Argumentation between parents and children

A study of family discussions at mealtime

A dissertation presented by

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Abstract

In recent years, the family context has emerged as one of the most important contexts for the study of argumentation. The activity of mealtime, in particular, represents a privileged moment for studying how parents and children interact with each other, because it is one of the few moments during the day in which all family members come together and engage in intensive verbal interaction.

During family mealtime discussions can frequently be observed in which parents and children hold different opinions about a certain issue, e.g. the proper way to be seated at the meal-table, the amount or quality of food, and so on. In such cases, parents could easily avoid engaging in a discussion by advancing arguments in support of their standpoint, and yet resolve the difference of opinion in their own favor due to the difference in age, role, and skills with respect to their children. However, frequently during mealtime we can observe argumentative discussions, in which parents and children put forward arguments to convince the other party that their standpoint is more valid, and therefore deserves to be accepted. Why does this happen?

This study is indeed aimed at identifying the function of argumentation between parents and young children during mealtime. To attain this purpose, the present dissertation assumes as its empirical base a corpus constituted of 30 video-recordings (and related transcriptions) of mealtime conversations in 5 Italian and 5 Swiss-Italian (Ticinese) families. Families were selected by adopting the following criteria: the presence of both parents and at least two children, of whom the younger is of preschool age (three to six years) and the second is older. All participants are Italian-speaking.

The results of this research indicate that the function of argumentative interactions between parents and children is fundamentally educational. In

particular, by means of argumentation, two distinct, but strictly related, educational targets are achieved. First, argumentation is an instrument that enables parents to transmit and children to learn values and models about how to behave in a culturally appropriate way. Interestingly, while the parents play the role of *educators* during argumentative discussions, the children play the not less important role of *active learners*. The second educational function is that of promoting in children the inclination to justify their desires in a reasonable manner. This second target is somehow present in all argumentative discussions. While the first target is behavioral in nature, because parents want to teach their children how to behave in a culturally appropriate way, the second target is cognitive in nature, because it is through argumentative interactions with their parents that children first learn a reasonable (i.e. argumentative) way of thinking. These outcomes represent real advances in the theoretical understanding of family discourse and in the investigation of the role played in this practice by argumentative processes. They also provide a basis for further investigations in this field.

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List of Abbreviations

SNSF: Swiss National Science Foundation

AIC: Book series "Argumentation in Context"

JAIC: Journal of Argumentation in Context

ISSA: International Society for the Study of Argumentation

CELF: Center on Everyday Lives of Families

ICELF: Italian Center on Everyday Lives of Families

AMT: Argumentum Model of Topics

CHAT: CHILDES standard transcription system

SPS: Swiss Psychological Society

APA: American Psychological Association

1.   Studying argumentation in the family context

There is at present a great interest in argumentation in contexts at national and international level. I would like to mention some recent facts in support of this statement. In 2008, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) decided to fund "Argupolis[1]: Argumentation Practices in Context", a doctoral program devoted to the study of argumentation in different contexts such as finance, politics, health communication, school, and family[2]. The doctoral program Argupolis, quoting from the main page of its website, "is a doctoral program constituted by a research and teaching endeavor focused on the study of argumentation practices in different social contexts […] from family to social and political institutions, from financial markets to media, schools, factories and courts". In 2009, the book series "Argumentation in Context" (AIC) and, in 2012, the "Journal of Argumentation in Context" (JAIC)[3] were inaugurated. AIC and JAIC, quoting from their respective websites[4], "aim to publish high-quality books and papers about the role of argumentation in the

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[1] The term Argupolis was originally introduced by Nathalie Muller-Mirza (University of Neuchâtel and University of Lausanne) within the e-learning project "Argumentum" (see the website: http://www.argumentum.ch). The name Argupolis etymologically recalls the image of a town comprised of a network of interrelated argumentative contexts. For more information on this doctoral program see the website http://www.argupolis.net.

[2] Argupolis was jointly designed and developed by Eddo Rigotti (Institute of Argumentation, Linguistics and Semiotics, Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano, Switzerland), Frans H. van Eemeren (Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands), Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont (Institute of Psychology and Education, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland), and Michele Grossen (Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne, Switzerland).

