"I Want to Talk but It Is Not Possible!" Dinnertime

Argumentation in Swiss and Italian Families

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This paper investigates to what extent Swiss and Italian family members engage to resolve differences of opinion during their everyday conversations at home. The goal is to point out the importance of the context in the analytical reconstruction of argumentation carried out by parents and children at dinnertime and to highlight the similarities and differences among different strategies. By means of case studies, we intend to analyze qualitatively how argumentation shapes the communicative practices of Swiss and Italian family members and how it can foster a critical attitude in their processes of decision-making. We integrate two theoretical and methodological approaches. The first one is the model of the critical discussion, derived from the pragma-dialectical perspective. It represents an ideal argumentative discussion against which real-life interaction can be analytically reconstructed and evaluated. The second one is the conversational and discursive approach that aims at identifying the sequential patterns of discourse produced by participants. Within conversations at dinnertime, we rely on insights from those approaches in order to interpret context-bound communicative and argumentative moves among family members. The results of this study show that, within the particular setting of dinnertime conversations, the pragma-dialectical and conversational analyses are powerful methods to understand how argumentation fosters a critical attitude in the process of building the family consent. Families show different ways through which children are socialized to argue and to discuss with adults, developing specific strategies and conversational devices within this kind of activity. The findings of this study open a large space for investigation about the management of family debates in different situations, taking into account a double perspective on argumentation.

Keywords: family, argumentation, discursive interaction, critical discussion, parent-child conversation

Introduction: Argumentation as an Everyday Activity

During everyday lives of people, argumentation is a very relevant 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). Traditionally, the study of argumentation has been developed with respect to some forms of specific institutionalized interactions. Political and media discourse (Rigotti, 2005; Rocci, 2009), juridical justification (Feteris, 2005; Walton, 2005), conflict resolution practice of mediation (Greco Morasso, 2008, in press) and financial proposal (Palmieri, 2008, 2009) have been recognized, among others, as the main contexts in which argumentation plays an essential role. Argumentation relates to a set of interpersonal and social practices of interaction that are framed by a context that permits

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participants to recognize at every time what they are doing and what they have to do with their interlocutors. Argumentation is a complex activity that is continuously co-constructed by means of participants' communicative moves.

In this paper, we intend to focus on the context of family interactions, in particular the specific situation of dinnertime conversations. In relation to other more institutionalised argumentative contexts, family is characterized by a large prevalence of interpersonal relationships and a relative freedom concerning issues that can be tackled. In this specific study, our goal is to analyze to what extent family members engage in resolving differences of opinions during their everyday interactions at home. By the presentation of case studies, we aim at highlighting how argumentation shapes the communicative practices of Swiss and Italian family members and how it can foster a critical attitude in their decision-making processes of everyday lives.

The Relevance of Family Argumentation

Research into children's argumentation has been focused primarily on peer interactions and based on conversation samples elicited either in experimental clinical settings or in semi formal pedagogic contexts (Maynard, 1985; Benoit, 1992; Felton & Kuhn, 2001). However, in recent years, alongside a growing number of studies which highlight the cognitive and educational advantages of reshaping teaching and learning activities in terms of argumentative interactions (Pontecorvo, 1993; Grossen & Perret-Clermont, 1994; Mercer, 2000; Schwarz, Perret-Clermont, Trognon, & Marro, 2008), the importance of the study of argumentative dynamics which are involved in the family context is gradually emerging as a relevant field of research in social sciences.

Indeed, the family context is showing itself to be particularly significant in the study of argumentation, as the argumentative attitude learnt in the family, in particular the capacity to deal with disagreement by means of reasonable verbal interactions, can be considered the matrix of all other forms of argumentation (Muller-Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2009). Furthermore, despite the focus on narratives as the first genre to appear in communication with small children, caregiver experiences as well as observations of conversations between parents and children suggest that family conversations can be a significant context for emerging argumentative strategies (Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1997).

