



**Families in transition during their everyday interactions.
The role of the context in the reconstruction of
argumentation among parents and children**

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Main goal of this study

- To analyze to what extent family members engage in resolving *differences of opinions* during everyday interactions at home
- Role of the *context* in the analytical reconstruction of argumentation



Approach

- *Argumentative model*

The task of argumentation is to promote the reasonableness of human action and interaction and to ensure a critical foundation to the consensus supporting any social reality.

(Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2009, p. 22).

- *Critical discussion*

Ideal argumentative discussion to analytically reconstruct and evaluate real-life interactions



Argumentation

Argumentation is a mode of discourse in which interlocutors are committed to reasonableness, i.e. they accept the challenge of reciprocally founding their positions on the basis of reasons

(Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2009)



Argumentation

The argumentation has to be distinguished from:

- Individual decision-making
- Explanation
- Demonstration



Critical discussion (I)

Pragma-dialectical perspective

(van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004)

- Ideal model of how a reasonable resolution of a difference of opinion should be



Critical discussion (II)

- *CD* does not refer to any empirical phenomena:
“in argumentative reality no tokens of a critical discussion can be found” (van Eemeren et. al. 2010, p.128).
- 4 phases:
 - *confrontation stage* (the difference of opinion emerges)
 - *opening stage* (to find out shared common ground)
 - *argumentation stage* (arguments in support to the standpoints)
 - *concluding stage* (the critical discussion is concluded)



Ethnographic view

- To analyze the interactions in the actual *context of the everyday life*, as it occurs spontaneously

“social life in situ, in the most ordinary of settings, examining the most routine, everyday, naturally occurring activities in their concrete details” (Psathas 1995, pp. 1-2)

- Need to assume the *participants’ own perspective*



The relevance of the context (I)

People develop argumentation in numerous purposeful activities: to make sound and well-thought decisions, to critically base their opinions, to persuade other people of the validity of their own proposals and to evaluate the proposals of others.

These activities are related to the contexts in which they take place and are significantly determined by these contexts; thus **argumentation** too, as the bearing structure of these activities, **moulds its strategies in connection with these very different contexts**: from families and schools to social and political institutions, from financial markets to media discourse and journalism, from social and ethical debate to the economic and financial sphere.

van Eemeren, F. H., Greco Morasso, S., Grossen, M., Perret-Clermont, A.-N. & Rigotti, E. (2009). Argupolis: a Doctoral Program on Argumentation practices in different communication contexts. *Studies in Communication Sciences*. 9(1): 289-301.



The relevance of the context (II)

- Not as a container but as a *constituent* of the communication process (Rigotti & Rocci 2006, p.166)
- *Framing*: context that permits the participants to recognize at every time what they are doing and what they have to do with their interlocutors
- Context is *co-constructed* by means of their communicative moves



The research project

- Research project «*Argupolis: argumentation in context*»
 - Italian and Swiss families
 - Language: Italian
 - Videorecordings of dinnertime interactions at home
 - Families: both parents; a child aged from 3 to 6; at least another child
 - Transcription (CHILDES: MacWhinney, 1989) and different qualitative analyses

cf. Arcidiacono & Bova (2010), Bova (forthcoming)



Excerpt 1: Swiss family

@Participants: MOM, DAD, MAR Marco, LUC

Luca.

@Age of LUC: 6

@Age of MAR: 9

@Location: Lugano (Switzerland)

1 *LUC: Mom [=! a tone of voice low].

2 *MOM: eh.

3 *LUC: I want to talk [=! a tone of voice low].

→ *LUC: but it is not possible [=! a tone of voice low]

→ *LUC: why <my voice is bad>? [=! with a very low tone of voice]

4 *MOM: why?

→ *MOM: no::.

→ *MOM: I do not think so.

→ *MOM: a beautiful voice like a man.

→ *MOM: big, beautiful.

5 *LUC: no.

*pau: common 2.5

→ *LUC: an idiot [voice =]

6 *MOM: you feel like an idiot?

7 *LUC: the voice.

*pau: 6.0

8 *MOM: tonight [:] if we hear the sound of "bread schioccarello" (the strange noise when hard bread is chewed) [=!smiling] [=! ironically]

9 *LUC: well bu [:] but not to this point.

*pau: common 4.0



Elements of analysis

- **Issue:** *“My voice is bad”*
- **Standpoint:** *“Not absolutely”*
- **Argument:** *you have a beautiful voice* (principal argument)
big, like a man (coordinative argument)
- **Protagonist/Antagonist:** mother/child



Elements of analysis

- It is the mother who assumes *the burden of proof*

Mom: *you have a beautiful voice like a man.*

- Function of irony and implicitness in the argumentative exchange (*turn 8*)



Conclusions and implications

- The general context of family interactions is given by the overarching goal of *socialization*
- It is the parent who often assumes the *burden of proof*, called upon to be the protagonist of the discussion
- It is very important to consider the function of *specific linguistic features* (use of the “why” by children, and the use of irony and implicitness by parents) in order to favor the beginning of argumentative debates in family



Further research questions...

- *To what extent family argumentation can correspond to a reasonable resolution of the difference of opinion?*
- *What is the specific function of the argumentative strategies used with more frequency by parents?*
- *Is it possible to consider young children as reasonable arguers?*



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