[3] This endeavor was realized by, van Eemeren and Garssen, working in conjunction with John Benjamins Publishing Company.

[4] The website of the book series "Argumentation in Context" can be found at http://benjamins.com/#catalog/books/aic. The website of the "Journal of Argumentation in Context" can be found at http://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/jaic.

various kinds of argumentative practices that have come into being in social life". In 2010, at the most recent Conference on Argumentation held by the International Society for the Study of Argumentation[5] (ISSA) (acknowledged as the world's foremost conference devoted to argumentation), scholars interested in studying argumentation in contexts were as numerous as argumentation theorists, logicians, and rhetoricians primarily interested in argumentation from a theoretical perspective. The second edition of the doctoral program Argupolis, funded again by the SNSF, was inaugurated in 2012[6].

Combined, these facts contribute to highlight how the study of argumentation in contexts is receiving a great attention from many scholars. There is the impression, as well, that a broad segment of the scientific community sees argumentation as a crucial research theme for society and, accordingly, aims to investigate the function of argumentation in the specific contexts in which it occurs. Using an expression borrowed from the social network Twitter, one could say that argumentation has today become a *trending topic* among the scientific community.

In recent years, the family context has emerged as one of the most important contexts for the study of argumentation. Traditionally, the essential role of argumentation has been clearly recognized in other contexts: for example, politics (van Eemeren, 2002; Mohammed, 2008; Zarefsky, 2009) and

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[5] Since 1986, the year of its first edition, the Conference on Argumentation of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation has been held every fourth year at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. ISSA's main goals, paraphrasing from the main page of its website, http://cf.hum.uva.nl/issa, are: to promote and improve the extent and quality of research in the field of argumentation theory and its application; to facilitate the professional cooperation of its members; to sponsor, organize, or support public and professional meetings in the field of argumentation; to support or produce publications relevant to these objectives; and to support and cooperate with individuals and organizations expressing related interests.

[6] Along with the four founding partners, the second edition of the doctoral program Argupolis also includes the participation of the "Laboratory of Argumentation" (ArgLab) of the New University of Lisbon, Portugal, directed by João de Deus Santos Sàágua.

media (Burger & Martel, 2005; Rocci, 2008a; Walton, 2007), law (Feteris, 1999, 2002; Walton, 2002) and mediation (Jacobs & Aakhus, 2002; Greco Morasso, 2011). The reasons for the growing interest in the study of argumentative interactions in the family context lie in the nature of these interactions, which are very different from those typically studied by argumentation theories. In fact, in relation to other more institutionalized contexts, the family context is characterized by a larger prevalence of interpersonal relationships and by a relative freedom concerning issues that can be tackled (Blum-Kulka, 1997). The nature of these interactions has thus attracted the attention of many scholars interested in argumentation, in particular of developmental and educational psychologists.

The work conducted in the last twenty years by Pontecorvo and her colleagues represents a milestone in the study of argumentation in the family context (e.g. Pontecorvo, 1993a, 1993b; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007; Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1997; Pontecorvo & Pirchio, 2000; Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002). This work has brought to light many interesting educational implications of the argumentative interactions in the family. In particular, according to Pontecorvo (1993b) the argumentative interactions have the function of socializing children towards the rules and behavioral models typical of their community. The present study is largely inspired from Pontecorvo's work.

The objects of this study are the argumentative discussions between parents and children during mealtime. The activity of mealtime represents a privileged moment for studying how parents and children interact with each other, because it is one of the few moments during the day in which all family members come together and engage in intensive verbal interactions. As observed by Fiese, Foley and Spagnola (2006, p. 77):

"Mealtime is a *densely packed event* in which much has to happen in approximately twenty minutes: food must be served and consumed, roles assigned, past events reviewed, and plans made".

At mealtime, parents and children talk about several issues, from daily events to the school and extra-curricular activities of children, and possible plans of future activities involving one or more family members. During these discussions, differences of opinion among family members can easily emerge. The correct management of the differences of opinion is of fundamental importance, since, at times, they can even degenerate into a full-blown interpersonal conflict (Greco Morasso, 2011). The parents could easily avoid engaging in a discussion by advancing arguments in support of their standpoint, and yet resolve the difference of opinion in their own favor, forcing children to accept, perhaps unwillingly, their standpoint. The difference in age, role, and skills with their children would allow them to do so. Now it is evident that this happens frequently. However, equally frequently during mealtime we can observe argumentative discussions, in which parents and children put forward arguments to convince the other party that their standpoint is more valid, and therefore deserves to be accepted. In this study, I tried to understand why this happens.