Family encounters including children should deserve more attentions as an important context of argumentative development in empirical as well as theoretical investigation. As suggested by Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono (2010), the role of language cannot be separated from the overall socio-cultural knowledge in the study of argumentation. Children learn progressively a complex set of relations between contexts of use and linguistic features. Every interaction, especially in the family context, is potentially a socializing experience (Pontecorvo, Fasulo, & Sterponi, 1998). In conversation with children, parents use language in order to convey norms and rules governing linguistic, social and cultural behavior. For example, by focusing on Swedish family's dinner table conversations, Brumark (2007) revealed the presence of certain recurrent argumentative features, showing how some argumentative structures may differ depending on the ages of children. More recent works showed how specific linguistic indicators may favor the beginning of argumentative debates in the family context (Arcidiacono & Bova, 2010; Bova, n. d.); they also demonstrated the relevance of an accurate knowledge of the context in order to evaluate the argumentative dynamics of the family conversations at dinnertime (Arcidiacono, Pontecorvo, & Greco Morasso, 2009).

It is important to emphasize that argumentation constitutes an intrinsically context-dependent activity

which does not exist unless it is embedded in specific domains of human social life. Argumentation cannot be reduced to a system of formal procedures as it takes place only embodied in actual communicative and non-communicative practices and spheres of interaction (Rigotti & Rocci, 2006; Eemeren van, Greco Morasso, Grossen, Perret-Clermont, & Rigotti, 2009). Thus, when we have to work with family conversations, the knowledge of the context has to be integrated into the argumentative structure itself in order to properly understand the argumentative moves adopted by family members. Accordingly, the apparently irregular, illogical and incoherent structures emerging in these natural discourse situations (Brumark, 2006) require a "normative" model of analysis as well as a specific "empathy" towards the object of research, since both of these elements are necessary to properly analyze the argumentative moves which occur in the family context.

The Argumentative Model of the Critical Discussion

In order to properly analyze the argumentative sequences occurring in the family context, we use the model of the Critical Discussion developed by Eemeren van and Grootendorst (1984). This model works as a normative tool to evaluate whether a real-life argumentative discussion proceeds in such a way as to correctly produce sound argumentative discourse. In fact, the procedure can be thought of as representing a "code of conduct" for rational discussants who aim to achieve their argumentative goals in a reasonable way (Eemeren van & Grootendorst, 2004).

The pragma-dialectical model of the critical discussion foresees four ideal stages, which do not mirror the actual temporal proceedings of the argumentative discussion but rather the essential constituents of the reasonable, i.e., critical and discussion. The first step is the confrontation stage in which a difference of opinion emerges: "It becomes clear that there is a standpoint[1] that is not accepted because it runs up against doubt or contradiction" (Eemeren van & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 60). In the opening stage, the protagonist and the antagonist try to find out how much relevant common ground they share (as to the discussion format, background knowledge, values and so on) in order to be able to determine whether their procedural and substantive zone of agreement is sufficiently broad to conduct a fruitful discussion. In the proper argumentation stage of critical discussion, arguments in support to the standpoint(s) are advanced and critically tested. Finally, in the concluding stage, the critical discussion is concluded, "in agreement that the protagonist's standpoint is acceptable and the antagonist's doubt must be retracted, or that the standpoint of the protagonist must be retracted"[2] (Eemeren van & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 60-61).

In order to fully understand the logics of the model, it is necessary to refer to the notion of strategic manoeuvring (Eemeren van & Houtlosser, 2002; Eemeren van, 2010). In empirical reality, discussants do not just aim at performing speech acts that will be considered reasonable by their fellow discussants (dialectical aim), but they also direct their contributions towards gaining success, that is to say, achieving the perlocutionary effect of acceptance (rhetorical aim). In other words, the parties in an argumentative discussion attempt to be persuasive (have their standpoint accepted) while observing the critical standards for

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[1] Standpoint is the analytical term used to indicate the position taken by a party in a discussion on an issue. Standpoint is a synonym of the Aristotelian term "pròblema", in expressing the fact of taking a position. As Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009) put it, "a standpoint is a statement (simple or complex) for whose acceptance by the addressee the arguer intends to argue" (p. 44).

