

Did you hear your partner speak? Correct answer – Yes and No.

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A normal part of a bridge auction is when you make a special systemic bid, your partner alerts it, the opponents ask and you partner tells them what he thinks your bid means. That last part of the process is rather problematic in terms of how the laws of bridge apply. One part of the laws wants you to hear what your partner said; another part of the laws insists that you don't hear it!

Although this is an area which I have previously considered in these articles, it is quite complex and still not understood by many players. Perhaps it will be easiest to explain by example:

You, sitting North, hold: ♠ 5
♥ KQ942
♦ 96
♣ KQJ84

The auction goes:

W	N	E	S
1D	2NT		

You and your partner have agreed to play that a jump to 2NT over the opponent's opening bid shows at least 5-5 in the lowest unbid suits. Partner alerts 2NT. East asks and South says, "5-5 in the minors". That's interesting! Partner seems to have forgotten that 2NT shows the minors only after a major suit opening. What are your rights and responsibilities?

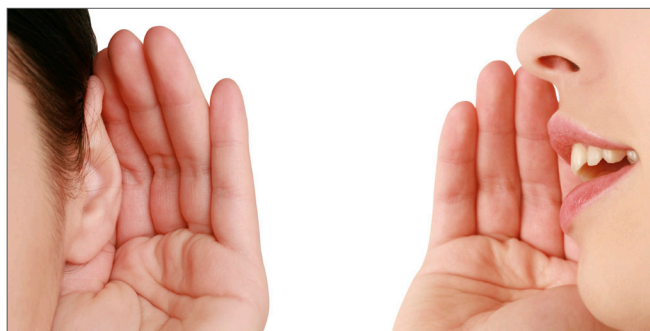
Responsibilities first: under the laws, EW are entitled to an accurate explanation of your agreements. Therefore, unless your partner does so first, you need to tell them. But...and it is a very big **BUT**, you can only do so at the correct time. The correct time is:

- if you become declarer or dummy – at the end of the auction;
- if you become a defender – at the end of the play of the hand.

Until the correct time, you must not do anything at all. You cannot say, "I think my partner got it wrong". You cannot call the director. You cannot excuse yourself and go and speak to the director away from the table. You must just sit there, saying and doing nothing about partner's mistake, until the correct time arrives. You may think you are trying to be helpful, but in most cases you will just be making things worse for your side.

Those are your responsibilities under the laws. In order to satisfy this duty to correct partner's mistake, you obviously need to have heard what partner said when the opponents asked.

You must just sit there, saying and doing nothing about partner's mistake, until the correct time arrives.



Rather confusingly, when we come to what your **rights** are in exactly the same situation, the laws require you to act as if you didn't hear your partner speak! This is a rather difficult concept to grasp. When considering what future action to take, if any, you need to behave as though your partner said that 2NT showed at least 5-5 in clubs and hearts (ie. what you have), even though you know that this isn't the case. Let's assume that the above auction continued as follows:

W	N	E	S
1D	2NT	Pass	3C
3D	?		

You may be tempted to bid 3♥ now to clarify things for your partner – after all, he doesn't think that you have hearts and you might have a big heart fit. However, to do so would be very wrong. When you bid 2NT, you were telling him you had 5 hearts (as well as 5 clubs). If, in response to East's question, he had said that 2NT shows 5-5 in clubs and hearts (I know he didn't) and bid 3C, you would know that he had heard about your hearts but didn't care about them. There should be no temptation to bid them now.

Although it is a normal part of the game, the laws refer to what you heard when your partner answered East's question as "**unauthorised information**". This is something which you cannot use when making a decision about what to do next. In fact, you need to go out of your way to make sure that you do not take advantage of it. That means you virtually need to act as if you didn't hear you partner speak. If your partner had given the right answer when asked, you would be free to make any bid over 3D in the above auction, even 3H if you felt like it (no matter how misguided that action may be!). However, when you get the "**unauthorised information**" that partner has misunderstood your bid, you have no alternative other than to pass.

Are there ever any occasions when you might bid again even when partner has responded incorrectly to East's question? Yes, but these are times when the hand you hold definitely warrants another call. For example, you might have a much stronger hand with six hearts and five clubs:

♠ 5
 ♥ AKJT95
 ♦ 6
 ♣ KQJ84

Just one useful card from partner would probably be enough for you to make game in hearts, so now 3H would be justified. Of course, partner, thinking you have the minors, might now be very confused. Your 3H might wake him up to his mistake. If so, well and good – that's allowed. But if you have done anything else apart from just bidding 3H – eg. saying "*you got it wrong, partner*", glaring and tutting at him, calling for the "*sheriff*", handing your system card to the opponents, etc. – then you will find yourself in trouble with the director – and no one wants that. ♥