



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Testimonial Knowledge without Speaker Knowledge:
Reassessing the Speaker Knowledge Requirement

verfasst von | submitted by

Anni Yu BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 941

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Philosophie

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Max Kölbel MA MPhil PhD

Preface

When I graduated from school back in 2020, I was kind of unsure what direction I should go into for my studies. I enrolled in the bachelor's programmes of Philosophy and Sinology, and also prepared myself to write the Austrian medical entrance exam. Soon after my first semester at university, I realized that my passion for philosophy was more than just an interest from school. I ultimately decided that I would finish the degree in philosophy, without knowing where exactly this path would lead me. Immediately afterwards, I registered for the master's programme in philosophy at the University of Vienna, still as excited as I had been when I was eighteen.

I have always loved discussing topics that other people might regard as unimportant or, as one would say in German, *Haarspalterei*. Although many people may react with annoyance at such discussions, I do have to say that studying philosophy has changed my view of life. I never would have expected to learn so much about the mechanisms underlying a certain concept, or how much the way an argument is constructed can shape the outcome of a debate. I would read one philosopher in a debate one week and think to myself, "This sounds convincing; they have a point", only to read a text from the opposing side the following week and think, "this also sounds compelling; perhaps they, too, have a point". Philosophy has taught me to pay attention to distinctions, assumptions, and structures that often remain unnoticed.

So, before I bring the academic path of my philosophical studies to an end, I would like to thank some very special people in my life.

First and foremost, I thank my parents for supporting me both financially and emotionally throughout this journey. My father has shown me that it is worth following your passion and making the most of it. Even if you do not know where it might lead, you can only do something well if you are truly passionate about it. My mother has never been the classical Chinese "Tiger Mom", and this has enabled me to find my own way of studying and achieving things that I want to reach for. Thank you.

I would also like to thank my lifelong friends Pia and Laura, who have, over the years, checked my essays for formulations and typos, even though I could have used a grammar-checking software. This shows what amazing people they are: despite having their own lives, schedules, and responsibilities, they always took the time to help me.

I also want to thank the persons who never judged me when I told them that I study something more “unconventional” than what is common in my circles, but who, on the contrary, actually supported me and cheered me on.

Last but not least, I want to thank my supervisor, Univ.-Prof. Max Kölbel, MA MPhil PhD. Without his expertise, patience, and engagement, this thesis would not have become what it is today.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
1 The Speaker Knowledge Requirement: Formulation and Scope	5
1.1 Testimony and Testimonial Knowledge	5
1.2 The Speaker Knowledge Requirement.....	6
1.3 Distinguishing the Exceptionless Conditional from Normality, Value, and Normativity .	7
1.4 More and Less Demanding Versions of the Speaker Knowledge Requirement	9
1.4.1 Immediate-speaker SKR	9
1.4.2 Chain-Based SKR.....	10
1.4.3 Default SKR	10
1.5 Why Precision Matters	11
2 Why the Speaker Knowledge Requirement Seems Plausible	13
2.1 The Transmission Picture	13
2.2 Testimonial Knowledge as Second-Hand Knowledge	15
2.3 The Anti-Luck Motivation	16
2.4 The Real Force of SKR.....	18
2.5 Preliminary Conclusion.....	18
3 Lackey's Challenge to the Speaker Knowledge Requirement	20
3.1 Lackey's Anti-Transmission Project.....	20
3.2 Counterexamples and the Burden against an Exceptionless Conditional	21
3.2.1 Creationist Teacher	22
3.2.2 Consistent Liar	24
3.2.3 Persistent Believer.....	26
3.3 Comparing the Cases.....	28
3.4 Provisional Conclusion	30
4 Can the Speaker Knowledge Requirement Be Rescued?	31

4.1 Denying the Intuition of Hearer Knowledge	31
4.2 Restricting the Category of Testimony	35
4.3 Relocating Knowledge Elsewhere in the Testimonial Chain	38
4.4 Moving to a More Modest Speaker-Dependent View	41
4.5 What Survives the Criticism?	42
5 What Follows from Rejecting the Speaker Knowledge Requirement?	45
5.1 The Negative Result: Immediate-speaker SKR Fails	46
5.2 What the Rejection of SKR Does Not Establish	47
5.3 Epistemically Adequate Communicative Routes	49
5.4 Applying the Replacement View to Lackey's Cases	51
5.5 Defeaters, Reliability, and Normativity	53
5.6 Final Answer to the Research Question	55
Conclusion	57
Bibliography.....	60

Introduction

Testimony is one of the central sources of human knowledge. Much of what we know about history, science, politics, geography, and ordinary practical matters does not come from first-hand observation or private inference, but from what other people tell us. Human knowledge is therefore deeply socially distributed. We rely constantly on the words of others in order to extend our epistemic reach beyond what we have directly perceived, remembered, or established for ourselves. As C.A.J. Coady emphasizes, this dependence is not marginal but pervasive: without testimony, much of what we ordinarily take ourselves to know would be unavailable to us.¹ Any adequate epistemology must therefore explain how testimony can yield knowledge and under what conditions it does so.

Within the epistemology of testimony, one especially intuitive thesis has been that a hearer can know that *p* through testimony only if the speaker knows that *p*. This thesis is commonly called the Speaker Knowledge Requirement, or SKR. Its attraction is easy to understand. Testimony often appears to be a way of passing epistemic standing from one person to another. If a hearer learns from a speaker, then it is natural to think that the hearer's epistemic success depends on the speaker already occupying the relevant epistemic position. On this picture, testimonial knowledge is fundamentally transmissive: the hearer acquires knowledge from a speaker who already knows, and the speaker's knowledge sets a limit on what the hearer can acquire.

This transmission picture has been influential because it captures several important features of ordinary testimonial practice. First, it explains why testimony often seems dependent: the hearer does not arrive at the truth independently, but relies on another person's say-so. Second, it fits the idea that testimonial knowledge is second-hand knowledge. Elizabeth Fricker, for example, argues that "knowledge gained through trust in testimony is always and necessarily knowledge at second-hand".² Third, it promises to address the anti-luck problem. Knowledge requires more than true belief, and testimony is especially vulnerable to luck because hearers often accept what speakers say without independently verifying it. If the

¹ Cf. Coady, C.A.J. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford University Press, 1994. p. 6ff.

² Fricker, Elizabeth. "Second-Hand Knowledge". In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 73. No. 3. (2006). p. 593.

speaker already knows, then the hearer's true belief appears to be anchored in a prior successful epistemic relation to the truth rather than arising accidentally.

Yet the Speaker Knowledge Requirement has been challenged. Most prominently, Jennifer Lackey argues that there can be testimonial knowledge without speaker knowledge. Her central objection is that traditional transmission views wrongly make the epistemic standing of the hearer's belief depend too much on the epistemic standing of the speaker's belief. Lackey's counterexamples are designed to show that hearers can acquire knowledge through testimony even when speakers themselves do not know what they assert.³ If these cases succeed, then SKR is false as an exceptionless universal conditional on testimonial knowledge. Not every case of testimonial knowledge includes knowledge in the immediate speaker, because there are cases in which the hearer seems to know despite the speaker's failure to do so.

The central question of this thesis is whether testimonial knowledge always involves knowledge in the immediate speaker. More precisely, it asks whether the following universal conditional is true: if a hearer H knows that p through testimony from a speaker S, then that speaker S knows that p. This is not intended as a modal thesis involving a necessity operator. The issue is whether the conditional holds without exception. If there is even one genuine case in which a hearer knows through testimony although the immediate speaker does not know, then the immediate-speaker version of SKR is false.

That narrower formulation matters because discussions of testimony can easily slide between different claims about the importance of the speaker's epistemic position. One may claim that knowledgeable speakers are paradigmatically good sources of testimony, that speakers normally ought to know what they say, or that testimonial practices function best when speakers know. But none of these points by itself establishes SKR. A thesis about what is standard, desirable, or normatively ideal is different from a thesis about what is strictly required in all cases. The present enquiry is concerned with the exceptionless universal conditional alone.

The argument defended in this thesis is that exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR should be rejected. Lackey's challenge succeeds against the claim that every case of testimonial

³ Cf. Lackey, Jennifer. "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". In *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 49. No. 197. 1999. p. 471ff.

knowledge includes knowledge in the immediate speaker. In particular, cases in which the speaker's epistemic position is defective while the hearer's remains intact create serious difficulty for the exceptionless conditional claim. The most challenging of these are not the most dramatic cases involving deception, but cases of defeater asymmetry. In such cases, the speaker lacks knowledge because of a defeater specific to her own epistemic position, while the hearer does not share that defeater and forms a true belief through ordinary testimonial uptake. These cases suggest that the speaker's lack of knowledge need not automatically block the hearer's knowledge.

However, the rejection of SKR must be understood carefully. It does not show that speaker-side epistemic factors are irrelevant, nor does it show that testimony is never transmissive. Nor does it establish that any true statement from any speaker can generate knowledge. A theory of testimony still needs to explain why testimonial belief is not merely lucky true belief caused by another person's words. This is the real force of the anti-luck motivation behind SKR, and it cannot simply be ignored. The conclusion of this thesis is therefore not that testimony is speaker-independent, but that testimonial dependence is more complex than immediate-speaker SKR allows.

The positive proposal developed in the final chapter is that testimonial knowledge requires an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth, rather than knowledge in the immediate speaker. Speaker knowledge is one important way of securing such a route, and in many ordinary cases it is the most straightforward way. But it is not the only way. Reliable institutional structures, proper hearer uptake, the absence of relevant defeaters, stable communicative practices, and environmental safeguards may also secure the hearer's non-accidental relation to the truth. This view preserves what is attractive about SKR while avoiding its excessive rigidity. It accepts the transmission theorist's concern with epistemic luck, and it accepts the responsibility theorist's concern that testimony is norm-governed. But it denies that these concerns require speaker knowledge in every case.

The thesis proceeds in five chapters. Chapter 1 clarifies the precise content of the Speaker Knowledge Requirement and distinguishes exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR from less demanding versions, such as chain-based or default forms of speaker dependence. Chapter 2 reconstructs the main motivations for accepting SKR, especially the transmission picture, the conception of testimonial knowledge as second-hand knowledge, and the anti-luck motivation.

Chapter 3 turns to Lackey's critique and examines three central counterexamples: Creationist Teacher, Consistent Liar, and Persistent Believer. It argues that these cases differ in argumentative force, and that Persistent Believer provides the clearest challenge to immediate-speaker SKR. Chapter 4 considers whether SKR can be rescued through several defensive strategies, including denying hearer knowledge, restricting the category of testimony, relocating knowledge elsewhere in the testimonial chain, and moving to a more modest requirement. Chapter 5 then draws out the consequences of rejecting immediate-speaker SKR and develops the replacement view: testimonial knowledge requires an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth, not necessarily knowledge in the immediate speaker.

The broader significance of the question is clear. To ask whether a hearer can know from a non-knowing speaker is to ask how testimonial dependence should be understood. If exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR is true, then testimonial knowledge is tightly constrained by the speaker's prior epistemic achievement. If it is false, then the epistemology of testimony must allow for more flexible forms of social epistemic dependence. The issue is therefore not a minor technical dispute, but a question about the structure of socially acquired knowledge itself.

1 The Speaker Knowledge Requirement: Formulation and Scope

1.1 Testimony and Testimonial Knowledge

The present thesis is concerned with testimony as a source of knowledge. At a general level, testimony involves one person telling another that something is the case, and the other person forming a belief on that basis. This basic characterization is enough for present purposes, provided one point is kept in view from the start: the concern here is not with every possible form of information transfer, but with testimonial belief in the epistemically relevant sense, that is, belief formed through accepting what another person says.⁴

Testimony is often contrasted with other familiar sources of belief such as perception, memory, and inference. In perceptual knowledge, the subject stands in a direct sensory relation to the world. In memorial knowledge, the subject relies on what has been retained from past cognition. In inferential knowledge, the subject reasons from one proposition to another. Testimonial knowledge differs from these because it depends essentially on another person's say-so. The hearer acquires belief by relying, in some way, on what the speaker asserts.⁵

This dependence gives testimony a distinctive epistemological character. On the one hand, testimony extends the hearer's epistemic reach beyond what could be known first-hand. On the other hand, it raises a special question: how does the speaker's epistemic position bear on the hearer's resulting belief? If a hearer comes to believe that *p* because a speaker says that *p*, under what conditions can that belief amount to knowledge? More specifically, what must be true of the speaker if the hearer is to know through testimony?⁶

The Speaker Knowledge Requirement offers one influential answer to that question. According to SKR, the hearer can know that *p* through testimony only if the speaker knows that *p*. Before that thesis can be evaluated, however, it must be stated with precision. This is important because debates about testimony often move too quickly between different claims about the role of the speaker. If the target thesis is left vague, criticism and defence alike risk missing the point.

⁴ Cf. Coady (1994). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. p. 42ff.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.* p. 6ff.

⁶ Cf. Lackey, Jennifer. *Learning From Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 39ff

For this reason, the present chapter does not attempt to defend or reject SKR at the outset. Its purpose is more limited but essential. It aims to identify exactly what SKR says, what kind of claim it is, and how it differs from weaker and more plausible claims about the epistemic importance of the speaker.

1.2 The Speaker Knowledge Requirement

In the immediate-speaker form, the Speaker Knowledge Requirement can be formulated as follows:

Immediate-speaker SKR: whenever a hearer H knows that p through testimony from an immediate speaker S, that immediate speaker S knows that p.

This is the thesis that will be assessed in the chapters that follow. The first point to notice is that SKR is an exceptionless universal conditional. It says that there is no case in which a hearer has testimonial knowledge that p while the immediate speaker lacks knowledge that p. It does not say that speaker knowledge is sufficient for hearer knowledge. Nor is it being treated here as a modal claim involving the operator “necessarily”. The thesis under discussion is simply the only-if claim: if hearer testimonial knowledge is present, then speaker knowledge is present.

It is also important to note that SKR is not a sufficiency claim. It does not say that whenever the speaker knows that p, the hearer also knows that p. A speaker may know that p while the hearer fails to know because the hearer misunderstands, ignores the testimony, possesses defeaters, or forms belief irresponsibly. SKR states only a one-way condition: hearer testimonial knowledge is said to occur only in cases where the speaker knows.

