value of 'yes' and 'no' are often open to negotiation, where there is always an expectation of flexibility in doing things and where consumer rights and trading standards are not as actively regulated as in other parts of the world.

The analysis is based on four calls in which fabricated ignorance was observed. It seeks to contribute to our knowledge of pragmatics in general and, more specifically, to Spanish business talk. After discussing the relevant background needed to appreciate the strategy and presenting the methodology adopted, the article concentrates on the analysis of the calls before offering concluding remarks.

## **2. Background and methods**

Clients of the Company have bought the use of a property, typically a holiday resort unit, for an allotted period of time. The Company offers its clientele the possibility of exchanging their resort unit at one of the various world-wide resorts to which it is affiliated. Clients of this time-share company pay an annual fee. In return for this, they deposit their allotted period of time, for instance, one or two weeks of accommodation in a given resort unit, in the Company's database in order to have the possibility of exchanging it for accommodation at one of the various other resorts that the Company has worldwide. An exchange can only be found once the clients' allotted time has been deposited with the Company and their membership is up to date. Once booked the units and/or the time slots cannot be changed. Changes are subject to a further exchange fee unless the clients can demonstrate that extraordinary personal circumstances prevent them from making use of them (i.e. the death of an immediate family member).

The four calls I examine were recorded as part of a wider study on mediated business interactions between speakers of different varieties of Spanish for which circa 80 hours of telephone conversations were gathered. Both agents and clients are aware that their calls may be recorded and monitored for quality control procedures. For ethical reasons, the name of the company and that of the participants are fictitious. Besides the recorded calls, interviews were carried out with call centre staff, call centre documents were analysed and, non-participant observation including what is known as silent listening conducted (see Márquez Reiter 2011 for more details). In this article, however, I will primarily focus on some of the calls in which the strategy was observed and on essential information on the interactional context which the participants have and the reader will need in order to fully appreciate the analysis.

The analysis of the telephone calls draws on Goffman (i.e. frames, alignment, fabrication and stance), a range of resources from pragmatics (e.g. indirectness, implicature, social activities, pragmatolinguistic formulations) and some tools of analysis from Conversation Analysis given the unrivalled analytic attention that telephone conversations have received from a talk-in-interaction perspective and the rich body of knowledge that now exists on the topic. The examination focuses on extended conversational fragments including interactional aspects which may, at first, be seen as partially relevant. This responds to the way in which the (prospective) clients approached the interactions in which the strategy was observed. Instead of offering the main reason for the call in the anchor position (Schegloff 1986), the clients proffered what looks like the principal motive behind the call in the form of a pre-sequence designed to address a gap in knowledge. The agents offered a response and proceeded to take the clients' details. Immediately after locating the relevant clients' history, the agents elaborated on the original response given and the topic was typically bounded, thus creating a closing-implicative environment. It is here that the clients demonstrated their understanding and knowledge of the system thus bringing to light the fact that the uniformed stance adopted in the preceding sequences of the interaction was feign.

## **3. Analysis**

Across the 19 calls where fabricated ignorance was observed, the clients approached the interactions by formulating a preliminary (i.e. a general request for information) to the

main reason for the call in the anchor position (Schegloff 1986). After a series of interrogative questions aimed at locating the clients' records, the clients elaborated on the preliminary offered in the opening sequence, thus proffering what looked like the main reason for the call (i.e. yet another request for information) and repeated this process contingent on the information received. Throughout the opening and middle sequences the clients claimed not to know or understand the Company's rules and/or of the way in which services are operationalized to varying degrees. Upon learning from the agent that their requests could not be granted, the participants signalled, to different degrees, their wish to move to a closing. At this conversational juncture, the (prospective) clients reacted in two ways. In 7 out of 19 calls, once it became evident that they would not obtain the service they wanted, the clients revealed their full awareness of how the system works in the form of a complaint which the agents truncated by resuming the closing sequence and bringing the interaction to a close. And, in 12 out of the 19 calls the clients moved out of the closing by making a further enquiry which opened up new dimensions of relevance. The enquiry constituted a second reason for the call and it is here while requesting and receiving this new information that they revealed that they were fully-versed in the Company's rules and regulations and that, therefore, the uninformed stance maintained throughout the interaction was a strategy to obtain a service they knew all along they were not entitled to receive.

### 3.1. *Complaining as a last resource*

The caller in the first conversational excerpt used to be a member of the Company. As it transpires towards the end of the conversation he became disillusioned with the way in which the Company offers its services and stopped his patronage. He now telephones the Company to find out if there are units available in Miami at a given time slot (see (3) L.105-6). Contingent on this and on whether the Company can guarantee them, he will consider renewing his membership (see (3) L. 102-3 and 109-13). According to the Company's procedures, slots can only be found for existing clients who are up to date with their membership fee. Therefore, the caller has not got any rights to receive the information requested. As it emerges later on in the exchange, that is, in the closing sequence, the caller was painfully aware of this (see complaint at (3) L. 109-13).

Despite the caller's misgivings regarding the Company's procedures, methods which may be deemed misleading and, therefore, commercially unfair, he contacts the Company again. This is because purchasing accommodation through the Company, should the desired unit and slot be available, is likely to offer better value for money than doing so independently.<sup>1</sup>

#### (1) **Excerpt 1** [10:1] T: telephone agent, C: client

- 1 T: Gracias por comunicarse con Vacaciones Inolvidables:(.) mi  
 2 nombre es Susana en qué lo puedo ayuda:r,  
*Thank you for calling Holidays to Remember (. ) my*  
*name is Susana how can I he:lp you,*  
 3 C: Sí::.. buenos días.

<sup>1</sup> At the time when the data were recorded, the Company had the biggest slice of the time-share market and a large portfolio of products. This, among other factors, allowed it to offer competitive prices.

- Yes:::. good morning.
- 4 T: Buenos días.  
Good morning.
- 5 C: E:::h ustedes aparte de-del tema de intercambio y eso tienen  
6 e:::h e::::::h bue-alquilan. no, eh:ps-a ver cómo se dice:  
7 tienen: oferta de hoteles. no,  
U:::m besides the-the issue of exchanges and that  
U:::m u:::m wel-you rent. right, um:ps-let see how do you say:  
You: have a portfolio of hotels, right,
- 8 T: Sí:::. me da su número de socio por favor, (.1) si lo  
9 recuerda↑  
Yes:::. Can you give me your account number please, (.1) if you  
remember it↑