1.1   Research aim and questions

The question that will guide this dissertation can be formulated as follows: *What function does argumentation between parents and children have during mealtime?* To answer this broad question, five research questions have been devised aimed at investigating the argumentative discussions between

parents and children in all relevant aspects, moving from the reasons which trigger their inception and development to the different types of conclusion. Because the reconstruction of the context is a precondition for a satisfying analysis of the argumentative discourse (van Eemeren, 2010), the first research question aims to investigate the ways in which the activity of mealtime can affect the argumentative discussions between parents and children:

- *(Question 1)* What kind of restrictions does family mealtime impose on argumentation and what kind of opportunities are created for argumentation?

Next, the investigation will be centred on the initial phase of the argumentative discussions. In particular, my goal will be to identify the types of issues that lead parents and children to engage in an argumentative discussion:

- (*Question 2*) On what types of issues do parents and children engage in argumentative discussions?

After having identified the types of issues that lead parents and children to engage in argumentative discussions, I will investigate how parents and children contribute to its inception and development:

- (*Question 3*) How do parents and children contribute to the inception and development of an argumentative discussion?

In the next phase of this study, the goal will be to identify the most frequent types of strategic maneuvers adopted by parents and children to convince the other party to accept their standpoint:

– (***Question 4***) What are the strategic maneuvers adopted most often by parents and children in the argumentation stage of the argumentative discussions?

Finally, in the last phase of analysis the goal will be to single out the ways in which parents and children conclude their argumentative discussions:

– (***Question 5***) How do parents and children conclude an argumentative discussion?

The results of this investigation should provide us with a comprehensive picture of the argumentative discussions between parents and children during mealtime. In order to clarify how the research questions will be answered, I will outline the structure of this dissertation in the next section.

1.2   Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is organized in two parts: one part addresses the theoretical and methodological aspects of the present research (Chapter 2 and 3), while the other part offers an empirical analysis of a corpus of argumentative discussions between parents and children during mealtime conversations (Chapter 4, 5, and 6).

In **Chapter 2**, I will present the existing literature on family discourse during mealtime, outlining those aspects of previous studies which are relevant to the present research.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed exposé of the research methodology. First, the theories forming the basis of the communicative-argumentative approach

used for the analysis of the argumentative discussions will be tackled. Next, the corpus of data, the collection phase and transcription of the data, and the criteria adopted in analyzing the argumentative discussions will be presented. In the last part of the chapter, practical problems in analyzing family mealtime conversations and common ethical issues present throughout the study will be considered.

Chapter 4 aims to address the first research question. In this chapter, I shall describe in detail the institutional conventions of the activity of family mealtime. Next, we will see how these institutional conventions can impose constraints on the way parents and children make strategic choices in argumentative discussions.

The analysis of argumentative discussions presented in **Chapter 5** aims to answer the second and the third research questions. In this chapter, I will identify the issues over which parents and children are most likely to engage in argumentative discussion.

The final piece of the analysis section, presented in **Chapter 6**, singles out the strategic maneuvers adopted most often by parents and children and identifies the types of conclusions of the argumentative discussions.

In **Chapter 7**, I will first provide an overview of the main findings in relation to the research questions. I shall then answer the research question which motivated this research project: *What function does argumentation between parents and children have during mealtime?* Finally, I shall indicate new research venues that should guide future investigation into the topic.

2. Mealtime as the privileged moment for studying family discourse

The mealtime is one of the few activities that bring all family members together every day, and the conversations, being characterized by substantial freedom as to the issues that can be tackled, are uniquely suited for the investigation of spontaneous family discourse (Blum-Kulka, 1997). The significance of this activity for the study of family discourse has already been greatly acknowledged. As we shall see in this chapter, a rich tradition of research has analyzed family mealtime conversations from different theoretical perspectives.