This formulation already helps distinguish the philosophical issue from several nearby but importantly different claims. One might hold that testimony normally functions best when the speaker knows what they are saying. One might also hold that speakers ought, as a matter of epistemic responsibility, to assert only what they know.⁷ Or one might simply note that in many ordinary cases of successful testimony, the speaker in fact does know. None of these claims is identical with SKR. All may be plausible even if SKR is false. The present thesis is

⁷ Cf. Moran, Richard. “Getting Told and Being Believed”. In *Philosophers’ Imprint*. Vol. 5. No. 5. (2005). p. 6ff.

therefore not concerned with the broad value of speaker knowledge, but with whether the SKR conditional holds without exception.

The intuitive force of SKR is easy to see. If testimony is understood as a way of learning from others, then it is natural to think that the hearer's epistemic success depends on the speaker already being in possession of the relevant knowledge. Knowledge seems unable to emerge from nowhere. If the speaker does not know, one may wonder what there is for the hearer to acquire. This is one reason why testimony has often been understood in transmissive terms: the hearer receives epistemic standing from a source who already has it. Fricker's account of testimonial knowledge as "second-hand knowledge" captures this dependence intuition especially clearly.⁸ Burge's account of content preservation likewise supports the thought that testimony preserves epistemic entitlement from a rational source rather than simply generating epistemic status from nothing.⁹

Still, the intuitive appeal of SKR should not be mistaken for clarity. Once the thesis is treated carefully, several questions arise. Must the immediate speaker know, or is it enough that someone earlier in the testimonial chain knows? Does the thesis concern all forms of testimony, or only standard face-to-face cases of assertion and uptake? Does it require full-fledged knowledge on the speaker's side, or merely some lesser epistemic standing? These questions show that even a seemingly simple exceptionless conditional claim requires careful formulation. Lackey's criticism of transmission views is important precisely because it exposes how different forms of speaker-dependence can come apart: hearer knowledge may depend on the speaker's statement, on the testimonial environment, or on a broader epistemic chain, without depending only on the immediate speaker's knowledge.¹⁰

1.3 Distinguishing the Exceptionless Conditional from Normality, Value, and Normativity

A central aim of this thesis is to prevent different claims from being conflated. In discussions of testimony, speaker knowledge may be important in at least four different senses.

First, it may be typical. In many ordinary cases, successful testimony does in fact come from speakers who know what they are talking about. That point is largely unobjectionable.

⁸ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594.

⁹ Cf. Burge, Tyler. "Content Preservation". In *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. 102. No. 4. (1993) p. 467ff.

¹⁰ Cf. Lackey (1999). "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". p. 475ff.

Fricker's description of testimonial knowledge as second-hand knowledge reflects the thought that ordinary testimonial knowledge often depends on the epistemic standing of the teller.¹¹ But a claim about what is common or standard is not yet a claim about what holds without exception.

Second, speaker knowledge may be epistemically valuable. Even if it is not required in every case, testimony from a knowledgeable speaker is plainly better, in many respects, than testimony from an ignorant or defective one. It may be more trustworthy, more stable, and less vulnerable to defeat. Fricker's emphasis on the hearer's need to monitor the speaker's trustworthiness helps explain why the speaker's epistemic position is valuable for testimonial uptake.¹² But again, to say that speaker knowledge is valuable is not to say that the hearer cannot know without it.

Third, speaker knowledge may be normatively appropriate. One may think that speakers ought to assert only what they know, or that knowledge is the proper norm of assertion. If so, then a speaker who asserts without knowledge is doing something epistemically criticizable. Moran's assurance view is relevant here because it treats testimony as a norm-governed interpersonal act in which the speaker presents themselves as accountable for the truth of what they say.¹³ But even this does not establish SKR. A norm governing proper assertion is not identical with a condition governing whether hearer knowledge is possible.

Fourth, speaker knowledge may be treated as part of an exceptionless universal conditional. On this view, if testimonial knowledge is present, then speaker knowledge is present as well. This is the most demanding claim. It says not merely that speaker knowledge is common, good, or proper, but that there are no cases of testimonial knowledge without speaker knowledge.

These distinctions matter because one of the easiest ways to make SKR seem plausible is to slide from one of the first three claims to the fourth. For example, if knowledgeable speakers are paradigm cases of good informants, it may seem natural to conclude that knowledge is therefore always required. But that inference is invalid. A paradigm case does not establish an exceptionless condition. Similarly, from the fact that speakers epistemically ought to know what they say, it does not follow that hearers cannot know when speakers fail to meet that

¹¹ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594ff.

¹² Cf. Fricker, Elizabeth. "Against Gullibility". In *Knowing from Words*. Kluwer, 1994. p. 145ff.

¹³ Cf. Moran (2005). "Getting Told and Being Believed". p. 8ff.

standard. Normative defect on the speaker's side and epistemic failure on the hearer's side may come apart.

The argumentative significance of this point is substantial. Much of the debate over SKR turns not on whether speaker knowledge matters, but on exactly how it matters. Once that question is put carefully, the thesis under examination becomes both sharper and more vulnerable. It is sharper because its content is now precise. It is more vulnerable because it can no longer draw illicit support from weaker and more plausible claims.

1.4 More and Less Demanding Versions of the Speaker Knowledge Requirement

Once SKR is formulated as an exceptionless conditional claim, a further complication appears. The thesis can be understood in more than one way, depending on how narrowly one interprets the relation between speaker and hearer. If these variants are not separated carefully, the debate risks becoming confused. Some arguments may refute only a particularly more demanding version of SKR while leaving less demanding speaker-dependent claims intact. Others may appear more damaging than they really are because the target has not been clearly fixed.

1.4.1 Immediate-speaker SKR

The most demanding version of SKR concerns the immediate speaker. On this reading, a hearer can know that *p* through testimony only if the person from whom the hearer directly receives the testimony knows that *p*.¹⁴ This is the version most naturally suggested by ordinary cases of face-to-face assertion. If one person tells another that *p*, and the second person comes to know that *p* by accepting what was said, then it may seem that the first person must already know it.

This demanding immediate-speaker version is the most exposed to counterexample. Cases in which the direct speaker is insincere, lacks belief, or possesses a defeater can be brought to bear against it relatively easily. Jennifer Lackey's examples¹⁵ are especially powerful if the target is understood in this way. If a hearer can know even though the immediate speaker does not, then this version of SKR is false.

¹⁴ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation". p. 486.

¹⁵ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

1.4.2 Chain-Based SKR

A less demanding version shifts attention from the immediate speaker to the testimonial chain as a whole. On this view, it does not need to be the direct speaker who knows; it may be enough that someone somewhere in the chain from which the content derives knows. The direct speaker may merely function as an intermediary. This less demanding position preserves a broadly transmissive picture while accommodating cases in which the immediate speaker is epistemically defective but the information ultimately traces back to a knowledgeable source.¹⁶

This distinction matters because some apparent counterexamples to SKR lose force if the chain-based version is adopted. In a classroom case, for example, the teacher may not know what they say, but the material they communicate may derive from a wider body of expert knowledge.¹⁷ A defender of a less demanding transmission thesis may therefore concede that the direct speaker lacks knowledge while insisting that testimonial knowledge still depends on knowledge elsewhere in the background. In that case, the exceptionless immediate-speaker version would fall, but a broader speaker-dependent thesis might survive.

1.4.3 Default SKR

Still another weakening of SKR replaces necessity with something closer to default structure. One might hold that testimonial knowledge is standardly or paradigmatically dependent on speaker knowledge, even if not universally so. This is a much more modest claim. It abandons the exceptionless conditional thesis that speaker knowledge is required in every case and instead says only that speaker knowledge remains central to the normal operation of testimony. Such a view may preserve much of the intuitive appeal of SKR without exposing itself to decisive counterexample in the same way.

At this point, an important methodological choice must be made. The present thesis is concerned with the most demanding and philosophically interesting version of SKR: the claim that every case of testimonial knowledge includes knowledge in the immediate speaker. This is the version most clearly challenged by Lackey and the one that gives the debate its sharpest form.¹⁸ If the thesis were weakened from the outset into a merely paradigmatic or default

¹⁶ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594ff.

¹⁷ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p. 39ff.

claim, much of the force of the dispute would disappear. It would then become much easier to grant that speaker knowledge matters in ordinary cases while conceding exceptional cases without significant theoretical cost.

For that reason, the central target of this thesis will remain exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR. However, later chapters will return to less demanding versions in order to ask whether something more modest can be preserved once the demanding only-if thesis is abandoned. This is important because a refutation of immediate-speaker SKR does not by itself show that all speaker-dependent insights are mistaken. It may only show that the immediate-speaker formulation overreaches.

The distinction between more or less demanding versions of SKR therefore serves two purposes. First, it prevents the debate from being framed too crudely. Second, it makes clear that the thesis under examination is both specific and demanding. The question is not whether speaker knowledge matters at all, but whether it is required in every case of testimonial knowledge.

1.5 Why Precision Matters

The need for precision is not merely terminological. It has direct consequences for the shape of the argument. If SKR is left vague, then both defenders and critics can win too easily. Defenders may smuggle support from less demanding claims into a more demanding conclusion, while critics may appear to refute the whole family of speaker-dependent positions when in fact they have only undermined one specific version.

This danger is particularly acute in debates about testimony because the topic naturally invites movement between descriptive, normative, and universal claims. Philosophers may begin by observing that testimony commonly involves learning from speakers who know. They may then note that speakers ought, ideally, to know what they assert. From there, it becomes tempting to conclude that hearer knowledge must depend on speaker knowledge. But this progression is too quick. It moves from what is standard, to what is proper, to what is necessary without adequate argument.

A similar problem arises on the critical side. Suppose a case is described in which the immediate speaker lacks knowledge but the hearer nevertheless seems to know. It may be tempting to conclude immediately that all transmission-based views of testimony have been

refuted. But this too can be too quick. A defender may reply that knowledge is present elsewhere in the chain, or that the case does not concern testimony in the relevant sense, or that the verdict that the hearer knows is itself mistaken. Whether these replies succeed remains to be seen, but they cannot even be assessed properly unless the target thesis has been stated with care.

Precision also matters because it helps determine what would count as a successful argument. If immediate-speaker SKR is the target, then the burden on the critic is clear: produce, or at least defend, a genuine case of testimonial knowledge without speaker knowledge. If, by contrast, the target were only the less demanding claim that speaker knowledge is paradigmatically important, then the same strategy would not suffice. Exceptional cases would not refute a merely default claim. The structure of the debate therefore depends directly on how the thesis is formulated.

This point is methodologically important for the rest of the present enquiry. The argument of the thesis will not be that speaker knowledge is unimportant, nor that testimony should be understood independently of the speaker altogether. The more limited aim is to test whether every case of testimonial knowledge includes speaker knowledge. Once that question is properly isolated, it becomes possible to assess both the appeal of SKR and the force of the objections against it without confusion.

The upshot of this chapter is therefore straightforward. The Speaker Knowledge Requirement expresses an exceptionless conditional claim about testimonial knowledge. Its intuitive attraction derives in part from less demanding claims with which it is easily conflated, but those claims do not establish it. Nor does the existence of challenging counterexamples to one formulation automatically settle the fate of all less demanding speaker-dependent views. The question that remains is whether the immediate-speaker conditional can be sustained once its motivations and its vulnerabilities are clearly exposed.

That is the task of the following chapters. Before assessing the counterexamples to SKR, it is first necessary to understand why the requirement has seemed so plausible in the first place. Only then can the eventual rejection of the thesis, if it is to be rejected, have real philosophical force.

2 Why the Speaker Knowledge Requirement Seems Plausible

The Speaker Knowledge Requirement is not an arbitrary restriction on testimonial knowledge. Its attraction lies in the fact that it gives a simple and powerful account of how testimony can be a source of knowledge at all. In ordinary cases, one person knows something, tells another person, and the second person comes to know it as well. Testimony appears to extend knowledge by passing it from an epistemically successful speaker to an epistemically dependent hearer. This is the basic thought behind transmission-based accounts of testimony.

The point of the present chapter is not to defend SKR as true, but to reconstruct why it is philosophically tempting. This is important because the later rejection of immediate-speaker SKR should not proceed by treating the requirement as obviously mistaken. On the contrary, SKR captures several important intuitions about testimony: that testimonial knowledge is dependent, that it is often second-hand, and that it must avoid epistemic luck. The question is whether these intuitions establish a universal conditional. I will argue that they do not, but first they need to be taken seriously.

2.1 The Transmission Picture

The most natural motivation for SKR comes from what may be called the transmission picture. On this view, testimony does not generate epistemic standing independently in the hearer. Rather, it preserves or transmits epistemic standing already present in the speaker. The speaker knows that *p*, asserts that *p*, and the hearer comes to know that *p* by accepting the speaker's assertion. The hearer's knowledge is therefore derivative: it depends on the speaker's prior epistemic achievement.

Lackey describes this background picture by comparing testimony with memory. Just as memory is often understood as preserving belief or knowledge over time, testimony is often understood as preserving knowledge across persons. On this picture, testimony is not a generative source of knowledge but a transmissive one: it does not create knowledge where none existed before, but passes knowledge from one subject to another.¹⁹ This analogy helps explain why SKR seems natural. If testimonial knowledge is transmitted knowledge, then it appears that there must be knowledge in the speaker for the hearer to receive.

¹⁹ Cf. Lackey (1999). "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". p. 471f.

Many ordinary examples support this picture. If a doctor knows the diagnosis and tells the patient, the patient seems to know because the doctor knows. If a historian knows a date and tells a student, the student's knowledge appears to depend on the historian's prior knowledge. If a local resident knows the way to the station and gives directions to a visitor, the visitor's knowledge seems derived from the resident's knowledge. In cases like these, the speaker's knowledge appears to do real epistemic work. It explains why the hearer's belief is not merely true, but knowledge.

Burge's account of content preservation helps explain the appeal of this model. In *Content Preservation*, Burge argues that a hearer is entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and is intelligible, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so. His Acceptance Principle states that a person is a priori entitled to accept what is presented as true and intelligible, because it is received from a rational source or resource for reason.²⁰ Burge's view is not simply identical with immediate-speaker SKR, since his focus is on entitlement and preservation rather than directly on the immediate speaker's knowledge. Nevertheless, his account reinforces the idea that testimonial uptake is not epistemically isolated. The hearer's epistemic position depends on a prior rational source.

This preservationist idea makes SKR attractive. If testimony preserves epistemic standing, then the quality of the source matters. A hearer cannot acquire knowledge from testimony if the relevant epistemic standing is absent at the source. On this way of thinking, the speaker's knowledge is not merely useful or common; it is what makes testimonial knowledge possible.