As illustrated at lines 5-7 in (1) above, once the opening is achieved the caller proffers the reason for the call in the anchor position (Schegloff 1986). The reason for the call is a request for information. It is formulated and treated by the participants as a polar question (see, for example, Gelyukens 1988), as shown by the agent's confirming answer at L.8. The caller formulates it tentatively. This is observed by the presence of hesitations (*e:::h e::::::h*), self-corrections (*bue-alquilan* 'wel-you rent'), false starts (*eh:ps-a*), use of reformulators (*a ver cómo se dice* 'let see how do you say') preceding the request as well as by its syntactic realisation as a tag and the rather basic nature of the information being sought. The caller thus displays right from the start relatively less knowledge than the agent. Put differently, he indexes his epistemic stance (see, for example, Heritage 2012), in this case his relative state of knowledge with regard to the type of services the Company offers in his capacity as information-seeker (*aparte del tema del intercambio, alquilan hoteles* 'besides the-the issue of exchanges', 'you rent hotels'). In the design of her reaction the agent displays what she expects the caller to know by virtue of the fact that the number dialled is given to clients and they are generally aware of the Company's (basic) portfolio of services as this is part and parcel of the sales pitch they have been part of prior to signing an agreement. The agent's response is prosodically marked (i.e. a prolonged affirmative particle with falling intonation) and oriented to the caller's enquiry as counter to expectation. This is also illustrated by the way in which the agent rephrases her request for the caller's membership number: A conditional with sharp intonation rise with which she externalises her 'presumed inward state' (Goffman 1978), namely that this may not be a call from a client with an active account. This allows her to sound the terrain for a potential sales pitch (see (2) L.53-55): A membership renewal (see (2) below).

After 30 lines (omitted) in which the participants go through a series of interrogative questions regarding the membership number and it becomes clear that the caller's account is no longer active, the agent offers a response to the caller's reason for the call (L. 42-3): A preliminary (Schegloff 2007) to the caller's preliminary (L.5-7) and recycles it (L. 45, L. 47-8, L.51) before launching into the sales proper (L.53-55), as illustrated in (2) below. The agent designs her preliminary as sales-implicative. With it she displays what she expects the caller to know given that he used to be a member of the Company and brings to the fore the essential condition for his request to be processed: having an active account. The implicit way with which she reiterates that the client's membership had elapsed (i.e. she informs the client that his membership was cancelled L.45, provides the year in which the cancellation took place L. 47-8 and an assessment of the time elapsed L. 51) could potentially be interpreted as a fishing

(Pomerantz 1980) attempt. In other words, as an avenue for eliciting the reason(s) why he had stopped his patronage and use information to persuade the client of the benefits of renewing his membership. Upon hearing what should, in theory, be news to him given the uninformed stance with which he approached the encounter the caller does not display that new information has been received. Instead, he reacts by offering laxed acknowledgment tokens (L.44, 46, 50). The caller thus indicates that he is not aligned with the agent's interactional project, albeit he does not display an explicit understanding of his request being denied, thus still maintaining his uninformed stance.

Having covered the ground from which to launch into the sales proper, the agent links her ensuing activity to the preceding talk (*y bueno* 'and so'). She offers a response (L.53-56) to the caller's request (L. 5-7) by proposing a solution to address his needs: to have his membership renewed. Essentially, the agent seizes the opportunity to turn an inbound call into an outbound call.<sup>2</sup>

**(2) Excerpt 1 continued [10:1] T: telephone agent, C: client**

- 42 T: Sí. Bien (.) ése es su número de socio. Señor Daniel usted  
 43 hace mu::cho que no trabaja con nosotros,  
*Yes.ok (.) that is your member's number. Mr Daniel you  
 Haven't worked with us for lo:::ng,*  
*Yes. Ok(.) that is your account number. Mr Daniel you  
 Haven't used our services for a lo:::ng time,*
- 44 C: Sí.  
*Yes.*
- 45 T: Bien (.) La membresía está cancela::da,  
*Ok (.) the membership is cance::lled,*
- 46 C: .(bua).  
 47 T: Sí, (.) desde el dos mil tre::s= desde octubre del dos mil tres,  
 48 *Yes, (.) since two thousand and three=since October two thousand  
 and three,*  
 49 (.)
- 50 C: .Mjm..  
 51 T: O sea que hace tiempo ya.  
*So it's time already.  
 So it has been a while.*
- 52 C: Sí.  
*Yes.*
- 53 T: Y: bue::no. Nosotros lo que tenemos que hacer antes que nada  
 54 sería renovar la membresía,= o sea volver a activar la cuenta  
 55 para que usted pueda seguir operando con nosotros. (.) usted  
 56 sigue siendo propietario del complejo::,  
*And: s:o. What we need to do before anything else  
 Would be to renew the membership,= that is to activate the  
 Account so that you can continue working with us.*
- 57 C: Sí sí sí.  
*Yes yes yes.*

After 38 lines (omitted) in which the agent elaborates on the sales pitch by describing the benefits of the membership renewal offered and how it works but fails to elicit an assessment from the caller, the latter reveals his intention. He acknowledges how the system works with what at first glance looks like a pre-closing token (*está bien*). This,

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<sup>2</sup> Inbound calls are typically used to administer product/service support and deal with enquiries, whereas outbound calls constitute the Company's main sales vehicle.

however, is not followed by a first close component. Instead, the caller utters an enquiry tinged with the flavour of complaint given the nature of the preceding talk (i.e. an active account is needed in order to operate with the Company) and its implicature i.e. the Company gives the facts needed to make an informed choice to act wisely and responsibly once prospects become clients, as illustrated at L. 95-96 in (3) below

**(3) Excerpt 1 continued [10:1] T: telephone agent, C: client**

- 95 C: Está bien. Y:: y::: y: se puede hacer consultas o antes hay  
96 que hacerse socio,  
*Alright. And:: and::: and: can enquiries be made or do you  
have to become a member beforehand,*
- 97 T: Me puede hacer algún tipo de consulta sí. pero lo que sucede  
98 es que es todo hipotético lo que vayamos a hablar porque  
99 como le comento no puedo mover la cuenta.  
*You can ask me some kind of queries yes.but what happens  
Is that everything we would talk about is hypothetical because  
As I was saying to you I cannot move your account.*
- 100 C: Bueno. Listo entonces=No hacemos nada.[( )]  
*OK.Fine then=we won't do anything. [(.)]*
- 101 T: [ Pero] por qué no  
renueva,  
*[but]why don't you  
Renew your membership,*
- 102 C: Porque::: no tengo ganas de gastar plata inútilmente si no  
103 tengo la respuesta:::antes,  
*Because::: I don't want to waste money if I  
Don't have the answer beforehand,*
- 104 T: Pero qué buscaba señor Daniel,  
*But what are you looking for Mr Daniel,*
- 105 C: Yo quiero viajar a Miami:: e::n la semana de:::l dieciocho  
106 al veintitrés de noviembre.  
*I want to travel to Miami:: the week of from the eighteenth  
To the twenty third of November.*
- 107 T: Y bueno.↓ eso hay lugar lo que pasa que habría que::: como  
108 le comenté a:::h=  
*And well. ↓there is availability then the thing is you would  
have to as I was telling you=*
- 109 C: =Bueno e:::h Lo que pasa es que::: yo no sé hace cuánto  
110 que usted trabaja ahí, pero no sabe las veces que me pasó  
111 hay lugar y después cuando sos socio no hay más lugar(.) o  
112 había lugar ju::sto en otra sema::na entonces no(.) por eso  
113 es que no:::.=  
*=well Um:: the thing is that::: I don't know how long  
You have been working there, but you have no idea how many  
times there was availability and then when you are a member  
there is no more availability(.) of there was availability  
just during a different time slot so no (.) this is why  
I don't:::.=*
- 114 T: =bueno Daniel= Piénselo y cualquier cosa nos llama. Si,  
115 =ok Daniel=think about it and if you change your mind call us.  
*right,*