[2] We agree with Vuchinich (1990) who pointed out that real-life argumentative discourse does not always lead to one "winner" and one "loser". There may even be no consensus on whether there is a winner or a loser, or on who is the winner. Indeed, frequently, the parties do not automatically agree on the interpretation of outcomes. From this perspective, the normative model of critical discussion has to be systematically brought together with careful empirical description.

argumentative discourse. This notion allows for the reconciliation of a longstanding gap between the dialectical (e.g., to maintain a standard of reasonableness) and the rhetorical (e.g., the desire to win the cause) approach to argumentation (Eemeren van & Houtlosser, 2005), and takes into account the arguers' personal motivations for engaging in a critical discussion.

In the present study, the pragma-dialectical model of critical discussion has both a heuristic and a critical function: It will work as a guideline to identify and analyze relevant moves from the argumentative point of view (analytical reconstruction) and it will allow to the interpretation of real-life interactions in terms of their correspondence to the ideal model of the critical discussion.

Conversational and Discursive Approaches

The conversation is one of the most ordinary, spontaneous and widespread activities that we know (Galimberti, 1994). The notion of conversation, as the common discursive practice in everyday interactions and a process of language socialization (Ochs, 1988), has been the topic of various studies in psychology, anthropology and sociology. The study of conversations "represents a general approach to the analysis of the social action which can be applied to an extremely varied array of topics and problems" (Heritage, 1984, p. 291).

The approaches of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and Discourse Analysis (Antaki, 1994; Edwards, Potter, & Middleton, 1992) aim at analyzing conversations in their actual contexts in order to identify the sequential patterns of discourse produced by participants. The main idea is to study social life in situ, in the most ordinary settings, examining routines and everyday activities in their concrete details (Psathas, 1995). These approaches try to assume the participants' own perspective, in order to explore the structures of expressions used in conversation (such as words, sounds and movements) as well as the structures of meanings (overall topic, their organization in talk, local patterns of coherence in the sequence, implication and assumptions). Within the conversational and discursive approach, there are not predetermined analytical categories: Participants' accounts are always occasioned in the context of discourse and address the concerns of people engaged in the interaction. Accounts are, thus, not considered as definite facts about people's lives, but as alternative versions of their experiences of life, assuming the participants' own perspective (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). The approaches propose that the organization of daily life is supported by a series of assumptions shared and continuously confirmed through social exchanges. The main idea is that participants construct a mutual understanding in verbal interactions, because the aim "is not to make light on 'what really happens' during an interaction... but to discover the systematic properties of the sequential organization of speech" (Levinson, 1983, p. 292). In particular, within the framework of family conversations and inspired by the theoretical paradigm of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), the analysis of talk-in-interaction involves a focus not only on structures and strategies, but also on processes that activate knowledge and different opinions among family members (Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Pontecorvo, 1996; Pontecorvo, Fasulo, & Sterponi, 2001).

The Research: Methodological Issues

The present study is part of a large project[3] devoted to the study of argumentation in the family context.

The general aim of the research is to verify the impact of argumentative strategies for conflict prevention and resolution within the dynamics of family educational interactions. The data corpus includes video-recordings of thirty dinnertime interactions held by five Italian middle class families and five Swiss middle class families. All participants are Italian-speaking.