However, the transmission picture supports immediate-speaker SKR only if it is interpreted in a more demanding way. One may accept that testimony often preserves epistemic standing without accepting that every case of testimonial knowledge requires the immediate speaker to know. Burge's preservationism, for example, may support a broader social or rational-source requirement rather than the narrower claim that the individual speaker must know. This distinction is crucial. The transmission picture explains why SKR is tempting, but it does not by itself prove the universal conditional without exceptions.

²⁰ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation". p. 467f.

2.2 Testimonial Knowledge as Second-Hand Knowledge

A second motivation for SKR comes from the idea that testimonial knowledge is essentially second-hand knowledge. Elizabeth Fricker gives one of the most forceful versions of this thought. In *Second-Hand Knowledge*, she writes that “knowledge gained through trust in testimony is always and necessarily knowledge at second-hand.”²¹ Her reason is that, when a hearer believes what she is told through trust in the teller, she takes the teller to be expressing knowledge. The hearer’s trust is not merely a response to a reliable signal, but it is trust in another person as someone who is in a position to know.

This gives SKR a deeper motivation. If testimonial knowledge through trust depends on the hearer taking the speaker to know, then the speaker’s knowledge appears built into the structure of testimonial knowledge. The speaker’s epistemic standing is not just an external condition that improves the reliability of the exchange. It is part of what the hearer relies on. The hearer accepts the speaker’s word because the speaker presents themselves as someone who knows. If that presentation is false, then the hearer’s epistemic basis seems defective.

Fricker’s position is also connected to her earlier concern with gullibility. In *Against Gullibility*, she argues that hearers should not simply accept testimony blindly. Testimonial uptake requires sensitivity to the speaker’s trustworthiness and to possible defeating conditions. The hearer must be alert to signs of incompetence, insincerity, or unreliability.²² This does not mean that the hearer must always conduct an explicit investigation. But it does mean that testimonial knowledge is not epistemically automatic. The speaker’s epistemic position matters because the hearer’s trust is directed at a person who purports to be a competent source.

This view gives significant support to SKR. If testimony is knowledge gained by trusting another person as a knower, then a non-knowing speaker seems unable to provide what the hearer needs. The hearer may acquire a true belief, but not knowledge through trust in testimony. The speaker’s lack of knowledge would mean that the hearer’s trust rests on a false presupposition.

²¹ Fricker (2006). “Second-Hand Knowledge”. p. 593.

²² Cf. Fricker (1994). “Against Gullibility”. p. 145ff.

Yet there is an important limitation in Fricker's formulation. Her claim concerns knowledge gained through trust in testimony. That may not exhaust all forms of testimonial knowledge. There may be cases in which a hearer gains knowledge from what a speaker says without the hearer's epistemic standing depending strictly on the speaker's knowledge. For example, in a classroom case, the student may rely not simply on the individual teacher as a knower, but on a wider educational and scientific practice in which the teacher functions as a transmitter.²³ Similarly, in cases of defeater asymmetry, the hearer may receive true information through a sincere assertion even though the speaker's own belief is defeated.²⁴

Thus, Fricker provides one of the most forceful arguments for SKR, but also helps clarify its scope. Her view is most compelling for cases of direct interpersonal trust, where the hearer relies on the speaker as someone who knows. It is less obvious that it applies to every case in which testimony produces knowledge. This distinction will matter later. Lackey's challenge need not deny that testimonial knowledge is often second-hand in Fricker's sense. It needs only to show that not all testimonial knowledge depends on the immediate speaker's knowledge.

2.3 The Anti-Luck Motivation

The third and most important motivation for SKR is the anti-luck problem. Knowledge requires more than true belief. A belief that is true by accident does not amount to knowledge. Testimony is especially vulnerable to this worry because the hearer often accepts what is said without independent verification. If the speaker does not know, it may seem that the hearer's true belief is too accidental to count as knowledge.²⁵

SKR offers a clean solution. If the speaker knows that *p*, then the hearer's belief that *p* is not merely caused by an assertion that happened to be true. It is grounded in the speaker's prior epistemic success. The speaker already has a non-accidental relation to the truth, and testimony extends that relation to the hearer. This explains why the hearer's belief is knowledge rather than lucky true belief.

Goldberg's discussion of unsafe testimony shows why the anti-luck issue cannot be ignored. He argues that testimonial knowledge cannot be understood simply as true belief caused by

²³ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

²⁵ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". p. 302ff.

another person's assertion. The route from testimony to belief must be epistemically good enough; otherwise, the hearer's belief may be too easily false to count as knowledge.²⁶ Goldberg's own position is not a simple defence of SKR. In fact, he is interested in cases where testimonial knowledge may arise despite unsafe testimony. But his work is useful here because it highlights the central problem that any anti-SKR position must answer: if the speaker does not know, what prevents the hearer's belief from being lucky?

This is the central challenge for Lackey. It is not enough to imagine a speaker who lacks knowledge and nevertheless says something true.²⁷ That would establish only true belief in the hearer, not knowledge. The anti-SKR theorist must show that there can be cases where the speaker lacks knowledge but the hearer's belief is still formed through a non-accidental route to truth.

The defender of SKR may put the objection as follows. If the speaker lacks knowledge, then the source of testimony is epistemically defective. Perhaps the speaker is guessing, lying, relying on poor evidence, or ignoring defeaters. In such cases, the hearer's success seems accidental. Even if the assertion is true, the hearer is lucky to believe it. Speaker knowledge therefore seems to secure the epistemic route from assertion to hearer belief.²⁸

This objection is powerful, but it also reveals where the debate must focus. The question is whether every failure of speaker knowledge creates epistemic luck for the hearer. Lackey's central insight is that it does not. Sometimes the speaker fails to know for reasons that are local to the speaker and do not undermine the hearer's epistemic position. For example, the speaker may lack belief while reliably transmitting institutionally grounded information.²⁹ Or the speaker may possess a defeater that the hearer does not share.³⁰ In such cases, the speaker's lack of knowledge need not make the hearer's belief lucky.

This is why the anti-luck motivation supports SKR only if speaker knowledge is the only possible anti-luck condition.³¹ But that assumption is contestable. Testimonial knowledge may be secured by other factors: reliable institutional structures, reliable statement-production, proper hearer uptake, absence of defeaters, or a truth-conducive communicative

²⁶ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". p. 302ff.

²⁷ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 475ff.

²⁸ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". p. 302ff.

²⁹ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

³¹ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". p. 306ff.

environment. Speaker knowledge is one way of securing testimonial knowledge. It remains to be shown that it is the only way.

2.4 The Real Force of SKR

The most compelling case for SKR is cumulative. The transmission picture explains how knowledge can be socially preserved. The second-hand knowledge model explains why trusting a speaker appears to involve taking that speaker to know. The anti-luck motivation explains why speaker knowledge seems needed to prevent testimonial success from becoming accidental. Together, these considerations make SKR much more than a crude prejudice in favour of knowledgeable speakers.

This is why the rejection of SKR must not be too quick. If immediate-speaker SKR is false, then one must explain how testimonial knowledge can remain genuinely epistemic despite not always being transmitted from a knowing speaker. The anti-SKR position cannot simply treat testimony as any reliable causal process that produces true belief. That would lose the interpersonal structure that made SKR attractive in the first place. Nor can it ignore the anti-luck problem. The hearer's belief must still be connected to the truth in a way adequate for knowledge.

The proper target, then, is not the idea that speaker knowledge is important. That idea is obviously right in many cases. The target is the more demanding claim that every case of testimonial knowledge includes speaker knowledge. The argument against SKR must show that there are cases where the hearer's testimonial belief is sufficiently connected to the truth even though the speaker does not know. This is the task of the next chapter.

2.5 Preliminary Conclusion

SKR is plausible because it captures something real about testimony. Testimony is often transmissive. It often involves second-hand knowledge. It often relies on a speaker whose epistemic standing protects the hearer from luck. Fricker's account of trust in testimony gives the most forceful version of this thought,³² while Burge's preservationism³³ and Goldberg's safety concerns³⁴ show why the transmission picture cannot simply be dismissed.

³² Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge".

³³ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation".

³⁴ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony".

Nevertheless, none of these considerations establishes the immediate-speaker conditional without exceptions. They show that speaker knowledge is a powerful and common way of securing testimonial knowledge. They do not show that it is the only way. The later argument will suggest that the real anti-luck condition is not speaker knowledge itself, but the adequacy of the testimonial route through which the hearer reaches the truth. Once this distinction is clear, the debate turns on counterexamples. If Lackey can show that a hearer can know through testimony from a speaker who lacks knowledge, and if the hearer's knowledge is not merely lucky, then immediate-speaker SKR fails.

3 Lackey's Challenge to the Speaker Knowledge Requirement

3.1 Lackey's Anti-Transmission Project

Lackey's challenge is aimed at the transmission picture behind SKR. She rejects the idea that the epistemic status of testimonial belief must be transmitted from the speaker's belief to the hearer's belief. Her central claim is that the epistemic conditions for testimonial knowledge should not be imposed simply on the speaker's belief. Rather, they must be assessed at the level of the speaker's statement and the hearer's uptake.³⁵

This is an important shift. Traditional transmission models focus on whether the speaker believes, is justified, or knows. Lackey argues that this focus is too narrow. A speaker's belief may be epistemically defective while the statement they produce is reliable, accurate, and epistemically useful for the hearer. Conversely, a speaker may have knowledge or justification while the hearer fails to acquire knowledge because of defeaters on the hearer's side. The relation between speaker warrant and hearer warrant is therefore not a simple transfer relation.

In her earlier article, Lackey distinguishes a necessity dimension and a sufficiency dimension in transmission views.³⁶ The necessity dimension is the one most relevant here: if a hearer knows that *p* through testimony, must the speaker know that *p*? Lackey's answer is no. Her cases are designed to show that the hearer's knowledge can survive different kinds of speaker-side epistemic defect: lack of belief, insincerity, and defeat.

For present purposes, the important point is not that all of Lackey's cases are equally challenging. They are not. Some are easier to resist than others. The task is to identify which cases genuinely threaten SKR and why. A successful counterexample must satisfy three conditions. First, the hearer must acquire the belief through testimony. Second, the hearer's belief must amount to knowledge rather than merely true belief. Third, the speaker must lack knowledge. Only if all three conditions are met does immediate-speaker SKR fail.

³⁵ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

³⁶ Cf. Lackey (1999). "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". p. 471ff.

3.2 Counterexamples and the Burden against an Exceptionless Conditional

Because SKR is an exceptionless universal conditional, the logic of the debate is relatively clear. To defend SKR, one must hold that in every genuine case of testimonial knowledge, the speaker knows what they assert. To refute it, one must defend a single counterexample in which three conditions are met: (1) the hearer's belief is genuinely acquired through testimony; (2) the hearer really has knowledge rather than mere true belief; and (3) the speaker does not know the proposition asserted. If all three conditions are satisfied in one case, immediate-speaker SKR is false.

This gives Lackey's strategy dialectical power. It is often easier to undermine a universal exceptionless conditional claim by case analysis than by broad theoretical argument. If these cases are convincing, then the thesis falls even if it remains intuitively attractive in standard contexts. That is why counterexamples play such a central role in the literature on testimony. The burden does not lie only in constructing coherent cases, but in showing that the relevant epistemic verdicts are stable enough to support a philosophical conclusion.³⁷

At the same time, this also explains why the cases must be handled carefully. A counterexample to SKR succeeds only if the knowledge attribution to the hearer is credible. If the hearer merely forms a true belief, or if the case is so deviant that it no longer counts as testimony in the relevant sense, then the challenge weakens. Similarly, if the speaker's apparent lack of knowledge can be redescribed away, for example by locating knowledge elsewhere in the relevant source, then the case may not threaten the thesis as directly as it seems.

For this reason, not all counterexamples have equal force. Some may be rhetorically vivid but philosophically unstable. Others may be more theoretically useful because they isolate the issue more cleanly. A serious assessment of Lackey's challenge must therefore do more than present the cases as a cumulative block. It must ask which of them really bears the greatest weight against the exceptionless conditional claim and which may be more vulnerable to resistance.

The present chapter will take up three kinds of case central to Lackey's discussion: a case in which the speaker lacks belief, a case in which the speaker is insincere, and a case in which

³⁷ Cf. Lackey (1999). "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". p. 476ff.

the speaker believes but does not know because of a defeater.³⁸ All three are meant to show that hearer knowledge can survive speaker-side epistemic defect. But they do not all threaten SKR in the same way. Part of the task of this chapter will therefore be comparative as well as critical.

3.2.1 Creationist Teacher

Lackey's first key case is the Creationist Teacher, presented early in *Learning from Words* (2008).³⁹ A devoutly religious biology teacher, Stella, does not believe the content of evolutionary theory, despite being fully aware of the overwhelming scientific consensus supporting it. Motivated by professional integrity, she nonetheless teaches her students the standard evolutionary facts, including that "Homo sapiens evolved from Homo erectus".

The students accept Stella's testimony and form true beliefs in a way that seems epistemically well-grounded: they are in a classroom designed to transmit reliable information; Stella is trained to teach the material correctly; and there are no defeaters in play for the students. Yet Stella herself lacks belief and, by Lackey's stipulation, lacks knowledge of what she asserts. If the students nonetheless know the relevant propositions, hearer knowledge can occur without speaker knowledge.⁴⁰

The intended conclusion is straightforward. Since the teacher does not believe the proposition asserted, she does not know it. Yet the students, who accept her testimony in a normal classroom setting, seem nevertheless to acquire knowledge. They are taught true information by a professionally competent instructor in an institution designed to communicate reliable knowledge. If the students know what they are taught, then the SKR conditional cannot hold without exception.

The case has obvious force. In ordinary academic life, it would seem highly artificial to deny that students can learn genuine knowledge from a teacher simply because the teacher privately withholds belief in the material. What matters to the students' epistemic position appears to be that the content presented is accurate, competently delivered, and received under conditions appropriate for learning. The teacher's lack of belief may be a serious defect from one point of view, but it does not seem to infect the students' epistemic success. They

³⁸ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 48f.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 49f.

do not merely happen to form a true belief; they learn in a reliable pedagogical setting from testimony that is carefully regulated by disciplinary standards.⁴¹

For that reason, the case creates genuine pressure for immediate-speaker SKR. If one insists that the students do not know, the result begins to sound strained. It suggests that large portions of ordinary education would fail to yield testimonial knowledge whenever the individual instructor is personally unconvinced of the material taught, even if the teaching is accurate, competent, and institutionally supported. That is not impossible, but it is a costly position. It makes testimonial knowledge appear more fragile than ordinary epistemic practice suggests.