Although it generates a modulated reaction from the agent, she does not budge as far as the caller's request to search the database is concerned. As a result, the caller proffers a

first close component ((*bueno listo entonces* Button 1987; Márquez Reiter 2011) followed by a closing-implicative comment (*no hacemos nada* ‘we won’t do anything’ L. 100). This he formulates in the second person plural (*hacemos*) thus alluding to the fact that neither he nor she will achieve their interactional goal.

Faced with the prospect of immediate interactional cessation representing the loss of a potential sale and her inability to win the client back, the agent formulates what turns out to be an idle question: An inquiry as to the reasons why the caller will not renew his membership. With this, she leaves the door open for the caller to expand on his preliminary complaint. At L. 102-3 the caller offers an expansion of the complaint proffered earlier (L. 95-6) by pointing out the unfairness of the commercial practice in question. In so doing, however, he shows his hand (i.e. his membership renewal is contingent on the availability of slots in his desired destination). In other words, he offers a window into the main reason for the call, signalling a rather different epistemic stance from that displayed from the initial stages of the opening.

In a final attempt to recruit the caller, and in what constitutes a move out of the closing, the agent finally enquires as to the caller’s needs (L.104). The caller responds (L. 105-6) and the agent attempts to entice him by confirming the availability of what the caller requires, albeit she still maintains her position by making product information and availability contingent on him activating the account (107-8). This triggers a full-fledged complaint by the caller. In an affiliative-seeking contribution the caller initiates a telling of his past experience with the Company by trying to bring the agent into his realm of experience. He does this by exonerating her from any possible accusation of blame or wrong doing in her capacity as agent (see *yo no sé hace cuánto usted trabaja allí* ‘I don’t know how long you have been working there’) and appealing to her listening ear via the uttering *pero no sabe* (‘you don’t know’). With *pero no sabe* he highlights the agent’s lack of knowledge with respect to his past commercial experience with the Company and attempts to raise interest in his ensuing contribution. In spelling out the complaint, however, he shows that the different levels of epistemic stances indexed from the beginning to the middle of the encounter were fabricated to gain access to a service that he knew he was not entitled to have. Further support for this can be found in the last turn construction unit of his contribution (L. 112-3) which he initiates with the causal particle (*por eso*) marking a logical connection between the preceding and current talk, hence highlighting his reluctance to renew his membership on the basis of his negative bad experience with the Company. This revelation, as it were, leads the agent to resume the closing in a latched contribution (L.114).

Similar behaviour is observed across the other 6 calls in which callers uttered pre-sequences to address a gap in information in the reason for the call slot for diverse business reasons and revealed that they knew that they were not entitled to receive the service they were telephoning for in the closing sequence in the form of a complaint.

The client in (4) below had already booked and paid for an accommodation unit at a specific time slot. He now contacts the Company to request a change in the time slot without having to pay the further exchange fee for which he is liable. The call is initially placed by an employee of the hotel where the client will be staying. Upon learning from the Company that the client needs to pay a further exchange fee in order to change the time slot, the employee of the hotel transmits this information to the client and as per the client’s request transfers the call to him.

(4) Excerpt 2 [14:3] E= employee of hotel, A=agent, C=client

- 18 E: Señor Vargas,  
*Mr Vargas,*
- 19 C: Sí,  
*Yes,*
- 20 E: Me dice la señorita de Vacaciones Inolvidables que para poder  
21 hacerlo debe cancelar otra cuota de intercambio a no ser que se  
22 trate del fallecimiento de un miembro de su familia.  
*The lady from Holidays to Remember tells me that to be able  
To do it you<sup>U</sup> have to pay another exchange fee unless it  
Relates to the death of a family member.*
- 23 C: A ver.(.) Páseme con ella pues si es tan amable.  
*Let me see.(.) Put<sup>U</sup> me through if you will.*
- 24 T: Aló sí:, (.) buenas tardes,  
*Hello yes:, (.) good afternoon,*
- 25 C: Sí amiga. estamos: e::h que- queríamos saber si se pueden  
26 cambiar las semanas de estadía,  
*Yes my friend. We're: u::m wa- we wanted to know if  
Slots can be changed,*
- 27 T: Claro pero:: si ya han sido reservadas, hay que volver a  
28 ingresar la cuota de intercambio.  
*Sure but:: if they have already been booked, you have to  
Pay the exchange fee.*
- 29 C: =es que es un inconveniente que no estaba en el programa:.  
30 ya yo pagué o sea. ya me cobraron ustedes e::n- e::n el  
31 banco. o sea yo ya pagué los trescientos mil y pico de  
32 bolívares. yo lo que quiero saber si se puede hacer,  
*=the thing is that we have a problem that was not in our  
plans:  
I have already paid so. You have already charged m:y m:y  
Bank. So I already paid the three hundred and so  
Bolívares. What I want to know is if it can be done,*
- 33 T: Claro. lo que pasa que primero tenemos que verificar si hay  
34 disponibilidad o no(.) cosa que es difícil tan sobre la  
35 fecha. pero además una vez que se cambia la fecha o el  
36 destino el sistema automáticamente nos pide: que se ingrese  
37 nuevamente la cuota de [intercambio]  
*Sure. The thing is that we first need to check that if  
There is availability or not (.) something which is difficult  
this  
Late. But besides this once the time or accommodation slot  
Is changed the system automatically requires that we: enter  
The exchange [fee]*
- 38 C: [O sea tengo que] volver a pagar.  
*[so I have to] pay again.*
- 39 T: =Claro.  
*=of course.*
- 40 C: Sí:::, yo no puedo::.. no puedo pagar trescientos mil y pico  
41 de bolívares otra ve:z.  
*Yes:::, I cannot::: I cannot pay three hundred and so  
Bolívares aga:in.*
- 42 T: Claro claro. lo que [pasa que realmente]  
*Of course of course. What [happens really]*
- 43 C: [es muy difícil] me ha pasado varias veces  
44 con ustedes y la verdad que no gano una siempre:: hay  
45 ese problema.  
*[is very difficult] this has happened to*