In the first part of this chapter, I shall present the existing literature on family discourse and the most recent findings concerning mealtime conversations. We shall see that in this tradition of studies four main research trends can be identified. The first consists of an extended body of studies developed within conversation analysis and theoretically inspired by ethnomethodology. The second consists of a series of studies based on anthropological, educational, and developmental perspectives. The third consists of a group of studies developed within the discursive social psychology approach. In the second half of the chapter, I shall concentrate on the fourth research trend on family discourse, which is of great interest for the present research, because it is specifically devoted to the study of argumentation in the family and the argumentative skills of young children.

I shall conclude the chapter by drawing provisional conclusions about the existing literature on family discourse, showing how these research trends

contribute, each on different aspects, to the research presented in this dissertation.

2.1   The first ethnomethodological researches

The first studies on family mealtime conversations, developed from the late 1960s onwards, are inspired by groundbreaking ethnomethodological[7] theories (Garfinkel, 1967). The analytical foundation of this research trend is based on the principle that discourse, like other social practices, can be investigated only *from within* located practices (Garfinkel, 1967; see also Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1992).

According to Garfinkel (1967), the founding father of ethnomethodology[8], the social order is not simply given by or through shared values, but is an enduring everyday project which occupies society. In Garfinkel's view, the ethnomethodology is a research method which aims to discover and analyze "the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, *from within* actual settings, as ongoing accomplishment of those settings" (ibid. p. viii). This approach is based on an *emic* account, i.e. an account that takes into consideration the study of ordinary language during

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[7] Building on the work of both Parsons (1937) and Schutz (1962), Garfinkel coined the term *ethnomethodology* (for more information on the origin of this term, see Garfinkel, 1968), which refers to the study of people's methods for organizing and making sense of their everyday lives (Heritage, 1984).

[8] Garfinkel is recognized as the founder of ethnomethodology, and an examination of its development (Psathas, 2008) shows how researchers within schools or programs in Boston, MA (USA) and Manchester (Britain) contributed to the growth of ethnomethodology. Key figures also include Jeff Coulter, Wes Sharrock, John Lee, George Psathas, and Rod Watson.

people's everyday activities and how and when people use language to accomplish social action (Harris, 1976; Pike, 1967).

Since the publication of Garfinkel's pioneering *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967), ethnomethodological scholars have produced a substantial body of work in several scientific fields. Already in the late 1970s, Zimmerman (1978, p. 6) noted "the increasing diversity in a variety of distinctive subfields among ethnomethodologists". Maynard and Clayman (1991, p. 386) have more recently pointed out, "it is more accurate to say that there are several bodies of work, rather than a single enterprise". The different subfields into which ethnomethodological studies can be divided include phenomenology, cognitive studies, conversation analysis, research in institutional settings, studies of science, and applied research (Atkinson, 1988; Francis & Hester, 2004; Maynard & Clayman, 1991). Among these different subfields, conversation analysis adopts the family mealtime as one of its favorite subject for investigation.

2.1.1 Studies developed within conversation analysis

The methodological approach known as conversation analysis originated in sociology in the mid-1960s (Psathas, 1995; Schegloff, 1995). The primary objective of conversation analysis is to identify and describe the sequential patterns that structure speech exchanges when they occur spontaneously in the context of human interaction (Sacks, 1992; Sacks et al., 1974). In describing what conversation analysis does, Mondada (2009, p. 559) suggests that "it takes into consideration the perspective of the participants, of the ordered character of these situated practices, and of their meaning". Methodologically speaking, conversation analysts stressed how a rigorous process of data gathering and

transcription is necessary for studying family conversations thoroughly (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

Family mealtime has been a privileged subject of investigation for conversation analysis, as it has provided a huge amount of naturally occurring data for examining the way in which family members manage their everyday conversations. Lerner (2002), for example, showed that simultaneous speech in mealtime conversation is not viewed by family members as a turn-taking problem or as a violation in need of repair. Instead, choral co-production during mealtime is frequently used to initiate or continue conjoined action, thus providing another vehicle for broadening the elements of participation in conversation to all family members. Lerner also noted that choral co-production during mealtime can also be used to exhibit understanding, affiliation and agreement with a current speaker. In a recent study, Butler and Fitzgerald (2010, p. 2462) examined how family members "make sense of particular actions through an orientation to locally relevant membership categories, and how category membership is invoked in the enactment of particular social actions". Drawing on Sacks and Schegloff's work (e.g. Sacks, 1972, 1979; Schegloff, 2005, 2007) and making use of conversation analytical methods, Butler and Fitzgerald (2010, p. 2472) showed that the relevance of membership categories is activated through sequential phenomena such as turn-taking organization, embodied action, and turn design, "which demonstrate the consequentiality of the members' locally relevant identities for the production of social action".