Still, the case is not beyond challenge. One possible response is to argue that the students' knowledge derives not from the teacher in the immediate-speaker sense, but from the wider scientific and educational system in which her testimony is embedded. On this line, the teacher is more like an intermediary than a genuine source. The relevant knowledge may be located in the disciplinary community, the textbook tradition, or the chain of expert inquiry standing behind the lesson. If so, the case may refute only the most demanding immediate-speaker version of SKR while leaving a less demanding chain-based transmission view intact.

This is an important complication. It means that Creationist Teacher is a serious challenge to the thesis that the immediate speaker must know, but perhaps a less decisive challenge to broader forms of speaker dependence. The case shows, at minimum, that the personal epistemic condition of the direct testifier may not determine the hearer's epistemic success. But it leaves open whether knowledge elsewhere in the testimonial background is doing the real work.

A second difficulty is that the case involves a highly structured institutional context. This helps the anti-SKR verdict by making the students' belief look secure and non-accidental. But it also weakens the force of the example as a pure test of testimonial exchange. The more the classroom is treated as a socially distributed epistemic environment rather than as a simple speaker-hearer interaction, the easier it becomes to explain the students' knowledge without treating the teacher's lack of knowledge as decisive. That supports Lackey's negative point

⁴¹ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

against immediate-speaker SKR, but it also means that the case may not isolate the core issue as cleanly as one might wish.

Even so, the case remains philosophically important. It shows that the most demanding and most intuitive version of SKR, according to which hearer knowledge requires knowledge in the immediate speaker, is under real strain. The students appear able to know despite the teacher's lack of belief. That is already enough to put pressure on the exceptionless conditional, even if one later argues that the epistemic success of the case depends on a wider chain of background knowledge.

The lesson of Creationist Teacher, then, is significant but limited. It suggests that immediate-speaker SKR is too demanding. It does not yet settle whether all speaker-dependent or transmission-based views must be abandoned. For that reason, the case is an important starting point, but not the cleanest or most decisive challenge to the immediate-speaker conditional.

3.2.2 Consistent Liar

A second counterexample is the Consistent Liar case.⁴² This case is meant to push the challenge further: hearer knowledge can arise even where the speaker is not merely non-knowing but epistemically defective in an especially stark way. In this example, a speaker, Bertha, suffers from a neurological condition that causes her to always lie about her perceptual experiences. When she sees a deer, she forms the (false) belief that she sees a horse; but following her lying disposition, she tells others that she saw a deer.

The hearer, unaware of the speaker's pathological lying habit, takes her assertion at face value and forms the belief that a deer is present. The belief is true, reliably formed, and free of defeaters. Crucially, Bertha neither believes nor knows the content of her testimony. She asserts something true only by accident, yet the hearer acquires knowledge.

The philosophical attraction of this strategy is obvious. If a hearer can know even when the speaker is insincere, then immediate-speaker SKR looks especially vulnerable. A speaker who lies does not merely fail to know in some incidental way. The very act of assertion seems corrupted at its source. To show that hearer knowledge can survive even this would be to

⁴² Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

show that speaker knowledge is not merely unnecessary in unusual circumstances, but unnecessary even where the speaker's testimonial posture is seriously defective.

This makes the liar case rhetorically powerful. It dramatizes the claim that what matters for hearer knowledge may be the truth and reliability of what is said rather than the internal epistemic state of the person saying it. If the hearer is placed in an epistemically favourable position by accepting testimony, then perhaps the hearer can know regardless of the speaker's insincerity. In that case, the dependence on the speaker's epistemic standing would be more limited than the defender of SKR supposes.

Yet precisely because the case is so striking, it is also less stable philosophically than Creationist Teacher.⁴³ The first difficulty is that insincerity seems much more closely tied to the nature of testimony itself than mere lack of belief in a professional role. A teacher who accurately conveys material she privately rejects may still be participating recognizably in a practice of testimony.⁴⁴ By contrast, a speaker who lies appears to defect from the cooperative norm of assertion more fundamentally.⁴⁵ This makes it easier for a defender of SKR to resist the case by arguing that it is no longer a genuine instance of testimony in the relevant epistemic sense.

A second difficulty is that the anti-luck pressure becomes more serious here. In order for the hearer to know from a liar, the case must be arranged so that the liar's statement is nevertheless truth-conducive in a stable enough way. But the more one builds in such special conditions, the more the case risks looking contrived. The hearer's true belief may still seem too dependent on fortuitous structure rather than on a properly epistemic route to truth. If that worry takes hold, then the case ceases to look like a genuine example of testimonial knowledge and instead becomes a curious mechanism for the accidental production of true belief.

This does not mean that Consistent Liar⁴⁶ is useless. Its value lies in showing just how far one would have to push speaker dependence if SKR were maintained in its most demanding form. If one thinks that a hearer can never know from insincere testimony, then one must explain why the speaker's defect necessarily blocks the hearer's knowledge even when the

⁴³ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.* p. 48ff.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54ff.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54f.

informational content is true, stable, and accepted under favourable conditions. That remains a non-trivial burden. But compared with Creationist Teacher, the liar case is easier to resist because the defender of SKR can appeal more naturally to the breakdown of sincerity as central to testimony.

For this reason, Consistent Liar should not bear the main argumentative weight of the case against SKR. It is useful as a limiting example. It illustrates the extent to which speaker-side defects might, in principle, fail to prevent hearer knowledge. But because it raises serious questions about the genuineness of the testimonial exchange and about the anti-luck status of the hearer's belief, it is not the cleanest or most compelling counterexample to the exceptionless conditional.

Its significance is therefore secondary. It broadens the range of imaginable anti-SKR cases, but it does not offer the most secure basis on which to reject immediate-speaker SKR. A more decisive challenge must involve a case in which the speaker remains recognizably within the practice of testimony and the hearer's knowledge appears less dependent on unusual structural luck. That is exactly what the next case is designed to provide.

3.2.3 Persistent Believer

The most philosophically powerful kind of anti-SKR case is one in which the speaker believes what they say, communicates sincerely, and is not generally unreliable as a testifier, but nevertheless fails to know because their own epistemic position is defeated. The hearer, however, does not share the defeater and accepts the testimony under otherwise favourable conditions. This kind of case is especially important because it isolates the issue more cleanly than either Creationist Teacher⁴⁷ or Consistent Liar.⁴⁸

The Persistent Believer case further illustrates the disconnect between speaker and hearer epistemic states.⁴⁹ Where the previous cases target lack of belief and lack of knowledge, this one targets the role of defeaters and justification. In this scenario, a speaker, Millicent, has overwhelming evidence that her perceptual faculties are unreliable, such as repeated warnings from medical professionals that she is suffering from severe illusions. Despite this, she continues to form perceptual beliefs as usual.

⁴⁷ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54ff.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

When she sees a tree in front of her, she forms the belief that a tree is present but has a strong defeater for this belief due to her evidence about her cognitive impairment. She reports her perceptual belief to a hearer who lacks this defeating evidence. Relying on the testimony, the hearer forms the same belief. Because the hearer is not aware of the speaker's undermining evidence, her belief is not defeated. She acquires knowledge, whereas the speaker does not.

What makes this case especially convincing is that it avoids many of the distracting features present in the earlier examples. The speaker is not insincere. She is not professionally reciting content she privately rejects. She is not functioning merely as a mouthpiece for an institution in a way that makes it tempting to shift the source of knowledge elsewhere. She is, in the relevant sense, an ordinary testimonial speaker who believes what she says and presents it as true. The only problem lies in the fact that her own epistemic position is undermined by a defeater that the hearer does not share.

This is exactly why the case is so damaging to immediate-speaker SKR. If the hearer knows, then speaker-side failure of knowledge does not automatically transfer to the hearer. The speaker's defeater is local to their own epistemic position. It prevents their belief from amounting to knowledge, but it need not infect the hearer's belief if the hearer lacks the defeating information and accepts the testimony under otherwise good conditions. In that case, the speaker's lack of knowledge cannot be a universal barrier to hearer knowledge.

The significance of this point should not be underestimated. A defender of SKR might try to resist Creationist Teacher⁵⁰ by relocating knowledge to the broader institutional environment. A defender might try to resist Consistent Liar⁵¹ by denying that insincere assertion is genuine testimony. But Persistent Believer⁵² makes both strategies less available. The case is much closer to ordinary testimony, and the speaker's epistemic defect is much more precise. The problem is not that the speaker is outside the practice of testimony; it is that her personal epistemic status is compromised in a way that seems irrelevant to the hearer's position.

For this reason, Persistent Believer appears to be the clearest challenge to immediate-speaker SKR. It shows that the hearer's testimonial knowledge may come apart from the speaker's knowledge not because the speaker is bizarre or institutionally marginal, but because

⁵⁰ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54ff.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

knowledge-blocking conditions may be indexed to one epistemic subject without being shared by another. That is a serious problem for any theory that treats speaker knowledge as a universal conditional.

A defender of SKR can, of course, still resist. One possible reply is to insist that if the speaker has a defeater, then the testimony itself is epistemically tainted in a way that prevents hearer knowledge. This response fits naturally with transmission-oriented views, such as those of Fricker⁵³ or Burge,⁵⁴ according to which the hearer's epistemic standing depends on the epistemic standing of the speaker or source. But this response looks costly. It implies that hearers are prevented from knowing by defects that may be entirely inaccessible to them and that have no bearing on the reliability of their own belief-formation. That makes testimonial knowledge appear implausibly hostage to the hidden epistemic condition of the speaker. Another reply would be to deny the intuition that the hearer knows. But here too denial is hard to sustain. The hearer seems to satisfy the ordinary conditions for testimonial knowledge: acceptance of sincere testimony, truth of content, absence of defeaters, and epistemically normal uptake. Graham's account of testimonial justification is useful here, since it allows testimonial uptake to confer *prima facie* justification when the hearer comprehends a telling and forms belief in the normal way, while still allowing such justification to be defeated where relevant defeaters are present.⁵⁵

For these reasons, Persistent Believer⁵⁶ is not merely one counterexample among others. It is the clearest test case for the exceptionless conditional. If one accepts that the hearer knows in such a case, then immediate-speaker SKR is very difficult to maintain. The speaker's lack of knowledge, caused by a defeater specific to her epistemic position, does not prevent the hearer's successful epistemic relation to the truth. The exceptionless conditional claim therefore appears too strong.

3.3 Comparing the Cases

Once the three cases are considered together, an important comparative point emerges. Lackey's challenge to SKR does not rest on a single uniform type of example. Instead, it

⁵³ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation". p. 467ff.

⁵⁵ Cf. Graham, Peter. "Testimonial Justification: Inferential or Non-Inferential?". In *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 56. No. 222. (2006). p. 84ff.

⁵⁶ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 59ff.

proceeds through several ways in which speaker-side epistemic failure might fail to block hearer knowledge. But these cases differ in strength, and treating them as equally compelling obscures what is most powerful in the anti-SKR argument.

Creationist Teacher is a serious challenge to the immediate-speaker version of SKR. It makes vivid the idea that accurate, professionally delivered testimony can yield knowledge even if the direct speaker lacks belief.⁵⁷ But the case is somewhat complicated by its institutional setting. Because the classroom environment is highly structured and the content taught is supported by a larger body of expert knowledge, defenders of speaker dependence can try to preserve a less demanding transmission thesis by shifting the source of knowledge to the broader chain behind the speaker.

Consistent Liar⁵⁸ is the least stable of the three. Its main value is rhetorical: it tests how far one can separate hearer knowledge from speaker-side epistemic virtue. But because the case involves insincerity and requires fairly unusual stabilizing conditions, it is easier to resist. A defender of SKR can plausibly argue either that the case is too deviant to count as genuine testimony or that the hearer's true belief is too close to luck to count as knowledge. For that reason, it should not play the central role in the argument against immediate-speaker SKR.

Persistent Believer, by contrast, poses the deepest problem. It keeps the speaker within ordinary testimonial practice, avoids the unusual features of pedagogical role conflict and deliberate deception, and isolates the issue in terms of defeater asymmetry between speaker and hearer.⁵⁹ Because the speaker's epistemic defect is local rather than global, the case makes it especially difficult to explain why the lack of knowledge in the speaker should automatically prevent the hearer from knowing. This is where Lackey's slogan becomes illuminating: "Unreliable believers can nonetheless be reliable testifiers."⁶⁰ This is the point at which immediate-speaker SKR looks most vulnerable.

The comparative lesson is therefore clear. Lackey's cumulative case matters, but its force is not evenly distributed. The clearest reason to reject SKR does not come from the most dramatic example, but from the cleanest one. If immediate-speaker SKR falls, it falls above all

⁵⁷ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54f.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59f.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 63.

because cases of defeater asymmetry show not every testimonial exchange involving knowledge includes speaker knowledge.

3.4 Provisional Conclusion

The central question of this thesis is whether every case of testimonial knowledge includes speaker knowledge. Lackey's challenge is important because it addresses that question directly through counterexample. Once the cases are examined carefully, the result is significant. The most demanding formulation of SKR, according to which the hearer can know through testimony only if the speaker knows, comes under serious pressure.

Creationist Teacher suggests that hearers may know even when the immediate speaker lacks belief.⁶¹ Consistent Liar pushes the point further, though in a less stable way, by suggesting that even insincerity need not always block hearer knowledge.⁶² Most importantly, Persistent Believer indicates that speaker-side failure of knowledge due to a defeater need not prevent the hearer from knowing where the hearer does not share that epistemic defect.⁶³ This last case is especially hard for immediate-speaker SKR to accommodate.

The provisional verdict of the present chapter is therefore that Lackey gives substantial reason to reject immediate-speaker SKR. At the very least, she undermines the claim that knowledge in the immediate speaker is necessary in every case of testimonial knowledge. Whether a broader or less demanding speaker-dependent thesis can still be preserved remains an open question. That is the issue to which the next chapter turns.

⁶¹ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.* p. 54ff.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

4 Can the Speaker Knowledge Requirement Be Rescued?

The previous chapter argued that Lackey's counterexamples put serious pressure on the Speaker Knowledge Requirement. If there are genuine cases in which a hearer acquires testimonial knowledge even though the immediate speaker does not know what they assert, then immediate-speaker SKR is false. However, the argument cannot stop there. SKR is not an obviously implausible thesis. It is supported by a powerful transmission picture of testimony, by the idea that testimonial knowledge is second-hand, and by the anti-luck thought that hearer knowledge must be grounded in a prior epistemic success. For that reason, a defender of SKR has several possible strategies available.