*me many times with you and to be honest I can never:: win  
there's  
Always that problem.*

In line with the behaviour observed in (1), the client utters a request for information in the reason for the call slot in the form of a preliminary (L. 26-26) to the main request (L.29-32). The preliminary is formulated with a polar question designed to address a gap in procedural knowledge, information which the agent had already divulged to the employee of the hotel where the client will be staying and that we, unlike the agent who did not have access to the conversation between them, know was conveyed to him. The agent's response at L.27-8 is designed on the basis of the information gathered earlier from the hotel employee and explicitly states the procedure to be followed for the required change to be effected. On hearing what he already knows, the client recycles the request for information, albeit this time preceded by an explanation aimed at justifying his request: he has already paid for the slot but is now facing an unforeseen problem. With this, he implicitly requests that the agent change the time slot without explicitly asking her to do so. The agent thus explains the relevant procedures and paints a picture of herself as having her hands tied with respect to the system's restrictions. In view of this, the client displays his understanding of the rules (L.38) before revealing in a closing-implicative complaint (L.43-45) that he was fully aware of the restrictions in place as this had happened to him before.

The above examples illustrate the pattern observed in 7 calls where the clients feign ignorance. They approached the interactions maintaining an uninformed stance with a view to gaining a service that they knew all along they are not entitled to. They did so by uttering preliminaries to the main reason for the call in the anchor position (Schegloff 1986) so as to induce the agents to have a false notion of what is going on. The preliminaries were formulated by means of polar questions and were recycled when offering the main reason for the call when the (prospective) clients sensed that the agents were not aligning with their project. Once it became clear that their requests could not be granted, the (prospective) clients proffered a closing-implicative complaint. The complaints revealed an informed stance with respect to the way in which the Company operates and hence that the uninformedness earlier displayed was strategically feign. This triggered the agents to resume the closing.

### **3.2. *Moving out of the closing***

The next two calls I examine are illustrative of the pattern observed in 12 out of the 19 calls in which the strategy was prevalent.<sup>3</sup> In the first call, the client manages to obtain her interactional goal but the in the second one she does not.

The client in the (5) has already booked and paid for a unit of accommodation and now telephones the Company to see if there is another unit in the same, or nearby, resort for the corresponding period without having to deposit another week. A prerequisite for conducting the search is the depositing of weeks. This is something the client does not wish to do unless she is certain that there is another unit available in the resort; otherwise she would have to deposit a week which has an expiry date not knowing when she might be able to make use of it, if at all.

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed analysis of these two calls the reader is referred to Márquez Reiter (2011).

As illustrated at lines 8-17, the client telephones the call centre to report that the accommodation voucher has not been received and thus implicitly requests that it is dispatched. In order to deal with the client's request, the agent initiates a series of interrogative questions to locate the client's details and history in the system. Once the relevant information is obtained, the agent confirms that the system shows that a reservation has been made (line 39). She thus implies that the voucher should have been received and proceeds to place a (new) request, reassuring the client that it will reach its intended destination (see lines 44-46 and contingency questions which follow)

**(5) Excerpt 3 [2:4]C= client; A = agent**

- 8 C: Tengo hecho una reserva:, que ya me la adjudicaron porque es  
9 más ya la pagué. para el veinti tres de septiembre (.) al  
10 treinta de septiembre (.)  
*I have a reservation:,that has already been allocated to me  
because what is more I've already paid for it for the twenty  
third of September (.)to the thi:rtieth of September(.*
- 11 A: Sí.  
*Yes.*
- 12 C: en Bahía Manzano.  
*in Bahía Manzano.*
- 13 A: Sí.  
*Yes.*
- 14 C: =Villa la Angostura.  
*=Villa la Angostura.*
- 15 A: =Sí.  
*=Yes.*
- 16 C: pero nunca me llegó el voucher,  
*but I never received the voucher.*  
17 (.2)
- 18 A: Hace cuánto que hizo la reserva,  
*When did you<sup>u</sup> book it,*  
(...) (contingency questions)(then customer is put on hold  
while the agent looks for the reservation in the system)
- 39 A: Tiene acá una reserva hecha bueno ya le hacemos el reclamo  
40 entonces de la reserva:. (.) e:h [para:,]  
*You have here a reservation okay we will request then the  
reservation for you<sup>u</sup>straight away(.)u:m[for:,]*
- 41 C: [Claro,] en realidad el día  
42 ocho de febrero, fue: e:m yo no llame a éste número llamé al  
43 cero ochocientos lo que pasa que ahora lo había perdido,=  
*[of course,] in fact the  
eighth of February, it was um: I didn't call this number I  
called 0800 what's happened is that now I had lost it,=*
- 44 A: = No hay problema igualmente ya le va a estar llegando la  
45 dirección correcta. es calle treinta y cinco mil cuarto  
46 veintisiete†=  
*=no problem in any case it will arrive at the right address.  
Street thirty five one thousand and twenty seven†=  
(...) (contingency questions left out)*

At first, the non-arrival of the voucher seems to constitute the (main) reason for the call (Schegloff 1986). It is proffered at the first available opportunity, immediately after the opening has been achieved and interpreted as such by the agent who, after double

checking the client's details (line 41 and contingency questions which follow) initiates a potential closing sequence. The agent does this at lines 44-46 by offering a remedy to the complaint expressed at line 16. She utters it immediately after the previous turn which contains the last pieces of information needed to establish that the client's details in the system are correct. This shows promptness and that in her view, there is, then, nothing else to talk about; the client's request for service has been satisfactorily met and the interaction can thus be brought to a close.

The client's next contribution, however, represents a move out of the closing as shown at line 57 in (6) below.