In order to minimize the researchers' interferences, the recordings were performed by the families on their own[4]. Researchers met the families in a preliminary phase to inform participants about the general goals of the research and the procedures, and to get the informed consent. Further, families were asked to try to behave "as usual" at dinnertime in order to offer the researchers an access to their "ordinary" interactions. During the first visit, a researcher was in charge of placing the camera and instructing the parents on the use of the technology (such as the position and direction of the camera and other technical aspects). Families were asked to record their interactions when all members were present. Each family videotaped their dinners four times, over a four-week period. The length of the recordings varied from 20 to 40 minutes. In order to allow the participants to familiarize themselves with the camera, the first videotaped dinner was not used for the aims of the research. In a first phase, all dinnertime conversations were fully transcribed using the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) (MacWhinney, 1989) and revised by two researchers until a high level of consent (80%) was reached. After this phase, the researchers jointly reviewed with family members all the transcriptions at their home. Through this procedure it was possible to ask family members to clarify some unclear passages, i.e., allusion to events known by family members but unknown to the researcher, implicit language, low level of audio of the video-recordings and unclear words and so forth.

The Study: Criteria of Analysis

In order to analyze the argumentative exchanges, we have selected a number of conversational sequences occurring in family interactions. As suggested by Schegloff (1990), "The organization of sequences is an organization of actions, actions accomplished through talk-in-interaction, which can provide to a spate of conduct coherence and order which is analytically distinct from the notion of topic" (p. 53). We considered the participants' interventions not as isolated turns, but as parts of sequences within the frame of the ongoing observed activities. Specifically, we were convinced that it was possible to understand each turn only in connection with the previous and following one. Moreover, to consider these sequences as relevant for our study, we were referring also to the concept of "participants' categories" (Sacks, 1992), in order to avoid predictive assumptions regarding interactants' motivational, psychological and sociological characteristics. In fact, these factors can only be invoked if the participants themselves are "noticing, attending to, or orienting to" them in the course of their interaction (Heritage, 1995, p. 396).

According to the model of the critical discussion, to get an analytic overview of those aspects of the discourse that are crucial for a more sophisticated analysis and evaluation of the argumentative sequences occurring in ordinary conversations, the following components must be carried out: the difference of opinion at issue in the confrontation stage, the premises agreed upon in the opening stage that serves as the point of departure of the discussion, the arguments and criticisms that are—explicitly or implicitly—advances in the argumentation stage and the outcome of the discussion that is achieved in the concluding stage. Besides, once

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[4] From a deontological viewpoint, recordings made without the speakers' consent are unacceptable. It is hard to assess to what extent informants are inhibited by the presence of the tape recorder. However, we tried to use a data gathering procedure that would minimize this factor as much as possible (Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2004; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007).

the main difference of opinion is identified, the type of difference of opinion may also be categorized. In a single dispute, a standpoint that relates to only one proposition is questioned, whereas in a multiple dispute, a standpoint relating to two or more propositions is questioned. In a non-mixed dispute, either a positive or a negative standpoint with respect to a proposition is questioned, whereas in a mixed dispute, both a positive and a negative standpoint regarding the same proposition are being questioned[5]. The possibilities that can be distinguished regarding the difference of opinion constitute four standard types: single-non-mixed (elementary form), single-mixed, multiple-non-mixed and multiple-mixed.

Dinnertime Conversations: A Qualitative Analysis

In this section, we present a qualitative analysis carried out in transcripts. In our work, we have identified the participants' interventions within the selected sequences and examined the relevant (informative) passages by going back to the video data, in order to reach a high level of consent among researchers. Finally, we have built a collection of instances, similar in terms of criteria of the selection, in order to start the detailed analysis of argumentative moves during family interactions. As each family can be considered a "case study", we are not interested here in doing comparisons among families. For this reason, the excerpts 1 and 2 below present situations considered and framed in their contexts of production, accounting for certain types of argumentative moves. This option derives exclusively from the intention to make clear and easy the presentation of the excerpts, avoiding the use of pre-established categories. In fact, from an ethnomethodological point of view, courses of action that run off "routinely" must be regarded as "achievements arrived at out of a welter of possibilities for pre-emptive moves or claims, rather than a mechanical or automatic playing out of pre-scripted routines" (Schegloff, 1986, p. 115).