The question in this chapter is whether any of these strategies can rescue SKR in its immediate-speaker form. Four responses will be considered. First, one might deny the relevant knowledge attribution to the hearer. Second, one might restrict the category of testimony so that Lackey's problematic cases no longer count as genuine cases of testimonial knowledge. Third, one might relocate the relevant knowledge elsewhere in the testimonial chain, rather than requiring knowledge in the immediate speaker. Fourth, one might weaken SKR into a more modest thesis about normal, paradigmatic, or epistemically ideal testimony. Each response captures something important. But none succeeds in preserving immediate-speaker SKR as a universal conditional.

4.1 Denying the Intuition of Hearer Knowledge

The most direct way to defend the Speaker Knowledge Requirement is to reject the verdict that the hearer has knowledge in Lackey's counterexamples. If SKR says that hearer knowledge requires speaker knowledge, then any case in which the speaker lacks knowledge must fail to be a case of hearer knowledge. The hearer may form a true belief, perhaps even a highly reasonable true belief, but not knowledge. The apparent counterexample is then dismissed as a misleading intuition.

This response has an obvious theoretical attraction. It preserves the transmission picture without modification. If testimonial knowledge is always second-hand, then the hearer cannot acquire more epistemic standing than the speaker possesses. This is close to the thought defended by Fricker, who argues that "knowledge gained through trust in testimony is always

and necessarily knowledge at second-hand.”⁶⁴ If the hearer’s knowledge depends on trusting the speaker as someone who knows, then a speaker who does not know cannot provide the epistemic basis required for hearer knowledge. On this view, Lackey’s cases may produce true belief, but they do not produce testimonial knowledge in the immediate-speaker sense.

The same response can also be motivated by anti-luck considerations. Knowledge is not merely true belief. A belief that is true by accident does not amount to knowledge. If the speaker lacks knowledge, then one may worry that the hearer’s true belief is insufficiently connected to the truth. Goldberg’s discussion of unsafe testimony is relevant here. He emphasizes that testimonial knowledge requires more than the actual truth of what is asserted; the route from testimony to belief must be epistemically secure enough to avoid luck.⁶⁵ The defender of SKR can therefore argue that Lackey’s cases underestimate the danger of lucky true belief. If the speaker is epistemically defective, then the hearer’s success may be accidental even where the assertion is true.

This line of defence is strongest in relation to Consistent Liar.⁶⁶ In that case, the speaker’s testimonial posture is seriously corrupted. The speaker does not merely lack knowledge; she is disposed to lie. The hearer’s true belief is therefore produced through a deviant route. Even if the case is stipulated so that the liar’s assertion is true, the resulting belief may seem too dependent on artificial background conditions to count as knowledge. A defender of SKR can plausibly say that the hearer is lucky: she happens to receive truth from a source whose ordinary epistemic and interpersonal orientation is defective. The denial of hearer knowledge in such a case does not appear absurd. It is a reasonable way to preserve the anti-luck constraint on knowledge.⁶⁷

This shows why Consistent Liar is not the strongest anti-SKR case. The more unusual and normatively defective the testimonial situation becomes, the easier it is for the defender of SKR to resist the intuition that the hearer knows. In liar cases, the defender can appeal both to the instability of the route to truth and to the breakdown of testimonial norms. Since assertion and testimony are usually governed by norms of sincerity and responsibility, a

⁶⁴ Fricker (2006). “Second-Hand Knowledge”. p. 593.

⁶⁵ Cf. Goldberg (2005). “Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony”. p. 302ff.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

⁶⁷ Cf. Goldberg (2005). “Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony”. p. 302ff.

systematically deceptive speaker is not a straightforward source of testimonial knowledge.⁶⁸ This does not prove that the hearer cannot know, but it makes the knowledge attribution contestable.

The strategy is less convincing in Creationist Teacher.⁶⁹ In that case, the speaker does not believe what she teaches, and so she does not know it, since knowledge entails belief. Yet the students appear to acquire knowledge. They receive accurate scientific information in a structured educational setting from a professionally competent teacher. The proposition taught is not accidentally true, nor is the classroom situation epistemically chaotic. The teacher's personal lack of belief is a defect in her own doxastic state, but it does not obviously undermine the students' epistemic position. Lackey uses this case to show that a speaker may be an unreliable believer while still functioning as a reliable testifier in a given context.

To deny that the students know seems costly. It would imply that ordinary educational knowledge depends on hidden psychological facts about the individual teacher. If a biology teacher accurately teaches evolutionary theory from a reliable curriculum, the students' knowledge should not disappear merely because the teacher privately rejects the content. Such a result makes testimonial knowledge implausibly fragile. The students' epistemic standing would be hostage to the teacher's private belief state, even when that belief state does not affect the accuracy, reliability, or institutional grounding of the instruction.

Still, the defender of SKR can attempt resistance here. She might say that the students acquire justified true belief, but not knowledge. Alternatively, she might say that the students' knowledge is not strictly testimonial knowledge from the teacher, but knowledge grounded in the scientific and educational system behind the teacher. The second reply is more promising, but it is no longer a simple denial of hearer knowledge. It shifts the explanation away from the teacher as immediate speaker and toward a broader testimonial chain. That strategy will be discussed later. For present purposes, the important point is that a pure denial of student knowledge is difficult to maintain without making educational testimony excessively dependent on individual speaker psychology.

⁶⁸ Cf. Moran (2005). "Getting Told and Being Believed". p. 8ff.

⁶⁹ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

The denial strategy faces its deepest problem in Persistent Believer.⁷⁰ This case is stronger than Creationist Teacher because it does not rely on institutional mediation, and it is stronger than Consistent Liar because it does not involve insincerity. The speaker sincerely believes what she says, and the hearer accepts the assertion in a normal testimonial exchange. The only complication is that the speaker possesses a defeater that prevents her own belief from amounting to knowledge. The hearer does not possess that defeater. If the content is true, the assertion is sincere, and the hearer lacks defeating evidence, then the hearer seems to be in a good epistemic position.

This is where the defender of SKR must make the strongest and most controversial claim: the speaker's defeater blocks the hearer's knowledge even though the hearer does not share it. Lackey's point is that this looks implausible. The speaker's epistemic defect is local to the speaker. It affects her own knowledge because it belongs to her evidential situation. But it does not automatically follow that the hearer's belief is defeated. If defeaters are, at least in many cases, subject-relative, then a defeater possessed by the speaker need not transfer to the hearer. The hearer's belief may be undefeated, responsibly formed, and connected to the truth through a sincere testimonial exchange.

The defender of SKR might reply that testimonial knowledge is source-dependent. If the source does not know, then the hearer cannot know. But this reply risks simply restating SKR rather than defending it. What needs to be shown is why the speaker's lack of knowledge undermines the hearer's epistemic relation to the truth. In Persistent Believer, this is precisely what is difficult to show. The speaker's defeater blocks her own knowledge, but unless that defeater also undermines the reliability or epistemic adequacy of the testimonial route for the hearer, it is unclear why the hearer's knowledge should fail.⁷¹

This does not mean that speaker-side defeaters never matter. If the speaker has evidence that her assertion is unreliable, or if the defeater reveals that the testimonial route is objectively defective, then the hearer's knowledge may indeed be threatened. But that is different from saying that every speaker-side defeater automatically transfers to the hearer. The more plausible view is that speaker defeaters matter when they affect the epistemic quality of the

⁷⁰ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 59ff.

⁷¹ Cf. Lackey (1999). "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". p. 484ff.

hearer's route to truth or when they are, or should be, available to the hearer. Persistent Believer is powerful because it suggests that some defeaters are local in precisely this sense.

For this reason, denying the intuition of hearer knowledge provides only a partial defence of SKR. It may work against the most deviant cases, especially Consistent Liar.⁷² It is less plausible in Creationist Teacher,⁷³ and least plausible in Persistent Believer.⁷⁴ The cleaner the case becomes, the more costly the denial becomes. If defending SKR requires denying knowledge in ordinary cases of sincere, true, undefeated testimonial uptake, then SKR begins to look too strict.

4.2 Restricting the Category of Testimony

A second strategy is to argue that Lackey's problematic cases are not genuine instances of testimony in the relevant epistemic sense. On this view, the cases fail not because the hearer lacks all epistemic standing, but because any knowledge present is not testimonial knowledge properly so called. The defender of SKR can then maintain that, in genuine testimonial knowledge, the speaker must know.

This strategy is connected to the thought that testimony is not merely a causal process by which words produce beliefs. Testimony is a norm-governed practice of telling and being told. It involves assertion, address, sincerity, responsibility, and uptake. Moran's assurance view gives one influential version of this thought. For Moran, testimony is not merely evidence supplied by another person's behaviour. In telling, the speaker presents themselves as accountable for the truth of what they say and gives the hearer a distinctive kind of assurance.⁷⁵ If testimony essentially involves this interpersonal commitment, then cases in which the speaker radically violates the norms of assertion may be excluded from the central category of testimonial knowledge.

This response is again most plausible in relation to Consistent Liar.⁷⁶ The liar does not responsibly tell the hearer that p. She uses assertoric language while aiming to deceive. If testimony is essentially a practice of responsible telling, then deliberate deception may be treated as a breakdown of testimony rather than as a defective instance of it. On that

⁷² Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

⁷³ Cf. *ibid.* p. 48ff.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

⁷⁵ Cf. Moran (2005). "Getting Told and Being Believed". p. 7ff.

⁷⁶ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

interpretation, the liar case does not threaten SKR because it does not involve genuine testimonial knowledge. The hearer's belief may be caused by another person's words, but it is not knowledge through testimony in the normatively significant sense.

This line of resistance has genuine appeal. It captures something that purely reliabilist accounts risk missing: testimony is not equivalent to any reliable information channel. A road sign, a thermometer, or an accidental sound may produce true belief, but testimony involves a person presenting something as true. This personal and normative dimension is part of what distinguishes testimony from mere information transfer. If Lackey's liar cases treat a radically defective assertion as epistemically equivalent to responsible telling, then the defender of SKR can object that the phenomenon has been misdescribed.⁷⁷

However, the restriction strategy becomes much less convincing once we move beyond the most deviant cases. Creationist Teacher is still recognizably testimony. The teacher is not producing random sounds, nor is she merely functioning as a natural indicator. She intentionally presents information to her students in a classroom setting. She is engaged in the social practice of teaching and telling, even if she privately rejects the content. Her assertion is normatively unusual because she does not believe what she teaches, but it is not obvious that this removes the case from the category of testimony altogether.⁷⁸

A defender might reply that the teacher does not genuinely testify because she does not speak from belief. This reply is too strong. Many ordinary cases of institutional testimony involve speakers who report information that they do not personally believe strongly, fully understand, or know firsthand. A museum guide, a newsreader, or a teacher may communicate material grounded in institutional sources rather than in personal belief. To exclude all such cases from testimony would make the category artificially narrow. It would also make the epistemology of testimony poorly suited to modern epistemic practices, where information is often transmitted through roles and institutions rather than through first-person knowledge.⁷⁹

The restriction strategy is even weaker against Persistent Believer. Here the speaker believes what she says and asserts sincerely. The hearer accepts the assertion as testimony. The

⁷⁷ Cf. Moran (2005). "Getting Told and Being Believed". p. 6ff.

⁷⁸ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁷⁹ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". p. 306ff.

exchange has the normal structure of testimonial communication. The only problem is that the speaker has a defeater that prevents her own belief from constituting knowledge.⁸⁰ That fact does not plausibly remove the exchange from the domain of testimony. If sincere assertion of a believed proposition does not count as testimony merely because the speaker lacks knowledge, then the defender has effectively built SKR into the definition of testimony.

This is the danger of circularity. A defender could define genuine testimony as assertion from knowledge. Then SKR would be true by definition: testimonial knowledge requires speaker knowledge because only knowledgeable assertion counts as testimony. But this would not be a substantive defence of SKR. It would avoid the counterexamples rather than answer them. The philosophical question is whether hearers can acquire knowledge from assertions made by non-knowing speakers. Defining such assertions out of the category of testimony simply insulates the thesis from challenge.

A more moderate version of the restriction strategy is available. One might distinguish between different senses of testimony. Fricker's view suggests such a distinction. She argues that knowledge through trust in testimony is second-hand knowledge and depends on the teller's epistemic position.⁸¹ On this view, Lackey's cases may show that hearers can acquire knowledge from another person's words, but not that they can acquire knowledge through trust in testimony in Fricker's immediate-speaker sense. This is a more careful response than simply denying that the cases involve testimony.

Nevertheless, this response narrows the conclusion. It may show that speaker knowledge may be required for one important kind of testimonial knowledge: knowledge acquired through direct trust in a speaker as a knower. But it does not show that testimonial knowledge as such always includes speaker knowledge. The present research question concerns the broader conditional claim. If there are cases of testimonial knowledge that are not instances of Fricker-style second-hand knowledge through trust, then immediate-speaker SKR remains false as a universal thesis.

Restricting the category of testimony therefore provides local resistance, especially against liar cases. It reminds us that testimony is a norm-governed practice and not mere information flow. But it cannot rescue SKR against the clearer cases. Creationist Teacher remains a case of

⁸⁰ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 59ff.

⁸¹ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594ff.

structured communicative teaching,⁸² and Persistent Believer remains a case of sincere assertion and uptake.⁸³ If the category is narrowed enough to exclude these cases, the defence becomes stipulative. If it is not narrowed that far, the counterexamples remain.

4.3 Relocating Knowledge Elsewhere in the Testimonial Chain

A more sophisticated and more promising defence does not insist that the immediate speaker must know. Instead, it argues that knowledge must be present somewhere in the broader testimonial chain. This approach does not rescue immediate-speaker SKR, but instead changes the conditional.

On this view, Lackey's cases show only that the direct speaker need not know, not that testimonial knowledge can arise without any knowledgeable source. The hearer's knowledge may still depend on prior knowledge located elsewhere in the social or communicative background.⁸⁴

This strategy is especially attractive in Creationist Teacher.⁸⁵ The teacher herself does not know evolutionary theory because she does not believe it. But the content she teaches is not epistemically unsupported. It derives from a wider network of scientific inquiry, textbook authorship, curriculum design, peer review, and expert consensus. The teacher functions as an intermediary rather than as the original epistemic source. The students' knowledge may therefore be grounded not in the teacher's personal belief state, but in the broader scientific chain behind the classroom. This preserves an important part of the transmission picture: testimonial knowledge still depends on prior epistemic achievement, even if not in the immediate speaker.