(6) Excerpt 3 continued [2:4] C= client; A = agent

- 57 C: [M::h](.)(traga) bueno la pregunta porque:=  
 58 [M::h](.)(swallows) okay the question because:=
- 59 A: =Sí,=  
 =Yes,=
- 60 C: =A veces estoy bastante desconectada de esto. E::h esto salió  
 61 p- de casualidad.(.) yo no sé si::: está la posibilidad y si  
 62 tengo alguna semana para que:: poder e::h, (.) de mis semanas  
 63 usar en el mi::smo o e:n algún otro que ustedes tengan en Villa  
 64 la Angostura para esa fecha,  
 =Sometimes I'm very out of date with this. U:m this came out f-  
 of the blue.(.) I don't know if:: there is a possibility and if  
 I have any weeks so that I:: can u:m, (.) use one of my weeks  
 in the same u:m or another one that you have in  
 Villa la Angostura for that period,
- 65 A: No. El tema de que tiene que depositar semanas,=sino no le va  
 66 a dar lugar:r.  
 No. The thing is that you<sup>u</sup> have to deposit weeks,=if not you<sup>u</sup>  
 will not get availability:.
- 67 C: E:l e:h lo concreto es eso. Yo no tengo deposit[adas]  
 T:he u:m that is exactly the case. I don't have weeks  
 deposit[ed]
- 68 A: [No]
- 69 C: porque por ejemplo yo (.) bueno este: voy a tener que reclamar  
 70 al [complejo]  
 because for example I (.) well um: I'm going to have to  
 complain to the [resort]
- 71 [Cla::ro] le faltaría la semana dos mil seis que
- 72 A: deposite,  
 [That's right:] you<sup>u</sup>'d need to deposit the week of  
 two thousand and six,
- 73 C: Claro es que el tema de la semana del año dos mil seis de  
 74 Semana Santa yo no la usé y la deposité. (.) [y no] te  
 75 figura:,=  
 Right the thing is I didn't use the week of the year two  
 thousand and six corresponding to Easter and I deposited it.  
 (.) [and you don't] have it:, =
- 76 A: [M:h]=No me  
 77 figura no. se la tiene que reclamar a e:llos,  
 [M'm]=No it  
 doesn't show no. You<sup>u</sup> have to request it from them.
- 78 C: Sí al complejo exa[ctamente] porque ellos la hicieron el  
 79 depósito (.) que obviamente se les pasó,=  
 Yes from the resort ex[actly] because they made the  
 deposit(.)and obviously forgot,=

At L. 57, the client acknowledges the information received and starts uttering the next request for service, that is, another reason for the call. The next request for service is followed by a justification, indicating that the client anticipates that the request may not be granted and that she is aware of its potentially delicate nature. The agent responds by indicating her understanding that the client has further business to discuss and her incipient reciprocity. It is at this juncture that the client starts to disclose the second reason for the call.

At lines 60-64, the client offers an explanation. That an explanation of this kind is proffered to justify a request for information is telling. Strictly speaking, it is unnecessary as the provision of product information is part and parcel of selling, and is, therefore, one of the things agents have been hired to do. The explanation comprises a self-portrait characterised by uniformedness and lack of planning (sometimes I'm very out of date with this, my mind is elsewhere, this came out of the blue, L. 60-1). It is congruent with the client's request for information, which reflects uncertainty as to its granting. The client presents the facts on which her request was based (lines 69,70, 73-75) and, in doing so, she shows that she is aware not only of how the system works but also of which week and year she needs to deposit her week for: Easter week; a sought-after week. Essentially, she claims to have deposited the week which would enable the agent to carry out the search for an additional unit of accommodation. The way in which the client formulates the explanation prior to the request at lines 60-64 *vis à vis* the explanation given at lines 73-75 is noteworthy. The former sounds hesitant, as illustrated by the semantic material deployed: *Casualidad, posibilidad, no sé, bastante desconnectada* v. *claro, el tema es*; and by the use of the conditional v. the simple past, the observance of self-repair, *p-de casualidad*, together with a few prolonged sounds: *si::, que::, e:h*. The latter, on the other hand, sounds assertive. What is more, the client limits herself to presenting the facts. In so doing, she relies on the agent seeing the importance of the facts for the issue at hand (Pomerantz 1984). This, in turn, would justify her request and absolve her from any potential interpretations of dishonesty or manipulation. It does, however, stand in contrast with her behaviour so far and subsequent contributions, lines 69, 70, and 73-75, where her knowledge of how the system works and 'general alertness' become evident. Arguably, her goal, which is to find out if there is another unit of accommodation without having to deposit her week, has a bearing on the way in which she portrayed herself. She maintains her basic stance as 'ignorant' throughout and makes use of it in different ways: By threatening to complain (I'm going to have to complain L. 70), actually complaining (obviously forgot L. 79) and generally seeking to fill epistemic gaps.

The agent responds by stating a mutually known institutional restriction, namely, that slot searches can only be conducted once allotted weeks are deposited (lines 65-66). In so doing, she implies that the client has not yet deposited her week and the participants go over the facts (Pomerantz 1984). Having ascertained that a search for the desired holiday unit will not be made unless the week is deposited, instead of moving to a close the client pursues yet another alternative route, as illustrated in (7) below.

(7) **Excerpt 3** continued [2:4] C= client; A = agent

80 A: [sí:]=Claro:: por eso tiene que  
81 reclamársela porque es una pena porque usted está perdiendo  
82 una semana que tiene mucho valor,=

[yes:]=*Right::that is why you<sup>u</sup> have to claim it because it is a pity because you<sup>u</sup> are losing a very valuable week.*=

- 83 C: >Sí no si es de Semana Santa.<=y te hago una pregunta  
 84 porque:: e:m, (.) bueno no, voy a tener que llamar a:-a, (.)  
 85 e::h porque mi papá:( ) también es propietario (.) es Sapi  
 86 Roberto él,=  
 >Yes of course it is an Easter week.<=And I ask you<sup>v</sup> a question  
 because: u:m, (.) well no, I'm going to have to call the:-the,  
 (.) u:m because my dad:, is also an owner (.) his name is Sapi  
 Roberto,=  
 87 A: =Sí.  
 =yes.  
 88 (.2)  
 89 C: E::h que: bueno el falleció en realidad no sé si está todo a  
 90 nombre de mi mamá. María Ellis,  
*U:m that: well he passed away and in fact I don't know if*  
*everything is in my mother's name. María Ellis,*  
 91 (.2)  
 92 C: No sé [cómo se ( )]  
*I don't know [how do ( )]*  
 93 A: [Ma-]María↑  
 94 C: Ellis↓

(.5) (agents searches for the information)  
 (...) (contingency questions)

At line 83 she projects another enquiry, that is, a new request for service with a preliminary *te hago una pregunta* (literally 'I ask you a question', idiomatically 'let me ask you a question'), and cuts its flow with the insertion of *bueno no voy a tener que llamar a:-a* ('well no I'm going to have to call the-the') as if she is thinking out loud as to the fittingness of her ensuing request. She does so as if the projected request had not been planned prior to the call and as if she was unaware of the institutional rules. These elements suggest that she sees the projected request as delicate and anticipates that it may not be granted. After some more hesitation (*e::h*), she starts providing informational elements about the projected request. The information volunteered by the client can be classified as hints (Weizman 1989), that is, minimal amounts of information needed for the agent to search the database. The micropauses observed after she conveys that the request is related to her father and that her father also owns a time-share with the Company might be taken as an indication of her pursuing a response from the agent (Pomerantz 1984).

After some contingency questions, the agent checks the facts and confirms that both her parents figure in the system (line 99 in (8) below).