For the aim of this paper, we have selected two excerpts as representative sequences of argumentation among parents and children. The first example concerns a Swiss family (case 1), while the second is related to an Italian family (case 2). In the excerpts, fictitious names replace real names in order to ensure anonymity. We have applied the above-mentioned criteria of analysis in order to highlight the argumentative moves of participants during the selected dinnertime conversations.

Case 1: Swiss family

Excerpt 1: Family GEV, dinner 3; participants: MOM (mother, age: 32); DAD (father, age: 34); FR1 (child 1, Luca, age: 9); FR2 (child 2, Bernardo, age: 4).

> All family members are eating seated at the table.
>
> %sit: FR2 touches and looks at the container with the pills.
>
> 1 *FR2: I'm going to take one of these.
>
> → *FR2: Yes.
>
> 2 *MOM: You can't Bernardo.

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[5] The negative standpoint "It is not true that women are better cooks than men" might, for example, give rise to a single difference of opinion. A multiple dispute arises, for example, when someone produces the negative standpoint "It is neither true that women are better cooks than men nor that they are better drivers than men" (Eemeren van & Grootendorst, 1992, pp. 13-25). If only the positive standpoint "It is unquestionably true that women are better drivers than men" is questioned, without the negative standpoint "It is not true at all that women are better drivers than men" being put forward in opposition to it, the dispute is non-mixed. It is non-mixed if the only reaction to the original standpoint was "I wouldn't know". If the positive standpoint had been countered with the negative standpoint, then the difference of opinion would have been mixed.

3 *FR2: Eh?

4 *MOM: You can't.

%act: Shakes his head

5 *FR2: Why not?

6 *MOM: Because children have to take special drugs.

→ *MOM: They can't take the same drugs as adults.

→ *MOM: Otherwise they will make themselves ill.

7 *FR2: And before you < > also felt ill?

8 *MOM: No because I'm an adult.

%sit: FR2 gets close to MOM

9 *FR2: And me?

10 *MOM: You are still a child.

%pau: Common 1.0

%sit: FR2 bangs the drugs' container on the table. MOM extends her hand towards him to try and make him eat a piece of fruit. FR2 turns his head away quickly and slowly leaves the kitchen to go towards DAD and FR1

Notes. *: indicate the speaker's turn; < >: non-transcribing segment of talk; ?: rising intonation; .: falling intonation; →: maintaining the turn of talk by the speaker; %pau: pause; %act: description of speaker's actions; %sit: description of the situation/setting

The sequence starts when Bernardo tells his mother that he is going to take a pill from the drugs container. In particular, the child announces his action by a pre-sequence (turn 1, "I'm going to...") and reinforces this idea by saying "Yes" at the end of his first turn. The mother in turns 2 and 4 does not agree with the child's behaviour (she repeats two times "You can't"): Bernardo cannot take the pills. In pragma-dialectic terms, the discussion is at the level of the confrontation stage. In fact, it becomes clear that there is a standpoint ("I want to take one of the drugs") that meets the mother's contradiction ("You can't, Bernardo").

The opening stage, in which the parties decide to try to solve the difference of opinion and explore whether there are the premises to start a discussion, is largely implicit. Bernardo wants to take one of the pills in the drugs' container by informing his mother of what is going on. We can also infer that he already knows that in order to take the drugs, he needs the permission of the mother. Starting from this shared premise, mother and child can start a critical discussion.