Conversation analysts have also investigated the construction of discourse coherence and the types of relationship within the participation frameworks. In his seminal work, Frederick Erickson (1981, 1988, 1990) showed that discourse coherence in family conversations is not simply a matter of choice of topic, but also involves the social identities and modes of social participation of family members. In the author's view, the distinct differences in

conversational roles among the interlocutors have a crucial function in the social organization of the interaction at mealtime. Making use of the terminology and conceptualization of Philips (1972), Erickson (1988, p. 8) termed the social organization of the interaction at mealtime as "social participation structure".

Other studies have illuminated how a conversation can favor various parallel discussions among family members such as, for example, collaboration in engaging story-telling (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004), coalition and "by-play" (M.H. Goodwin, 1997), or schisms (Egbert, 1997). In their numerous studies devoted to the analysis of "naturally occurring data", Charles Goodwin and Marjorie Harness Goodwin showed that during mealtime individual utterances and single turns are strictly linked to power asymmetries among family members, showing that family mealtime conversations are essentially characterized by a social organization of the turns at talking (C. Goodwin, 1981, 1984; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987). The work of these two scholars focused also on the interactive organization of affect and emotion and on how family members achieve, and display to each other, congruent understanding of the events they are talking about (C. Goodwin, 1986; M.H. Goodwin, 2007).

2.2 Studies based on anthropological, educational, and developmental perspectives

Starting from the mid-1980s, a series of studies, based on anthropological, educational, and developmental perspectives, has looked at family mealtime as a breeding ground for language socialization and the development of linguistic competences in young children.

From a developmental psychology perspective, this line of research particularly grew out of the work initially set up by Catherine E. Snow, Jean

Berko Gleason, and Diane E. Beals (e.g. Beals, 1993; Beals & Snow, 1994; Gleason et al., 1984; Snow, 1983), afterwards extended by many other scholars (e.g. Aukrust, 2002; Davidson & Snow, 1996; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). At the same time, other researchers interested in language from an anthropological and educational perspective (e.g. Ochs, 1993; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Pontecorvo, 1993a, 1993b) have shown that family mealtime conversations can stimulate the language socialization of young children.

2.2.1 Family mealtime as a breeding ground for development of linguistic competences in young children

In the last decades, a series of studies have shown that the participation in multiparty conversations with their parents and other children in family mealtime conversations is an important opportunity for children for the development of their linguistic competences. For example, Beals (1991, 1993) and Aukrust and Snow (1998) brought to light that family mealtimes can offer a great opportunity for extended discourse involving both explanatory and narrative talk. In these studies, these authors showed that through the explanatory talk children can gather information previously often unknown to them, whereas the narrative talk can be an opportunity for starting to reason on hypothetical or conditional events as well as learning complex language forms. Similar results were also found by Aukrust (2002), by Beals and Snow (1994), and by Blum-Kulka and Snow (1992). Also, Aukrust and Snow (1998) stressed that narrative events during mealtime conversations enhance the rights and responsibilities of children as storytellers, the creation of alliances, and the reinforcement of familial roles.

Other studies have shown that mealtime conversations provide opportunities for children to organize and structure their dialogues in group interactions, which are more interactionally complex than dyadic situations (Davidson & Snow, 1996; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Fiese & Schwartz, 2008; Snow & Beals, 2006) and offer the opportunity to children to extend their vocabulary (Beals, 1997; Beals & Tabors, 1995). For instance, Weizman and Snow (2001) found that mealtime is a more richly supportive context than playing with toys or even reading books for the use of rare words. Recently, Harding and her colleagues (2012) investigated verbal interactions between parents and children with early feeding difficulties. In this study, the authors found differences in the communication style between the parents who supported children who had a history of early feeding difficulties and those who had not reported any. According to the authors, "parents who supported children who had a history of early feeding difficulties used more language to manage and guide the child's behavior during the mealtime. Caregivers who reported early feeding difficulties appeared to be more concerned with how their child was concentrating on the meal (i.e. appropriate behavior and meal enjoyment)". Differences in the communication style between parents with children who have disabilities and parents with children who do not have any disabilities were also found by Ferm et al. (2005), Sanders et al. (1997), and Veness and Reilly (2007).