**(8) Excerpt 3** continued [2:4] C= client; A = agent

- 99 A: Sí:: figuran e[llos,]  
*Yes: [they] are on the system*  
 100 C: [Bue:no] porque e:h ella m:m fue la que me  
 101 preguntó. me dice fijate que si yo tengo-porque  
 102 exacta[mente.]  
*[Okay] because u:m she m:m was the one that*  
*asked me. She says to me find out if I have-because*  
*exact[ly]*

- 103 A: [Sí::] e:h mirá justamente hoy habló no-ayer habló con  
 104 alguien de Vacaciones Inolvidables su ma[dre:]  
 [yes::] u:m look<sup>t/v</sup> precisely today she talked no-  
 yesterday she talked  
 with someone from Holidays to Remember your mo[ther:]
- 105 C: [Sí]porque creo  
 106 que:: tenemos asignada una semana para irnos a Aruba,  
 [yes]because I  
 think that:: we have been allocated a week to go to Aruba,
- 107 A: =Sí(.) exactamente [acá está.]  
 =Yes (.) exactly [here it is.]
- 108 C: [en septiembre] el dieciseis por eso lo que  
 109 te preguntaba. porque e:s, la mujeres a un lugar y los hombres  
 110 [a otro.]  
 [in September] the sixteenth that's why I  
 was asking you<sup>t/v</sup>. Because it is:, the women to one place and  
 the men to [another]
- 111 A: [A::h bueno]está [bien]  
 [o::h okay]that is [fine]
- 112 C: [Bien]organizadas para no  
 113 pelearnos.=  
 [Well] organised to avoid  
 quarrels.=
- 114 A: =Pero la semana de Aruba no la tienen con nosotros e:h↑  
 =but the week in Aruba is not with us ah:↑
- 115 C: E:h no no no no sé si esa la tenía por Top Holidays. por [no  
 116 sé ( ) ] porque ella tiene las dos cadenas.=  
 U:m no no no I don't know if she had it with Top Holidays.  
 With [I don't know ( ) ] because she is with both chains.=
- 117 A: [claro]  
 118 ella sí tiene semanas para usar.  
 [that's  
 right]she has weeks available.
- 119 C: Bueno por eso porque ella me dijo vos fijate, (.) que si  
 120 dentro de mi: cadena e:h tenía disponibilidad, y en esa  
 121 fecha el veintitrés (.) [al::]  
 Okay that's why because she said to me you<sup>t/v</sup> find out, (.) if  
 there is availability in my chain, and during that period from  
 the twenty third (.) [to::]
- 122 A: [no]
- 123 C: trei:nta, (.) de septiembre:: bueno yo la llamaba  
 thirtieth, (.) of September:: Then I'd call you<sup>u</sup>
- 124 aunque sea ella la propietaria. pagabamos la tasa de  
 125 [intercambio y todo eso:]  
 although she is the owner. We would pay the fee for the  
 [exchange and all of that:]

At this juncture the client reiterates her request. This time she resorts to using direct reported speech (Holt 1996). She constructs her contribution to imply that she is reproducing her mother's, the account holder's, words. She thus introduces an old lady into the scene who deserves more attention and possibly sympathy to support her request to search her parents' account; a request which, for legal reasons, should not be granted. In deploying direct reported speech, the client allegedly reports the words of her mother. As a result, she plays the role of the reported (Coulmas 1986; Holt 1996), seeks legitimacy for her actions, and orients her contributions to their shared knowledge

of the institutional rules which are meant to be followed. She thus positions the agent as a problem solver who is not requested to do anything against the rules.

The move pays off as the agent discloses information about another client (lines 103-104). The client confirms the information provided by the agent and reports facts which can be easily corroborated by the agent (line 105) as a way of further legitimising her request to search her mother's account for available weeks. She continues going over facts (lines 108-110), the veracity of which can be easily checked by the agent, and offering a rationale for her original request (lines 60-64). The agent offers a positive assessment at line 111 and, at lines 117-118, after checking out the facts, finally discloses the balance of the mother's account. Once it became clear that there was no availability during that period, that is, after the agent had searched for the additional unit of accommodation at the desired resort and time slot, using the mother's available week, and found that there was no availability, the conversation is finally brought to a close.

Excerpt 3 shows how the client achieves her goal despite this being institutionally restricted. In order to maximise her chances of reaching it she cannot offer the main reason for the call in the initial stages of the interaction. After the opening, she provides what looks like the main the reason for the call in the anchor position in the form of a request for information aimed at addressing a gap in knowledge. The agent offers a response and takes the client's details. Immediately after locating the client's details and having had a chance to look at her history, the agent elaborates on the original response given and the topic is typically bounded, thus creating a closing-implicative environment. At this point, however, the client makes a further enquiry which opens up new dimensions of relevance. The enquiry constitutes a second reason for the call, hence a move out of the closing. It is here that the strategy is best appreciated as a fortuitously constructed move out of a closing.

In the next call (9), the client contacts the Company to cancel the unit of accommodation that she has booked and paid for in Canada without having to lose the bonus week that she had to deposit in order to make the booking in the first place. Instead, she would like to use that bonus week for Mexico. According to the Company's rules bonus weeks are non-refundable. Put differently, once they are booked they have to be used up if not, they are lost. In keeping with the pattern observed in the other calls where fabricated ignorance was observed, an enquiry into the procedures for depositing weeks and the cost of the exchanges is presented as the (main) reason for the call (i.e. wh questions at L.10-12). It is offered in the anchor position and responded to by the agent before he initiates a series of interrogative questions aimed at locating the client's records in order to provide further assistance.

**(9) Excerpt 4 [9:11] C= client; A = agent**

- 4 C: E:::h yo tengo (.) e:::h estoy afiliada a los hoteles del  
5 Royal acá en Colombia.  
*E:::h I have(.) e:::h I am a member of the Royal hotels here  
in Colombia.*
- 6 A: Sí:  
*Yes:.*
- 7 C: Yo quiero viajar a Puerto Vallarta† para el veintiocho de  
8 octubre,  
*I want to travel to Puerto Vallarta† from the twenty-eight of  
October,*
- 9 A: Sí.  
*Yes.*

10 C: Qué tengo que hacer para depositar las becas que yo tengo con  
11 del Royal, (.) y::: y cuánto le debo de pagar a usted por el  
12 intercambio.  
*What do I have to do to deposit the points I have with Royal,  
(.)and::: and how much do I have to pay you<sup>u</sup> for the  
exchange.*

Once the client's details have been located and confirmed, the client initiates a further enquiry based on the content of the information she had received so far (line 33), thus still maintaining an unformed stance with respect to the way in which the exchanges work. The agent's response at lines 34-35 and its confirmation at line 37 trigger yet another enquiry, one that helps the client pave the way for her incipient action: A request for credit transfer (lines 50-51) as illustrated in (10) below.