At this point, the child asks his mother the reason for which he cannot take the drugs (turn 5, "Why not?"). Doing so, Bernardo is not going to defend his position by putting forward arguments in his own favour, but, instead, he asks his mother the reason why he cannot take the drugs. The mother does not avoid justifying her position: in turn 6, she puts forward her argument ("Because children have to take special drugs"), and by assuming the burden of proof, she accepts to be the protagonist of the discussion. The intervention of the mother (turn 6) is evoking a general rule ("Children have to...") that also includes Bernardo. The subject of the mother's claim is not her son anymore, but the large category of children ("they"). This intervention of the mother could be the sign that she is trying to emphasize the power of the rule she is using and accounting for

("otherwise they—the children—will make themselves ill"). In turn 7, the child makes a request for clarification. We can paraphrase the child's question as follow: Has it already happened to you as well? Doing so, Bernardo is not yet convinced by the explanation of the mother and trying to make a reference to a previous reality (as if he is in search of "evidences" for the mother's claim). The mother's answer is clear and explicit in turn 8: "No, because I'm an adult". This claim reveals the social positioning of the mother. In particular, the beginning of her turn ("no") is a mark of the inappropriateness of the previous turn of Bernardo. The connector "no" provides a link with the core meaning of her claim in a pragmatic sense (Schiffrin, 1987). In fact, the mother highlights that the identity of adult is the boundary that defines the limits of the prescribed rule. Then, in turn 9, the child makes a further request for clarification (and hetero-positioning) in order to understand what his status is (adult or child?). The mother's answer (turn 10) is clear and explicit: Bernardo is still a child. The following common pause is the concluding point of this exchange, as the evidence that the child is not anymore going to sustain his initial standpoint. In pragma-dialectical terms, we can recognize that, from turn 5 to turn 10, the mother and the child go through an argumentation stage. The mother defends her position by putting forward arguments to counter the child's questions and, doing so, she is removing his doubt. At the end, a non-verbal act (Bernardo bangs the drugs' container on the table) concludes the sequence, showing that Bernardo accepts the mother's standpoint and that he does not take the drugs. Within the model of the critical discussion, this can be considered the concluding stage.

To summarize, we can reconstruct the difference of opinion between the child and his mother as follows:

Issue: Can Bernardo take a pill from the drugs container?

Protagonist: Mother

Antagonist: Bernardo

Type of difference of opinion: Single and Mixed

Standpoint: You can't Bernardo

Arguments: Because children have to take special drugs

        They can't take the same drugs as adults (coordinative argument)

        Otherwise they will make themselves ill (subordinative argument)

Burden of Proof and "Why" Question

In the excerpt 1, it is the mother who decides to start the critical discussion. Indeed, in turn 6, she puts forward her argument ("because children have to take special drugs") and, by assuming the burden of proof, she accepts to be the protagonist of the discussion. As observed in other works devoted to the study of argumentative discussions in the family (Arcidiacono & Bova, 2010), even though it is the parent who is in charge of starting an argumentative discussion, the beginning of the critical discussion in family is often favoured by the continuous requests of children to discover the reasons behind the parental prescriptions.

This aspect leads us toward the second important point we want to highlight in our analysis: the crucial function of the child's "why". In fact, in turn 5, Bernardo points out that he wants to know the reason why he cannot take the pills, and doing so, he makes clear that he wants to sustain an argumentative discussion with his mother. In particular, the presence of significant argumentative indicators (Rocci, 2009)—"why not?", "because"—suggests that a critical discussion is taking place, as the attempt to solve a disagreement "between a party who defends a certain standpoint, the protagonist, and a party who challenges this standpoint, the antagonist" (Eemeren van, Houtlosser, & Snoeck Henkemans, 2007, p. 25).

Case 2: Italian family

Excerpt 2: Family TAN, dinner 2; participants: MOM (mother, age: 35); DAD (father, age: 37); MAR (child 1, Marco, age: 9); FRA (child 2, Francesco, age: 6).

> All family members are seated at the table waiting for dinner.

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

2 *MOM: Eh.

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

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

→ *FRA: Because <my voice is bad> [=! a low tone of voice]

4 *MOM: Absolutely not

→ *MOM: No::.

 5 *FRA: Please:: mom:

6 *MOM: Why?

