

**Title**

The Role of Argumentation in Families with Young Children

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**Abstract**

The main goal of this study is to analyze the role of argumentation in resolving differences of opinion during dinner table interactions of Italian and Swiss-Italian families with pre-adolescent children. Particular attention is paid both to the effects of argumentative strategies used by family members on the family relations and to the ways how such strategies are influenced by the specific phase of family life cycle concerned (Cigoli & Scabini, 2006).

We integrate two theoretical and methodological approaches: the first one is the model of critical discussion, developed by Pragma-dialectics. This model represents an ideal standard of reasonable discussion against which real-life argumentative interactions can be analytically reconstructed and evaluated. The second one is the conversational and discursive approach derived from ethnomethodology, that we adopt in order to identify the sequential patterns of discourse produced by participants. The data corpus is constituted by the video recordings of eighteen dinners, held by three Italian families and by three Swiss Italian families. The basic criteria adopted in the selection were: presence of both parents, presence of a child aged from three to six and of at least one preadolescent sibling; the language of interaction is largely Italian.

As showed by previous studies devoted to various contexts (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007; Muller Mirza et al., 2009; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009), argumentation is supported by a series of assumptions shared by participants and continuously confirmed through social exchanges. In particular, this study shows how argumentation in family context can foster the “care of dialogue” between parents and children (Scabini & Cigoli, 1991) and how argumentative (Brumark, 2008) and conversational analyses (Galimberti, 1994) constitute relevant tools in order to understand how argumentation accomplishing this task.

**Keywords**

argumentation; family life cycle; verbal conflict; conversation analysis; pragma-dialectics

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