**(10) Excerpt 4 [9:11] continued C= client; A = agent**

32 C: >0 sea< siempre me va a costar eso el intercambio, o eso  
33 depende del destino?  
*>so, is it always going to cost that the exchange, or that  
depends on the destination?*

34 A: E:::h siempre le va a costar eso, (.) e:::h  
35 internacionalmente en cualquier lugar.  
*U:::m it will always cost that, (.) e:::h anywhere  
internationally*

36 C: Trescientos y pico.  
*Three hundred and something*

37 A: Exactamente= Siempre le va a [costar-]  
*Exactly =it will always [cost you<sup>u</sup>-]*

38 C: [Ve] y por qué y por qué para  
39 una reserva que yo hice en el Canadá, me cobraron cuatrocientos  
40 sesenta y cinco?  
*[see<sup>u</sup>] and why and why for a  
reservation I made in Canada, they charged me four hundred and  
seventy five?*

41 A: Porque >me imagino que no utilizó< becas.  
*Because >I imagine that you<sup>u</sup> didn't use< points.  
(9 lines of explanation omitted)*

50 C: M:::= Y mira y yo esa semana no la pude utilizar en el Canadá=  
51 no la puedo pasar para Puerto Vallarta?  
*M:::= and look<sup>f</sup> and I couldn't use that week in Canada= can I  
not transfer it to Puerto Vallarta?*

52 A: E:::h si ya está confirmado,>desafortunadamente ya no< puede  
53 manejar nada↓  
*E:::h if it is already confirmed, >now unfortunately you  
cannot< do anything↓*

It is at this juncture, after providing the necessary information to advance her interactional agenda, that is, that she has been charged \$465 for a reservation in Canada that the client shows her hand. She does so with a contribution prefaced by a hesitation marker and followed by *y mira* ('and look<sup>f</sup>'). With *y mira* the client seeks to invite the agent into her own sphere (Márquez Reiter 2002) and thus to appeal to his sense of

affiliation with respect to what will be uttered next: A request to have the bonus week refunded (lines 50-51). The request is preceded by an explanation, *y yo esa semana no la pude utilizar* ('and I couldn't use that week'), and negatively phrased, *no la puedo pasar para Puerto Vallarta* ('Can I not use it instead for Puerto Vallarta?'). The negative interrogative expresses the client's low entitlement to the requested action (Curl and Drew 2008). This is not surprising in the light of the company's rules and her subsequent contributions where, contrary to her behaviour so far, she demonstrates knowledge of the procedural steps needed for her request to be considered and discloses that she had already contacted the right department about this.

The agent offers a dispreferred response as signalled by, among other features, by the semantic material mentioned, that is, an implicit reference to the institutional rules that would make it impossible to grant the request (lines 52-53) suggesting that there is nothing else to add and that the topic can be 'shut down'. The client, however, does not take the agent's rejection as final. As illustrated in (11) below she pursues response (Pomerantz 1984).

(11) Excerpt 4 [9:11] continued C= client; A = agent

57 C: Sí. Pero pero imagínate que a mí nunca me dieron-no me dieron  
58 la visa para viajar allá,  
Yes. But but imagine<sup>t</sup> I was never given-I wasn't given the visa  
to travel there,

59 A: A:::hh (.)↑guau↓  
O:::hh (.) ↑wow↓

63 A: Ajá.  
Aha.

64 C: pero no me la dieron entonces no voy a poder viaja:r De todos  
65 modos yo les tengo que mandar a ustedes una carta para  
66 que ustedes esa semana vacacional pues me la tengan  
67 allí, (.) para yo luego poderla utilizar porque la verdad es  
68 que yo >no la voy a poder utilizar< no fue por mi cu::lpa  
69 sino porque no me dieron la vi::sa

*but I wasn't granted it, so I will not be able to travel. In any case I have to send you a letter, for you to keep that week there, (.) so that I can use it because the truth is that I >I will not be able to use it< it wasn't my fault, it was because they didn't grant me the visa*

At L. 57-58, the client confirms her understanding of the information received via the affirmative particle *sí*, followed by an affiliation seeking appeal (Davidson 1990). Through this appeal, the client seeks to engage the agent further, arguably to engage with him at a personal rather than institutional level. This is illustrated by the inclusion of *imagínate* ('imagine<sup>T</sup>') in the familiar second person singular, as if she were talking to a friend. In using *imagínate* ('imagine<sup>T</sup>'), the client literally asks the agent to put himself in her shoes; the use of the extreme adverb *nunca* ('never'), the subsequent self-correction and the semantic content of the contribution where she explains that she was

not granted a visa all further boost her plea for sympathy and indicate heightened affectivity. Her move pays off, albeit only partially. The agent's sympathy does not stretch as far as granting her the credit refund she wants. The agent's response at line 59 shows affiliation (i.e. empathetic display illustrated by the stretched *a:::h* 'oh' with which the agent indicates his realisation of the client's worthwhile motive, followed by an extreme expression of surprise *guau* 'wow' uttered with a rise and fall pitch), albeit as it transpires later, it does not entail alignment with respect to the interactional project.

Given the agent's comparatively lax response in the subsequent turn (line 63) in uttering an acknowledgment token with low intonation contour, the client revises her position (lines 64-69). She displays heightened affectivity, as illustrated by the deployment of consecutively stressed and negatively phrased constructions (*no me la dieron*; 'they didn't give it to me'; *no voy a poder*; 'I won't be able to'), with which she logically intends to provide a grounder for her request and highlight the fact that she is not to blame for the problem; this she does by using the passive voice in the first of these constructions thus hiding agency and strengthening her case. It is, however, while displaying such affectivity that she discloses shared knowledge of the institutional rules: She needs to send a letter to the company for her case to be considered. Such a disclosure means that the client knew that her request for credit transfer cannot be considered by an agent over the telephone. However, her pursuit of response throughout the interaction indicated the contrary.

As shown in (12) below, the agent aligns with institutional authority. He presents himself as subordinated to the institutional rules that dictate that such a request can only be considered by another institutional body.

**(12) Excerpt 4 [9:11] continued C= client; A = agent**

- 70 A: Cla:ro>sí eso señora< lo maneja directamente es el:-el  
 71 Departamento de calidad,  
*Su:re >yes that M'am< is dealt by the-the  
 Customer Care department,*
- 72 C: Sí. de Calidad me dijeron que les mandara una carta, yo  
 73 ya la tengo allí para mandarla para que ellos- para que  
 74 ellos me tengan pues presente esa semana que no la voy  
 75 a utilizar pues por otros mot↑ivos, cierto,
- Yes. Customer Care told me to send them a letter, I already  
 have it there to send it to them-for them to bear in mind  
 then the week that I will not be able to use then  
 for other rea↑sons, right,*
- 76 A: Exactamente= sí señora.  
*Exactly= yes M'am.*
- 77 C: Pero entonces yo quería saber si yo esa semana la puedo  
 78 utilizar en Puerto Valla:::rta↑ porque para eso sí yo  
 79 ya tengo la visa para México,  
*But then I wanted to know if I can use that week in Puerto  
 Valla:::rta↑ because for that I do I already  
 have a visa for Mexico,*
- 80 A: >(claro)no la puede utilizar de momento en Puerto  
 81 A: Vallarta< y además como-por la cercanía de la fecha con la que  
 82 usted está solicitándola en Puerto Vallarta, (.)  
 83 no >creo que le alcancen a dar< una respuesta de aquí a  
 84 allá.