7 *FRA: [=! nods]

8 *MOM: I do not think so

→ *MOM: A beautiful voice like a man.

→ *MOM: Big, beautiful::.

9 *FRA: No.

%pau: Common 2.5

10 *MOM: Tonight: If we hear the sound of crisp bread ((the noise when crisp bread being chewed)) [=! smiling]

11 *FRA: Well bu: but not:: to this point.
%pau: Common 4.0

Notes. *: indicate the speaker's turn; < >: non-transcribing segment of talk; (( )): segments added by the transcriber in order to clarify some elements of the situation; [=!]: segments added by the transcriber to indicate some paralinguistic features; :: prolonging of sounds; ,: continuing intonation; ?: rising intonation; .: falling intonation; →: maintaining the turn of talk by the speaker; %pau: pause; %act: description of speaker's actions; %sit: description of the situation/setting.

The sequence starts with the intervention of the child that selects the addressee (turn 1, "Mom"), with a low tone of voice as a possible sign of hesitation. After a sign of attention by the adult (turn 2, "Eh"), the son makes explicit his request (turn 3, "I want to talk::") and the problem that is at stake. When he explains the reason behind his opinion ("My voice is bad"), the mother expresses her disagreement with the child's argument, trying to mitigate her intervention through the repetition and the prolonging of the sound (turn 4, "Absolutely not, no::"). At this point, the discussion is at the phase of the confrontation stage. In fact, it becomes clear that there is a child's standpoint ("I cannot talk") that meets the mother's contradiction. In particular, in turn 5, Francesco does not provide further arguments to defend his position. In fact, for him, it is so evident that his voice is bad and he tries to convince the mother to align to this position through a

recontextualization (Ochs, 1990) of the claim ("Please:: mom:"). The prolonging of the sound is thus a way to recall the mother's attention to the topic of discussion (and the different positions about the topic). The child's argument ("my voice is bad") is not sufficient for the mother: in turn 6, she asks the child the reason behind such an idea ("why?"), expressing her need for explanation and clarification. From an argumentative point of view, the sequence turns to a very interesting point. In fact, Francesco does not provide further arguments to defend his position, but he answers with a non-verbal act which aims at confirming his position (he nods as to say that he knows what he is saying). Despite of the mother's request, it is clear how the child tries to evade the burden of proof.

At this point, the mother states that she completely disagrees with her child (turn 8, "I do not think so") and, by assuming the burden of proof, she accepts to be the protagonist of the discussion. Indeed, she provides arguments in order to defend her standpoint ("Your voice is not bad"), telling her child that his voice is beautiful as that of a grown-up man. Then, the mother uses an ironic expression, an argument with a high degree of implicitness (turn 10, "Tonight if we hear the sound of crisp bread"). Indeed, she tells the child that if in that evening, they would hear strange noises, such as that of crisp bread being chewed, it would be her child's voice. It is interesting to notice that the mother uses the first person plural ("We hear the sound") in order to signal a position that puts the child vs. the other family members. The presumed alliance among family members reinforces the idea that the claim of Francesco is not supported by the other participants. The use of epistemic and affective stances (turn 8, "A beautiful voice... big, beautiful") and the irony (turn 10) emphasize the value of the indexical properties of speech through which particular stances and acts constitute a context. In fact, as suggested by Ochs (1992), linguistic forms may help to constitute local conceptions of participants' positions which, at the time, a particular utterance is produced or perceived.

In pragma-dialectical terms, from turn 5 to turn 10, the mother and the child go through an argumentation stage. In turn 11 Francesco maintains his standpoint but he decreases its strength in a way ("Well but not to this point"). Indeed, we could paraphrase Francesco's answer as follows: "Yes, I have a bad voice, but not so much!". Not to that point, not as strange as the noise of crisp bread being chewed! The child's intervention in turn 11 is an opportunity to re-open the conversation about the voice, in particular if we consider the beginning of the claim ("well") as a proper keysite (Vicher & Sankoff, 1989) to potentially continue the argumentative activity. However, the common pause of four seconds closes the sequence and marks the concluding stage of the interactions.