There is real force in this reply. Much of our testimonial knowledge is not acquired from isolated individuals who personally know everything they say. Modern epistemic life is mediated by institutions and chains of communication. Teachers, journalists, medical assistants, museum guides, translators, and public officials often transmit information that originates elsewhere. In such cases, the immediate speaker may not be the deepest epistemic

⁸² Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁸³ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

⁸⁴ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594ff.

⁸⁵ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

source. A theory that insists only on the immediate speaker's knowledge may be too individualistic to capture how testimonial knowledge actually functions.⁸⁶

Burge's preservationist framework can support this broader way of thinking. His account emphasizes the preservation of content and entitlement through communication, not merely the psychology of the final speaker in a chain.⁸⁷ If communication can preserve entitlement from rational sources, then the epistemic standing of a testimonial exchange may depend on a larger communicative structure. The hearer's entitlement may be grounded in the proper functioning of that structure, rather than in the immediate speaker's personal knowledge.

Goldberg's discussion of environmental factors also points in this direction. He argues that testimonial knowledge may depend on reliability-enhancing features of the environment, even when those features are not fully accessible to the hearer.⁸⁸ This makes sense of cases in which individual speakers are epistemically limited but embedded in reliable practices. A speaker may not know in a strong personal sense, yet the surrounding epistemic environment may stabilize the route to truth.

For these reasons, chain-based relocation is the most promising rescue strategy. It avoids the implausibility of denying that the students in Creationist Teacher know, while preserving a significant speaker-dependent or source-dependent insight. It also fits many real-world cases better than a simple dyadic model of testimony. In institutional contexts, it is often misleading to ask only whether the person directly uttering the words knows. The more important question may be whether the information is anchored in a reliable epistemic chain.⁸⁹

However, this strategy also concedes something important. Immediate-speaker SKR says that the hearer can know through testimony only if the speaker knows. The chain-based view says something different: the hearer can know if the relevant content is grounded in knowledge somewhere in the testimonial ancestry. That may be a plausible thesis, but it is not immediate-speaker SKR. It replaces the original requirement with a less demanding and more socially distributed one.

⁸⁶ Cf. Coady (1994). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. p. 6ff.

⁸⁷ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation". p. 467f.

⁸⁸ Cf. Goldberg (2005). "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". p. 306ff.

⁸⁹ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation". p. 467ff.

This distinction matters for the present thesis. The research question is whether every case of testimonial knowledge includes speaker knowledge in the immediate-speaker sense. If the best defence requires shifting from the immediate speaker to the wider chain, then the original thesis has already been abandoned. What survives may be a form of epistemic dependence, but not the Speaker Knowledge Requirement as originally formulated.

The chain-based strategy also does not handle Persistent Believer⁹⁰ as easily as it handles Creationist Teacher. In Persistent Believer, the problem is not that the speaker is merely a relay for a broader institutional source. The speaker sincerely believes and asserts a true proposition. Her lack of knowledge arises from a defeater in her own epistemic position. If the hearer nevertheless knows, then the central issue is not where the knowledge can be relocated, but whether the speaker's lack of knowledge blocks the hearer's knowledge. The chain-based strategy does not directly answer this point.

One might try to say that even in Persistent Believer, the content ultimately traces back to some reliable source or method. But then the explanation no longer depends on speaker knowledge. It depends on the adequacy of the communicative route as a whole. That is a different kind of condition. It suggests that what matters is not whether the immediate speaker knows, but whether the hearer's belief is formed through a truth-conducive and undefeated testimonial route.⁹¹

This is close to the replacement view that the next chapter will develop. Speaker knowledge is one way to secure testimonial knowledge, but it is not the only way. A broader chain of reliable sources, institutional safeguards, or environmental reliability may also secure the hearer's epistemic position. This preserves the insight that testimonial knowledge is socially dependent, but it rejects the immediate-speaker claim that the immediate speaker must know.⁹²

Thus, relocating knowledge elsewhere in the testimonial chain is philosophically valuable, but it is not a rescue of immediate-speaker SKR. It is a retreat to a weaker and more plausible form of speaker- or source-dependence.

⁹⁰ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 59ff.

⁹¹ Cf. Graham (2006). "Testimonial Justification". p. 84ff.

⁹² Cf. *ibid.* p. 84ff.

4.4 Moving to a More Modest Speaker-Dependent View

The final strategy is to concede that immediate-speaker SKR is too demanding while preserving a more modest speaker-dependent thesis. This is probably the most defensible response available to someone sympathetic to SKR. Rather than insisting that every case of testimonial knowledge includes speaker knowledge, one might say that speaker knowledge is normally required, paradigmatically present, epistemically valuable, or normatively ideal. One might also replace speaker knowledge with a more modest condition such as speaker reliability, responsible assertion, epistemic competence, or being properly connected to a knowledgeable source.⁹³

This move has clear advantages. It explains why SKR seemed attractive in the first place. Knowledgeable speakers are paradigmatically good testifiers. In many ordinary cases, the speaker's knowledge is precisely what explains the hearer's knowledge. If a doctor knows the diagnosis and tells the patient, or if an eyewitness knows what she saw and reports it, the hearer's testimonial knowledge is naturally explained by the speaker's knowledge. The rejection of immediate-speaker SKR should not obscure this ordinary structure.⁹⁴

A more modest view can also accommodate Lackey's counterexamples without giving up all speaker-side epistemology. It can say that Creationist Teacher is an exceptional case in which institutional reliability compensates for the teacher's lack of belief.⁹⁵ It can say that Consistent Liar remains problematic because insincerity undermines normal testimonial practice.⁹⁶ It can say that Persistent Believer shows that speaker-side defeaters do not always transfer to the hearer, while still allowing that they often matter.⁹⁷ Such a view is flexible and avoids the implausible rigidity of immediate-speaker SKR.

This position also fits with Graham's account of testimonial justification. Graham argues that testimonial uptake can provide *prima facie* justification when a hearer understands a telling and forms belief in the normal way, though such justification remains defeasible.⁹⁸ On this kind of view, testimonial justification does not have to be inherited from the speaker's

⁹³ Cf. Fricker (2006). "Second-Hand Knowledge". p. 594ff.

⁹⁴ Cf. Burge (1993). "Content Preservation". p. 467ff.

⁹⁵ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54ff.

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

⁹⁸ Cf. Graham (2006). "Testimonial Justification". p. 84ff.

knowledge. Still, the speaker's reliability, sincerity, and the absence of defeaters remain important. This supports a more modest condition: testimonial knowledge requires an epistemically adequate communicative route, not necessarily speaker knowledge.

However, replacing SKR with a more modest thesis is not a rescue of SKR. It concedes the central point. An exceptionless universal claim cannot be saved by redescribing it as a default or normality claim. If speaker knowledge is not required in every case, then immediate-speaker SKR is false. The more modest thesis may be true and philosophically important, but it is not the thesis under examination.

This is not merely a verbal point. The original force of SKR came from its logical demandingness. It claimed that hearer knowledge is impossible without speaker knowledge. Once that universal claim is abandoned, the theory has changed. The defender now holds not that every case of testimonial knowledge includes speaker knowledge, but that it is often epistemically significant. That is a much more plausible claim, but also a much less controversial one.

The value of the more modest position should nevertheless be recognized. It prevents the rejection of SKR from being overstated. Lackey's cases do not show that speaker knowledge is irrelevant. They do not show that testimony is never transmissive. They do not show that any true assertion can produce knowledge. They show only that there can be testimonial knowledge without speaker knowledge. A more modest speaker-dependent view can preserve these insights while avoiding the most challenging counterexamples.

For the purposes of the present thesis, then, the result is clear. Replacing SKR with a more modest view yields a plausible successor view, but it confirms rather than avoids the failure of immediate-speaker SKR. It shows that the original requirement was too strong, even though the intuition behind it remains important.

4.5 What Survives the Criticism?

The discussion of this chapter allows a more precise conclusion. The main strategies for rescuing SKR do not preserve the thesis in its original form. Denying hearer knowledge is plausible in some deviant cases, especially Consistent Liar,⁹⁹ but becomes increasingly

⁹⁹ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

implausible in more ordinary cases such as Creationist Teacher¹⁰⁰ and Persistent Believer.¹⁰¹ Restricting the category of testimony captures the norm-governed nature of testimony, but risks circularity if it excludes all non-knowing speakers by definition. Relocating knowledge elsewhere in the chain preserves an important transmissionist insight, but abandons immediate-speaker SKR. Replacing SKR with a more modest requirement produces a more plausible thesis, but no longer defends the universal conditional claim.

What survives, then, is not immediate-speaker SKR, but a set of more modest speaker-dependent insights. Speaker knowledge remains epistemically important. It is often the best explanation of why hearers know. Knowledgeable speakers are paradigmatically good informants, and many testimonial exchanges are naturally understood as cases in which knowledge is passed from one person to another. In addition, many cases of testimonial knowledge may depend on a broader epistemic chain in which knowledge is present somewhere upstream.

But these points do not establish immediate-speaker SKR. They show that speaker knowledge is often valuable, often normal, and often sufficient. They do not show that it is universally necessary. Lackey's cases, especially Persistent Believer, show that the speaker's lack of knowledge may be local to the speaker and need not automatically defeat the hearer's belief. If the hearer's testimonial route is sincere, truth-conducive, and undefeated from the hearer's perspective, then hearer knowledge may be possible even without speaker knowledge.

The lesson is therefore not that testimony is speaker-independent. That would be too strong. Testimonial knowledge remains social. It depends on speakers, hearers, communicative practices, norms of assertion, and epistemic environments. The lesson is rather that testimonial dependence is not always dependence on the immediate speaker's knowledge. A hearer may depend on a speaker's words, on a wider chain of epistemic labour, or on reliable institutional structures without depending on the immediate speaker's knowing that *p*.

This result also clarifies the role of Lackey's challenge. Lackey does not need to show that speaker knowledge is usually absent, nor that transmission never occurs. Because SKR is an exceptionless conditional claim, she needs only to show that speaker knowledge is not

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

required in every case. Her clearest cases do exactly that. The attempted rescues either fail against those cases or retreat to more modest theses.

The conclusion of this chapter is therefore that immediate-speaker SKR cannot be rescued. What can be preserved is a more modest and more flexible insight: speaker knowledge is one important way of securing testimonial knowledge, but not the only way. The next chapter draws out the consequences of this result. If immediate-speaker SKR must be abandoned, the remaining task is to specify what follows from that rejection and, equally important, what does not follow.

5 What Follows from Rejecting the Speaker Knowledge Requirement?

The previous chapters have argued that the immediate-speaker Speaker Knowledge Requirement should be rejected. If SKR is understood as the thesis that a hearer can acquire testimonial knowledge that *p* only if the immediate speaker knows that *p*, then Lackey's challenge succeeds. The clearest cases, especially cases of defeater asymmetry such as Persistent Believer,¹⁰² show that the speaker's failure to know need not automatically prevent the hearer from knowing. Speaker knowledge is often epistemically important, but it is not a universal conditional without exception.

This conclusion is significant, but it must be handled carefully. The rejection of SKR is a negative result. It tells us that one proposed exceptionless condition on testimonial knowledge is too strong. It does not by itself provide a complete positive theory of testimony. Nor does it show that the speaker's epistemic position is irrelevant, that norms of assertion do not matter, or that any true statement from any speaker can generate knowledge. A theory of testimony that simply replaced SKR with an unrestricted generative model would be too permissive. It would fail to explain why testimonial knowledge is not merely lucky true belief caused by another person's words.

The task of this final chapter is therefore twofold. First, it clarifies what the rejection of immediate-speaker SKR does and does not establish. Second, it develops a more plausible replacement condition. The central proposal is that testimonial knowledge requires not knowledge in the immediate speaker, but an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth. Speaker knowledge is one way of securing such a route, and in ordinary cases it is often the most straightforward way. But it is not the only way. Reliable institutional structures, proper testimonial uptake, the absence of relevant defeaters, and stable communicative practices may also secure the hearer's non-accidental relation to the truth.

This replacement view preserves what is attractive about SKR while avoiding its excessive rigidity. It accepts the transmission theorist's concern that testimonial knowledge must be protected from luck. It accepts the responsibility theorist's concern that testimony is norm-governed and socially structured. But it denies that these insights require the immediate speaker to know in every case. The correct conclusion is therefore not that testimony is

¹⁰² Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 59ff.

independent of speakers, but that testimonial dependence is more complex than immediate-speaker SKR allows.

5.1 The Negative Result: Immediate-speaker SKR Fails

The argument against immediate-speaker SKR depends on the fact that it is formulated as a universal conditional. SKR is not merely the claim that speaker knowledge is normally present in successful testimony, or that knowledgeable speakers are especially good sources. It is the more demanding conditional: whenever testimonial knowledge is present, speaker knowledge is also present. This means that one genuine counterexample is enough to refute it. If there is even one case in which a hearer knows through testimony although the speaker does not know, then exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR is false.

The previous chapters have argued that Lackey's cases provide substantial reason to think that such cases exist. Creationist Teacher shows that the immediate speaker may lack belief while still communicating true information in a reliable and institutionally supported way.¹⁰³ Consistent Liar is more controversial, but it illustrates the possibility that speaker sincerity and hearer epistemic success can come apart.¹⁰⁴ Persistent Believer provides the clearest challenge.¹⁰⁵ In that case, the speaker sincerely believes and asserts the proposition, but fails to know because she possesses a defeater. The hearer lacks that defeater and forms the belief through ordinary testimonial uptake. If the hearer's belief is true and undefeated, it is difficult to see why the speaker's local defect should automatically prevent the hearer from knowing.

The crucial point is that the speaker's lack of knowledge does not always undermine the hearer's route to truth. Sometimes the reason why the speaker does not know is specific to the speaker's own epistemic position. A defeater may be possessed by the speaker but not by the hearer. A lack of belief may prevent the speaker from knowing, while the statement itself is still grounded in reliable institutional structures. A speaker may fail to satisfy the norm of assertion, while the hearer's belief is nevertheless formed through a reliable route. In such cases, the hearer's epistemic standing may exceed the speaker's.

This is the result exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR cannot accommodate. The requirement treats speaker knowledge as an upper limit on hearer knowledge. If the speaker

¹⁰³ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *ibid.* p. 54ff.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

does not know, the hearer cannot know. Lackey's cases show that this picture is too simple. Testimonial knowledge does not always move from a knowing speaker to a dependent hearer in a straightforward transfer relation. Sometimes the hearer's knowledge is generated through a broader communicative process in which the immediate speaker's own knowledge is not the decisive factor.