>(sure)you<sup>u</sup> cannot use it for the moment in Puerto Vallarta<  
and besides because-given the proximity to the date to which  
you<sup>u</sup> are requesting to use it in Puerto Vallarta, I don't>  
think they will be able to< give you an answer between now and  
then.

The client thus reformulates her understanding of the institutional procedures by taking the agent out of the equation as illustrated by her use of the pronoun *ellos* ('they') and reported speech *de Calidad me dijeron* ('Customer Care told me'). She thus suggests that the agent is not responsible for the bureaucratic steps which she now has to follow for her request to be considered and implies that talking with him can potentially help to solve things differently.

The agent reacts by confirming the client's understanding and asserting his misalignment with respect to the client's project (L. 76). In doing so, he suggests that the topic should be shut down and creates a closing-implicative environment. The client, however, does not take the agent's contribution as final and further pursues a response until it becomes evident that there are no further avenues to explore and the conversation is brought to a close.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The foregoing analysis has focused on a negotiating strategy deployed by (prospective) clients of a time-share company to circumvent what they know are the rules in an attempt to obtain good value for money: fabricated ignorance. Through this strategy the (prospective) clients show an unawareness of how the system works in order to gain access to services that they are not entitled to. They do so, among other things, by formulating pre-sequences in the reason for the call slot designed to address a gap in knowledge as a way of dealing with the possibility of their requests being rejected.

In the encounters examined, the (prospective) clients seized the moment to reveal the main reason for the call, in a closing-implicative environment. More precisely, after the opening, the (prospective) clients provide the reason for the call in the anchor position in the form of a request for information. The agents offer a response and take their details. Immediately after locating the relevant details and having had a chance to look at their history, they elaborate on the original response given and the topic is typically bounded, thus creating a closing-implicative environment. At this juncture, the (prospective) clients either acknowledge the institutional restrictions in place and thus, by default, that they are not entitled to receive the service they want by means of a complaint-implicative remark which triggers the agents to resume the closing, or they make a further enquiry which opens up new dimensions of relevance. In both cases it is in the closing sequence that the strategy is best appreciated as the (prospective) clients reveal that they were aware the Company's rules and that, as a result, they had strategically feigned ignorance. In the latter case, the strategy is best appreciated as a fortuitously constructed move out of a closing. It entails proposing solutions that go against mutually known rules, that is, the institutional rules which they were aware about in their capacity as (former) clients. Importantly, they do not do so in the anchor position as this would decrease their chances of succeeding. Instead the proposals arise from the discussion of the details of the order, while the participants check out the facts, and in a closing-implicative environment. By going over the facts, the callers assume

the role of information-seekers and the agents that of problem-solvers. The kind of problem solvers who, given the alleged lack of knowledge of the callers, are not requested to go against the mutually known institutional rules but who can simply reject the clients' proposal by referring to such rules.

One of the resources mobilised by the participants to claim lack of knowledge with respect to the system was the formulation of preliminaries in the anchor position (Schegloff 1986). The preliminaries were primarily realised by polar questions to elicit, in most cases, confirmation of knowledge they already had with a view to having it endorsed so as to safely and smoothly progress into the activity proper. The questions were packaged tentatively, thus further helping to display an uninformed stance. Further requests for service in the calls were preceded by explanations as a means of justifying them and contained informational elements in the form of hints (Weizman 1989) so as to get the agents to perform an action against the rules without explicitly requesting them to do so.

The realisation that their course of action was not leading them to achieve the agents' circumventing of the rules as evidenced by topic shut downs leading to potential closings, led some of the (prospective) clients to utter closing-implicative complaints. In doing so, they disclosed their knowledge of the system as well as what they understood to be unfair commercial practices. The complaints were, however, truncated by the agents who proceeded to resume the closings. On the other hand, the majority of the (prospective) clients who engaged in this strategy, instead of potentially moving out of the closing by complaining, formulated a new enquiry. The formulation of new enquiries further substantiated the picture of ignorance painted by the (prospective) clients and allowed them to continue negotiating. This was principally done by formulating tentative enquiries indicating their lack of knowledge and, upon sensing a final rejection the clients walked down the affiliative-seeking road.

Affiliation was primarily sought by the production of tellings of bad past experiences with the Company. These were primarily achieved by preceding the negative short narratives with speech particles conjugated in the informal second person singular aimed at bringing the agents into their realm of experience and, by cleverly excluding the agents in their capacity as institutional representatives from the actual telling by means of manipulating personal pronouns. Clients also deployed direct reported speech (Coulmas 1986) to legitimise their position and play the role of the person reported in a further effort to get the agents to affiliate and thus obviate the relevant institutional restrictions in place.

The unfair commercial treatment observed here is something that these consumers seem to be accustomed to. It also something which the Company appears to be getting away with, given the exercising of consumer rights in the developing countries where the participants come from, coupled with the huge slice of the time-share market which the Company enjoyed at the time that the data were recorded. Additionally, the absence of paralinguistic cues provides some of the right conditions for the emergence of the strategy as the risks of it being interpreted as a 'fabrication' are reduced by the affordances of the medium (i.e. lack of visual clues). Similarly, if the business agreement offered better value for money, there might not be any need for (prospective) clients to engage in it.

Service operationalization which positions the (prospective) clients as information-disadvantaged relative to the agents, coupled with the powerless state of

influence of the former *vis à vis* that of a multinational company which has the biggest slice of the market, potentially leads (prospective) clients to pursue ways of counterbalancing such an imbalance. One avenue for achieving this aim is the acting out of an uninformed stance and to persist even when the odds are against us them.

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### Transcription conventions

(adapted from Schegloff 2007)

[ ]	overlapping speech
(1.5)	numbers in brackets indicate pause length in seconds
(.)	micropause
:	lengthening of the sound of preceding letter
-	word cut-off
.	falling or final intonation
?	rising or question intonation
=	latching utterances
<u>Underlining</u>	contrastive stress or emphasis
CAPS	indicates volume of speech
°°	markedly softer speech
↑↓	sharp falling/rising intonation
> <	talk is compressed or rushed
< >	talk is markedly slowed or drawn out
( )	blank space in brackets indicates uncertainty about the speech

NB: Some of the contributions in the calls examined have two rather than one lines of glossing. In those cases, the first line represents a more or less literal translation and the second one an idiomatic one.

### Grammatical glosses

T/V use of familiar second person singular *tú* or *vos*

U use of the formal second person singular *usted*

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