In argumentative terms, we could reconstruct the difference of opinion between the child and his mother as follows:

Issue: How is the Francesco's voice?

Protagonist: Mother

Antagonist: Francesco

Type of difference of opinion: single-mixed

Standpoint: The Francesco's voice is beautiful

Argument: It is big, like a grown-up man

Burden of Proof and Irony

Within the selected sequence, we intend to focus on two additional aspects. First, although the sequence starts with the child's assumption ("I want to talk but it is not possible because my voice is bad"), it is the mother who assumes the burden of proof. In fact, the child does not defend his initial assumption by providing

arguments, but he refuses to assume the burden of proof since, for him, his assumption needs no defense. What happens is that the mother is called upon to be the protagonist of the discussion and, consequently, she provides arguments to defend her standpoint. Thus, it is clear that it is the mother to decide to start the (critical) discussion. Second, it has to be underlined the important function of irony and implicitness in the argumentative exchange of this Italian family. Indeed, we have seen in the last part of the sequence how the mother makes clear use of an ironic expression with a high degree of implicitness in order to withdraw or decrease the strength of the child's opinion. According to leading scholars, commenting ironically on the attitudes or habits of children appears to be a socializing function adopted by parents in the context of family conversation (Rundquist, 1992; Kreuz & Roberts, 1995). In this case, we can note how when the implicit meaning is clear and shared by both arguers (i.e., the child understands the implicit meaning of the mother's utterance), commenting ironically on the child's behavior can also represent an argumentative strategy adopted by parents in order to withdraw or to decrease the strength of the child's standpoint.

Discussion and Conclusions

The general context of family interactions is given by the overarching goal of socialization (Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2009). The triggers of family debates are often given by the need to have children complying with some more or less explicit parental prescriptions as well as preventing them from performing some forbidden behaviours. In both cases, children often try to oppose parents by giving the verbal accounts which they consider necessary or possible in the given setting (Sterponi, 2003). For those reasons, the common goals of family conversations should be taken into account in reconstructing argumentation and evaluating the argumentative strategies adopted by family members.

In this study, we have highlighted how argumentation shapes the communicative practices of Swiss and Italian family members and how it can foster a critical attitude in their decision-making processes. At this point, it seems appropriate to take stock of the acquisitions of the research presented here, listing also the insights which have been drawn.

Firstly, we have seen in both Swiss and Italian families that it is the parent who assumes the burden of proof. He/she is called upon to be the protagonist of the discussion and he/she provides arguments in order to convince the child to accept his/her opinion. Thus, it is clear that in our cases it is the parent to decide to start an argumentative discussion in families with young children. Secondly, we have observed some differences in the argumentative moves adopted by family members. In the Italian case, participants seem to make more use of irony and implicitness, while, within the Swiss family, it seems that people adopt a more "rationale" style: They are more explicit in their argumentation and focused more on giving reasons than seeking to convince. In addition, we think that it is very important to consider the fundamental function of the children's requests (such as the use of "why") in order to favor the beginning of argumentative debates within the family context, the different ways to position themselves within a dinnertime interaction and the related identity played by participants (as adults or children). Other interesting elements concern the use of affective stances and ironic claims to conduct the discussion and also to call the other family members to align (often implicitly) to some positions within the argumentative exchange.

Considering the two cases as a part of a larger research project, some questions about the argumentative moves of family members at dinnertime still remain unanswered. In particular, in the idea to provide further analyses of the collected data, we intend to understand, from a cross-cultural comparative perspective, what

extent family argumentation corresponds to a reasonable resolution of the difference of opinion, highlight the specific nature of argumentative strategies used by family members and define whether it is possible to consider young children as reasonable arguers, by taking into consideration their communicative and cognitive skills.

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