However, this negative result should not be exaggerated. Rejecting immediate-speaker SKR does not mean that Lackey has shown all transmission views to be false in every sense. Many ordinary cases of testimony are transmissive. If an eyewitness sees an accident, knows what happened, and tells another person, the hearer's knowledge is naturally explained as deriving from the speaker's knowledge. Similarly, if a doctor knows a diagnosis and tells a patient, the patient's testimonial knowledge plausibly depends on the doctor's prior epistemic achievement. Nothing in the rejection of exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR requires denying this.

The point is rather that transmission is not the only possible structure of testimonial knowledge. Speaker knowledge explains many ordinary cases, but the SKR conditional does not hold in all cases. Once this distinction is clear, the debate shifts. The question is no longer whether testimony must always transmit knowledge from speaker to hearer. The question is what condition must be satisfied if testimonial belief is to count as knowledge when speaker knowledge is absent.

5.2 What the Rejection of SKR Does Not Establish

The rejection of immediate-speaker SKR establishes that the SKR conditional does not hold universally. It does not establish that the speaker's epistemic position is irrelevant. This point is important because otherwise the argument against SKR may appear more radical than it really is.

First, speaker knowledge remains epistemically valuable. A speaker who knows what they assert is usually a better testifier than one who does not. Knowledgeable speakers tend to be more reliable, more responsive to evidence, more able to answer challenges, and less likely to mislead their hearers. In many ordinary testimonial exchanges, the speaker's knowledge is precisely what explains why the hearer comes to know. The rejection of SKR therefore does

not undermine the ordinary thought that knowledgeable speakers are paradigmatically good sources of testimony.

Second, speaker knowledge may remain normatively important. One may accept that hearers can sometimes know from non-knowing speakers while still holding that speakers ought, in general, to assert only what they know. The norm governing responsible assertion and the condition governing hearer knowledge need not be identical. A speaker who asserts without knowledge may be criticizable even if the hearer happens to acquire knowledge. This distinction is essential. Lackey's cases show that a speaker's normative failure does not always entail hearer epistemic failure. They do not show that the speaker's normative failure is insignificant.

Third, rejecting SKR does not imply that testimony is simply a reliable causal mechanism. Testimony is not equivalent to any process that produces true belief. If a hearer forms a true belief because another person accidentally produces sounds that resemble a sentence, that is not ordinary testimonial knowledge. Likewise, if a hearer believes a liar whose statement happens to be true by coincidence, that may still fall short of knowledge. The social and normative structure of testimony matters. Speakers assert, address, report, promise, explain, and inform. Hearers trust, accept, question, defer, and rely. Any adequate theory must preserve this interpersonal structure.

Fourth, rejecting SKR does not solve the anti-luck problem. This is the most serious point. The central motivation for SKR was that it provides a clean way to avoid lucky true belief. If the speaker knows, then the hearer's belief seems anchored in a prior successful epistemic relation to the truth. If the speaker does not know, the worry is that the hearer's true belief may be accidental. Therefore, an anti-SKR view must explain what prevents testimonial knowledge from collapsing into luck. It is not enough to say that the hearer's belief is true and caused by testimony. The route from testimony to belief must be epistemically good enough.

This is why Consistent Liar remains difficult.¹⁰⁶ The case is useful because it tests the limits of speaker dependence. But it also shows the danger of an overly permissive generative view. If the speaker is disposed to deceive, then the hearer's true belief may appear epistemically unstable even if the actual statement is true. Unless special conditions make the liar's true

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

assertion reliably connected to the truth, the hearer's belief may be too lucky to count as knowledge. The rejection of SKR should therefore not be understood as licensing knowledge from any non-knowing speaker. It only shows that speaker knowledge is not the only possible anti-luck condition.

The task, then, is to formulate a replacement condition that is restrictive enough to exclude lucky cases but flexible enough to allow the successful Lackey cases. That replacement must explain why Creationist Teacher¹⁰⁷ and Persistent Believer¹⁰⁸ threaten SKR, while also explaining why Consistent Liar remains unstable. The best way to do this is to focus not on the speaker's knowledge alone, but on the quality of the communicative route through which the hearer forms belief.

5.3 Epistemically Adequate Communicative Routes

The positive proposal can be stated as follows:

A hearer H has testimonial knowledge that p only when H's belief is formed through an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth. In some cases, however, the route may be adequate even though the immediate speaker S does not know that p.

This formulation is deliberately broader than SKR. It does not require knowledge in the immediate speaker. But it is also narrower than an unrestricted generative view. It does not say that any true assertion can generate knowledge. The hearer's belief must be formed through a route that is epistemically adequate. The crucial question is therefore what makes a communicative route epistemically adequate.

At least five conditions are relevant.

First, the content communicated must be true. This is obvious but necessary. Testimonial knowledge, like knowledge generally, requires truth. If the proposition asserted is false, the hearer cannot know it through testimony.

Second, the hearer must form the belief through testimonial uptake. The hearer must accept, rely on, or otherwise take up the speaker's assertion as a reason for belief. This distinguishes testimonial knowledge from cases in which the hearer merely uses the speaker's behaviour as

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

evidence. For example, if a speaker nervously denies having stolen something and the hearer infers from the nervousness that the speaker is guilty, the hearer's belief may be evidentially based on the speaker's behaviour, but it is not straightforwardly knowledge through testimony. Testimonial uptake involves accepting what is presented as true, not merely drawing an inference from the speaker's conduct.

Third, the communicative route must be sufficiently reliable or non-accidentally connected to the truth. This is the anti-luck condition. The hearer's true belief must not be true merely by chance. The route from assertion to belief must be one that tends, in the relevant context, to produce true beliefs rather than false ones. Speaker knowledge is one way to secure this reliability, but it is not the only way. Institutional checks, professional roles, stable educational practices, reliable source chains, or environmental safeguards may also secure it.

Fourth, the hearer must not possess undefeated defeaters. If the hearer has reason to doubt the speaker's competence, sincerity, or reliability, then testimonial uptake may no longer be epistemically appropriate. A hearer who ignores obvious signs of deception or unreliability may fail to know even if the speaker's statement happens to be true. This preserves the insight behind Fricker's emphasis on vigilance. The rejection of SKR does not require gullibility. Hearers remain responsible for responding appropriately to defeaters available to them.

Fifth, speaker-side defects must not undermine the communicative route itself. This condition is crucial. The fact that the speaker lacks knowledge does not automatically defeat the hearer. But some speaker-side defects may still matter. If the speaker's lack of knowledge results from unreliability that also affects the assertion, then the hearer's route may be defective. If the speaker is guessing, hallucinating, fabricating, or ignoring evidence that directly undermines the content asserted, then the hearer's belief may be lucky. By contrast, if the speaker's lack of knowledge is local in a way that does not affect the truth-conduciveness of the communication, then the hearer may still know.

This fifth condition explains why the speaker is not irrelevant. The speaker's epistemic position matters when it bears on the adequacy of the communicative route. What should be rejected is not the relevance of speaker epistemology, but the automatic inference from "the speaker does not know" to "the hearer does not know." That inference is precisely what Lackey's cases undermine.

The proposed view therefore occupies a middle position. Against immediate-speaker SKR, it denies that immediate speaker knowledge is necessary. Against an overly permissive generative view, it insists that testimonial knowledge requires an epistemically adequate route to truth. The result is a more flexible account of testimonial dependence. The hearer depends on testimony, but not always on the immediate speaker's knowledge. The hearer may depend on the speaker's assertion, the speaker's reliability as a testifier, a wider epistemic chain, institutional structures, or the absence of relevant defeaters. Testimonial dependence is real, but it is not reducible to knowledge in the immediate speaker.

5.4 Applying the Replacement View to Lackey's Cases

The advantage of the proposed replacement view is that it explains why Lackey's cases differ in dialectical force. It does not treat all non-knowing-speaker cases alike. Instead, it asks whether the communicative route remains epistemically adequate despite the speaker's lack of knowledge.

Consider first Creationist Teacher.¹⁰⁹ The teacher lacks belief in evolutionary theory and therefore does not know the propositions she teaches. Immediate-speaker SKR says that, because the teacher does not know, the students cannot acquire knowledge from her testimony. This verdict is implausible. The students receive accurate information in a structured educational setting. The content is backed by scientific evidence, curriculum standards, textbooks, and disciplinary consensus. The teacher's private disbelief does not prevent her from accurately presenting the material. The communicative route is therefore epistemically adequate, not because the teacher knows, but because the testimony is embedded in a reliable pedagogical and scientific practice.

This explains both the strength and the limitation of the case. Creationist Teacher strongly refutes immediate-speaker SKR. The immediate speaker lacks knowledge, yet the students plausibly know. But the case does not show that knowledge can arise without any reliable epistemic background. On the contrary, the students' knowledge depends heavily on such a background. The teacher functions as an intermediary within a larger knowledge-producing practice. This supports the proposed replacement view: what matters is not knowledge in the

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 48ff.

immediate speaker, but the adequacy of the route through which the students receive the truth.

Now consider Consistent Liar.¹¹⁰ This case is more difficult. A speaker who is disposed to lie seems to violate the norms that make testimony epistemically trustworthy. If the hearer forms a true belief from the liar's assertion, the belief may still be too lucky to count as knowledge. The proposed view can explain this instability. A liar's assertion will not normally constitute an epistemically adequate communicative route, because the route is corrupted by deception and unreliability. The hearer's true belief may be accidentally true, even if the proposition asserted is in fact correct.

However, the case cannot be dismissed too quickly. If special conditions make the liar's assertions reliably truth-conducive, then the hearer's belief may be less lucky than it first appears. For example, if the liar is systematically disposed to say the opposite of what she falsely believes, and this structure reliably produces true assertions in the relevant circumstances, one might argue that the route is reliable after all. But even then, the case remains normatively defective. The speaker is not a responsible testifier, and the hearer does not receive assurance in the ordinary interpersonal sense.

The proposed view can accommodate this complexity. It need not say that the hearer never knows in liar cases. But it can say that such cases are not central to the rejection of SKR because their route adequacy is questionable. Consistent Liar shows that it is not obvious that every case of testimonial knowledge must include speaker knowledge, but it does not provide the cleanest basis for rejecting SKR. Its instability confirms the need for an anti-luck condition broader than speaker knowledge.

Persistent Believer is the most important case.¹¹¹ Here the speaker sincerely believes what she says and communicates in the normal way. Her failure to know is due to a defeater that she possesses but the hearer does not. The question is whether that speaker-side defeater automatically blocks hearer knowledge. Exceptionless immediate-speaker SKR says yes: because the speaker does not know, the hearer cannot know. The proposed route view says no: the speaker's defeater blocks the hearer's knowledge only if it undermines the epistemic adequacy of the hearer's route to truth.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words*. p. 54ff.

¹¹¹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 59ff.

This is the crucial difference. Defeaters are not always automatically transferable. Some defeaters are local to a subject's evidential position. If the speaker has misleading evidence that undermines her own belief, that may prevent her from knowing. But if the hearer lacks that misleading evidence, has no reason to doubt the testimony, and forms a true belief through sincere testimonial uptake, then the hearer's belief may remain undefeated. The speaker's epistemic defect does not necessarily infect the hearer.

This does not mean that speaker-side defeaters never matter. If the speaker's defeater reveals that the assertion itself was produced unreliably, or if it concerns evidence that would undermine the proposition for anyone who possessed it, then the hearer's route may be defective. For example, if the speaker has strong evidence that her perceptual faculties are currently malfunctioning, then her report may be unreliable in a way that affects the hearer as well. But if the defeater is local and does not undermine the reliability of the communication from the hearer's standpoint, then the hearer may still know.

Persistent Believer is therefore the clearest case against immediate-speaker SKR because it shows exactly why speaker knowledge is too blunt a condition. What matters is not simply whether the speaker knows, but why the speaker fails to know and whether that failure affects the hearer's epistemic route. SKR cannot make this distinction. The route view can.

5.5 Defeaters, Reliability, and Normativity

The proposed replacement view must now address three connected issues: defeaters, reliability, and normativity. These are the points at which an anti-SKR theory is most vulnerable. If it handles them badly, it becomes too permissive. If it handles them well, it offers a more adequate account than SKR.

First, defeaters must be understood relationally rather than mechanically. immediate-speaker SKR effectively treats the speaker's lack of knowledge as a global defeater for the hearer. If the speaker does not know, the hearer cannot know. But Lackey's cases suggest that this is too crude. The epistemic relevance of a defeater depends on whether it undermines the hearer's belief-forming route. Some defeaters possessed by the speaker should matter to the hearer; others should not. The important question is not merely whether the speaker has a defeater, but whether that defeater reveals a defect in the communicative route through which the hearer forms belief.

Second, reliability must be located at the right level. Transmission theorists often locate reliability primarily in the speaker's knowledge. But modern testimonial practices frequently distribute reliability across institutions, roles, procedures, and communities. A teacher, journalist, or spokesperson may not personally know every proposition communicated, but the communicative route may still be reliable because of background structures. This does not make testimony impersonal. Rather, it shows that the social character of testimony is epistemically significant. Testimonial knowledge often depends on networks of epistemic labour, not merely on isolated individual knowers.

Third, normativity must be preserved without being turned into SKR. This is a delicate point. Fricker and Moran are right that testimony is not mere information flow. Speakers are subject to norms of sincerity, responsibility, and accountability. Hearers are subject to norms of reasonable uptake and sensitivity to defeaters. These norms shape the practice of testimony. But it does not follow that violation of these norms by the speaker always prevents hearer knowledge. A speaker may act irresponsibly while the hearer still forms a belief through an adequate route to truth. Conversely, a speaker may act responsibly while the hearer fails to know because the hearer ignores defeaters.

The best way to understand testimonial normativity is therefore not as an individual condition that holds in every successful case, but as part of the structure that normally sustains epistemically adequate routes. Norms of assertion, trust, and responsibility help make testimony reliable over time. They explain why testimony is generally a knowledge-conducive practice rather than a random exchange of noises. But individual compliance with every norm is not always necessary for hearer knowledge in a particular case.

This gives a balanced answer to responsibility-based critics. They are right that testimony is norm-governed. They are wrong if they infer from this that speaker knowledge is necessary in every case. The norms matter because they sustain the reliability and intelligibility of testimonial practice. But the epistemic success of a particular hearer depends on whether the hearer's belief is formed through an adequate route to truth. Speaker knowledge is an important contributor to such adequacy, not its universal condition.

5.6 Final Answer to the Research Question

The research question of this thesis was whether speaker knowledge is a conditional requirement for testimonial knowledge. The answer is no. immediate-speaker SKR should be rejected. A hearer can, at least in some cases, acquire testimonial knowledge even when the immediate speaker does not know the proposition asserted.

The clearest reason for this conclusion comes from cases of defeater asymmetry. These cases show that the speaker's lack of knowledge may be local to the speaker's own epistemic position. If the hearer does not share the defeater, and if the testimonial route remains sincere, reliable, undefeated, and properly connected to the truth, then hearer knowledge remains possible. This directly undermines the universal conditional claim made by SKR.

However, the rejection of SKR should be understood modestly. It does not show that speaker knowledge is irrelevant. It does not show that testimony is never transmissive. It does not show that any true assertion can generate knowledge. Speaker knowledge remains central in many ordinary cases because it often explains why the hearer's belief is non-accidentally connected to the truth.

The better view is that testimonial knowledge requires an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth. Such a route may be secured by the speaker's knowledge, but it may also be secured by other factors: reliable institutional background, stable communicative practices, proper hearer uptake, absence of defeaters, or environmental safeguards. This view explains why Creationist Teacher and Persistent Believer are genuine challenges to immediate-speaker SKR, while Consistent Liar remains more doubtful. It also preserves the anti-luck and normative concerns that originally made SKR attractive.

The final position can therefore be stated as follows:

Testimonial knowledge is socially dependent, but it is not always strictly dependent on the immediate speaker's knowledge.

This conclusion preserves the most plausible insight behind the transmission picture. Testimony is not epistemically free-floating. Hearers depend on others, on communicative practices, and on social structures of reliability. But the dependence relation is more flexible than SKR allows. The hearer need not always inherit knowledge from a knowing speaker. In

some cases, the hearer's knowledge is generated through an epistemically adequate communicative route even though the immediate speaker does not know.

The final result is not that speaker knowledge is irrelevant. Nor is it that testimony is independent of speakers. The result is narrower: the exceptionless immediate-speaker conditional fails. Testimonial knowledge does not always depend on knowledge in the direct speaker. What it requires instead is an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth. Speaker knowledge is one important way of securing such a route, but Lackey's cases show that it is not the only way. The epistemology of testimony should not ask only whether the speaker knows. It should ask whether the testimonial exchange places the hearer in a non-accidental, undefeated, and socially intelligible relation to the truth. When that condition is satisfied, testimonial knowledge is possible, even without speaker knowledge.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined whether speaker knowledge is a required condition for testimonial knowledge. The question was deliberately narrow. It was not whether speaker knowledge is normally present in successful testimony, whether it is epistemically valuable, or whether speakers ought to know what they assert. Nor was it whether testimony often functions by transmitting prior knowledge from speaker to hearer. The central question was whether a hearer can know that *p* through testimony only if the immediate speaker knows that *p*.

The argument has been that immediate-speaker SKR should be rejected. The requirement is initially attractive because it fits a powerful transmission picture of testimony. In ordinary cases, one person knows something, tells another person, and the hearer comes to know it as well. This picture also seems to explain why testimonial knowledge is not merely lucky true belief. If the speaker already knows, then the hearer's belief appears grounded in a prior epistemic success. For this reason, SKR captures something important about testimony: testimonial knowledge is often dependent, often second-hand, and often secured by the speaker's own epistemic standing.

Nevertheless, these considerations do not establish that the SKR conditional holds without exception. They show that speaker knowledge is one important way of securing testimonial knowledge. They do not show that it is the only way. This distinction has been central throughout the thesis. A claim about what is normal, valuable, or normatively ideal is not the same as a claim about what is present in every case. immediate-speaker SKR becomes vulnerable once this distinction is made explicit.

Lackey's counterexamples show why the requirement is too strong. Creationist Teacher suggests that hearers may acquire knowledge from a speaker who lacks belief when the testimony is embedded in a reliable educational and scientific context. Consistent Liar pushes the challenge further by separating hearer success from speaker sincerity, though this case remains less stable because of worries about luck and the nature of testimony. Persistent Believer provides the clearest challenge. It shows that a speaker may fail to know because of a local defeater while the hearer, who lacks that defeater, nevertheless seems able to acquire knowledge through ordinary testimonial uptake.

The central lesson of these cases is that the speaker's lack of knowledge does not always undermine the hearer's epistemic route to truth. Sometimes the reason why the speaker lacks knowledge is local to the speaker's own epistemic position. A defeater possessed by the speaker need not automatically transfer to the hearer. A speaker's lack of belief may prevent the speaker from knowing, while the assertion itself remains embedded in a reliable communicative structure. Speaker-side epistemic defects matter when they undermine the hearer's route to truth, but they do not matter simply because they prevent the speaker from knowing.

The attempts to rescue SKR do not preserve the thesis in its immediate-speaker form. Denying hearer knowledge may be plausible in especially deviant cases, such as Consistent Liar, but it becomes much less plausible in Creationist Teacher and Persistent Believer. Restricting the category of testimony captures the important point that testimony is norm-governed and not mere information flow, but it risks circularity if it defines all non-knowing speakers out of genuine testimony. Relocating knowledge elsewhere in the testimonial chain is the most promising rescue strategy, especially in institutional cases, but it abandons immediate-speaker SKR. Replacing SKR with a more modest claim about normal, paradigmatic, or ideal testimony produces a much more plausible thesis, but it gives up the original universal conditional claim without exceptions.

The conclusion is therefore that the immediate-speaker SKR conditional is false: not every case of testimonial knowledge includes knowledge in the immediate speaker. This result should not be overstated. Speaker knowledge remains epistemically important. It is often the best explanation of why hearers know. Many testimonial exchanges are genuinely transmissive, and knowledgeable speakers remain paradigmatically good sources of testimony. The rejection of SKR does not eliminate the epistemic significance of the speaker. It only rejects the claim that knowledge in the immediate speaker is required in every case.

The more plausible view is that testimonial knowledge requires an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth. Such a route may be secured by speaker knowledge, but it may also be secured by reliable institutional background, stable communicative practices, proper testimonial uptake, absence of defeaters, and environmental safeguards. This replacement condition explains why Creationist Teacher and Persistent Believer are genuine challenges to immediate-speaker SKR, while Consistent Liar remains doubtful. It also preserves the anti-luck

concern that made SKR attractive in the first place. The hearer's belief must still be non-accidentally connected to the truth. What is denied is only that speaker knowledge is the only way to secure that connection.

This conclusion also preserves the normative dimension of testimony. Testimony is not merely a causal mechanism for producing true belief. It is a social practice structured by norms of assertion, trust, responsibility, and defeater-sensitive uptake. But these norms need not function as immediate-speaker individual necessity conditions in every successful case. A speaker may violate a norm and yet the hearer may still know, provided the communicative route remains epistemically adequate. Conversely, a speaker may act responsibly while the hearer fails to know because the hearer ignores available defeaters. Normativity matters because it helps sustain reliable testimonial practices, not because every norm violation automatically blocks hearer knowledge.

The final position can therefore be stated as follows: testimonial knowledge is socially dependent, but it is not always strictly dependent on the immediate speaker's knowledge. Testimony does not float free of speakers, practices, or epistemic environments. Hearers depend on others when they acquire knowledge through testimony. But the form of that dependence is more flexible than immediate-speaker SKR allows. In some cases, the hearer inherits knowledge from a knowing speaker. In other cases, the hearer's knowledge is generated through a broader communicative route that remains reliable, undefeated, and properly connected to the truth even though the immediate speaker does not know.

Immediate-speaker SKR therefore overstates the role of speaker knowledge. It treats one important way of securing testimonial knowledge as if it were the only possible way. Lackey's challenge shows that this is mistaken. The epistemology of testimony should not ask only whether the speaker knows. It should ask whether the testimonial exchange places the hearer in a non-accidental, undefeated, and socially intelligible relation to the truth. When that condition is satisfied, testimonial knowledge is possible, even without knowledge in the immediate speaker.

Bibliography

- Burge, Tyler. "Content Preservation". In *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. 102. No. 4. 1993.
(<https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.2307/2185680>)
- Coady, C.A.J. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
(<https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1093/0198235518.001.0001>)
- Fricker, Elizabeth. "Against Gullibility". In *Knowing from Words*. Kluwer, 1994.
(https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-2018-2_8)
- Fricker, Elizabeth. "Second-Hand Knowledge". In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 73. No. 3. 2006.
(<https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1111%2Fj.1933-1592.2006.tb00550.x>)
- Goldberg, Sanford. "Testimonial Knowledge through Unsafe Testimony". In *Analysis*. Vol. 65. No. 288. 2005.
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3329084>)
- Graham, Peter J. "Testimonial Justification: Inferential or Non-Inferential?" In *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 56. No. 222. 2006.
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3543149>)
- Lackey, Jennifer. "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission". In *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 49. No. 197. 1999.
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2660497>)
- Lackey, Jennifer. *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
(<https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199219162.001.0001>)
- Moran, Richard. "Getting Told and Being Believed". In *Philosophers' Imprint*. Vol. 5. No. 5. 2005.
(<https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1093/oso/9780190873325.003.0002>)

The AI-tool ChatGPT was used as an aid to formulate my thoughts and arguments into better English. It was also used to check this thesis for formality and correctness in grammar. All other sources have been provided accordingly by direct or indirect citations in footnotes.

AI-prompts:

- Write this in a formal manner.
- Compare these two passages.
- Summarize this for me.
- What are the main arguments of this passage?
- Change the wording of this paragraph.
- Paraphrase this.
- Check this for formality.
- This sounds awkward. Rewrite it please.
- Check whether there are typos or misspellings.
- This sentence is too long, how can I rewrite it so it sounds better?
- What can I still optimize in this paragraph?

Kurzfassung

Diese Arbeit untersucht das Verhältnis zwischen testimonialen Wissen und Wissen auf Seiten des unmittelbaren Sprechers. Im Zentrum steht das Speaker Knowledge Requirement (SKR), verstanden nicht als hinreichende Bedingung und auch nicht als modale These mit einem Notwendigkeitsoperator, sondern als ausnahmsloser universeller Konditionalsatz: wenn ein Hörer weiß, dass p, aufgrund des Zeugnisses eines Sprechers, dann weiß dieser Sprecher, dass p. Die Attraktivität dieses Konditionalsatzes ergibt sich aus mehreren vertrauten Überlegungen zur epistemischen Rolle von Zeugnis. Testimoniales Wissen scheint häufig die Übertragung eines epistemischen Status von dem Sprecher auf den Hörer zu beinhalten; es wird oft als Wissen aus zweiter Hand beschrieben; und Wissen auf Seiten des Sprechers scheint die Überzeugung des Hörers gegen epistemisches Glück abzusichern. Diese Überlegungen zeigen jedoch für sich genommen nicht, dass der Konditionalsatz ausnahmslos gilt.

Vor diesem Hintergrund wird Jennifer Lackeys Kritik an transmissionbasierten Theorien testimonialen Wissens untersucht. Die Diskussion konzentriert sich auf Fälle wie „Creationist Teacher“, „Consistent Liar“ und „Persistent Believer“. Dabei wird argumentiert, dass der stärkste Druck auf die unmittelbare Sprecher-Version des SKR von Fällen der Defeater-Asymmetrie ausgeht. In solchen Fällen fehlt dem Sprecher Wissen aufgrund eines Defeaters, der spezifisch zu seiner eigenen epistemischen Position gehört, während der Hörer diesen Defeater nicht teilt und durch gewöhnliche testimoniale Aufnahme eine wahre Überzeugung bildet. Solche Fälle legen nahe, dass das Ausbleiben von Wissen auf Seiten des Sprechers nicht automatisch ein Ausbleiben von Wissen auf Seiten des Hörers nach sich zieht.

Die vertretene Schlussfolgerung lautet, dass die unmittelbare Sprecher-Version des SKR als ausnahmsloser Konditionalsatz falsch ist. Das bedeutet nicht, dass Sprecherwissen epistemisch irrelevant ist oder dass Zeugnis niemals transmissiv funktioniert. Vielmehr bleibt Sprecherwissen eine wichtige Weise, in der testimoniales Wissen abgesichert werden kann. Es ist jedoch nicht die einzige Weise. Die positive Auffassung, die vorgeschlagen wird, besagt, dass testimoniales Wissen von einem epistemisch angemessenen kommunikativen Weg zur Wahrheit abhängt. Ein solcher Weg kann Wissen auf Seiten des Sprechers einschließen, kann aber auch durch zuverlässige institutionelle Strukturen, stabile kommunikative Praktiken, angemessene testimoniale Aufnahme, das Fehlen relevanter Defeater und epistemische

Sicherungen in der Umgebung unterstützt werden. Testimoniales Wissen ist daher sozial abhängig, aber nicht immer strikt abhängig von Wissen in der unmittelbaren Sprecherin.

Abstract

This thesis examines the relation between testimonial knowledge and knowledge in the immediate speaker. Its central focus is the Speaker Knowledge Requirement (SKR), understood not as a sufficiency claim or as a modal thesis involving a necessity operator, but as an exceptionless universal conditional: if a hearer knows that *p* through testimony from a speaker, then that speaker knows that *p*. The appeal of this conditional lies in several familiar thoughts about testimony. Testimonial knowledge often seems to involve the transmission of epistemic standing from speaker to hearer; it is frequently described as second-hand knowledge; and speaker knowledge appears to secure the hearer's belief against epistemic luck. However, these considerations do not by themselves show that the conditional holds without exception.

Against this background, the analysis evaluates Jennifer Lackey's challenge to transmission-based accounts of testimony. The discussion focuses on cases such as "Creationist Teacher", "Consistent Liar", and "Persistent Believer". It argues that the most serious pressure on immediate-speaker SKR comes from cases of defeater asymmetry. In such cases, the speaker lacks knowledge because of a defeater specific to their own epistemic position, while the hearer does not share that defeater and forms a true belief through ordinary testimonial uptake. These cases suggest that the failure of knowledge on the speaker's side does not automatically entail a failure of knowledge on the hearer's side.

The conclusion defended is that immediate-speaker SKR is false as an exceptionless conditional. This does not mean that speaker knowledge is epistemically irrelevant, nor that testimony is never transmissive. Rather, speaker knowledge remains one important way in which testimonial knowledge may be secured. It is not, however, the only way. The positive view proposed is that testimonial knowledge depends on an epistemically adequate communicative route to truth. Such a route may involve knowledge in the speaker, but it may also be supported by reliable institutional structures, stable communicative practices, proper hearer uptake, the absence of relevant defeaters, and environmental safeguards. Testimonial knowledge is therefore socially dependent, but not always strictly dependent on knowledge in the immediate speaker.