2.2.2 Studies based on the language socialization approach

Starting from the mid-1980s, many scholars have shown that the activity of family mealtime can stimulate the language socialization of young children. These studies, inspired by the so-called "language socialization approach" (Ochs, 1993; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), focused on

social and socializing activities in the natural contexts in which they occur[9]. Within this research strand, the process of socialization is seen as a lifelong experience through which novices and competent members of any social group jointly construct and transform their structure of knowledge and their competence. As Ochs (1988, p. 224) puts it:

> "Members' understanding of family roles is modified through joint activities with infants and children. Despite the asymmetry of their relationship and their competence, children and caregivers may jointly construct these domains of knowledge with each other. In this sense, caregivers may be socialized by the children they are socializing".

The methodology adopted by researchers within the language socialization paradigm includes the examination of routine interaction in naturalistic settings (Heath, 1983; Ochs & Shohet, 2006). While transcripts of audio or video recordings of interactions are analyzed using conversational analysis, this data are often supported by additional ethnographic material such as information concerning the socio-economic background of the family, participant observation, and interviews (Ochs & Taylor, 1992).

Specific interest in family mealtime as a privileged moment to promote and expedite the language socialization of young children was largely sparked by the work of Ochs and her colleagues on American families[10] (Ochs &

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[9] As pointed out by Ochs (2008, p. 6), the term "language socialization" stems from Sapir's classic 1933 article "Language" in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, in which he states (quoted in Sapir, 1949, p. 15): "Language is a great force of socialization, probably the greatest that exists". The language socialization approach, initiated by Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin in the early 1980s, has rapidly gained consensus and followers among scholars of many different disciplines and is now acknowledged as a productive field of research.

[10] The research by Ochs and more recently with her colleagues at the Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELF) within the UCLA Department of Anthropology on family mealtimes is extensive. CELF, which is one of six Sloan Centers on Working Families supported by the

Kremer-Sadlik, 2013 - a just-published study - provides a comprehensive overview of these works; see also Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989; Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) and Pontecorvo and her colleagues on Italian families[11] (Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007, provides a comprehensive overview of these work; see also Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2009; Fasulo, Liberati, & Pontecorvo, 2002; Ochs, Pontecorvo, & Fasulo, 1996; Pontecorvo, 1993a, 2004; Pontecorvo, Fasulo, & Sterponi, 2001). These studies focused in particular on what children learn through engagement in mealtime interactions, showing that the process of child socialization within the family is thoroughly related to social positioning and cultural differences.

A remarkably important contribution to the development of language socialization studies is due to Blum-Kulka (1993, 1994, 1997, 2008). In her cross-cultural study on the dinner conversations of Israeli and Jewish American families, Blum-Kulka (1997, p. 3) centers her investigation on cultural patterns for parent-child relationships and the dynamics of pragmatic socialization of young children, i.e. the ways in which the dinner talk socializes children to use language in "socially and culturally appropriate ways". According to Blum-

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Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Workplace, Workforce, and Working Families Program on Dual-Career Working Middle Class Families, is an interdisciplinary center where anthropologists, applied linguists, education specialists, and psychologists study how working parents and their children approach the challenges of balancing the demands of work, school, and family life using detailed, ethnographic research of everyday life. The center has four aims: (1) detailed, ethnographic research on the home life of middle-class working families; (2) creation of a digital archive of everyday family life; (3) providing research training opportunities for scholars of family life; (4) informing public dialogue on working family life. For more information, see the website http://www.celf.ucla.edu.

[11]The work of Pontecorvo and her colleagues is carried on at the Italian Center on Everyday Lives and Families (ICELF), which is one of the six Sloan Centers on Working Families (*Program on Dual-Career Working Families*). The team ICELF includes developmental and educational psychologists, social psychologists, clinical psychologists and anthropologists, and it is located at the Department of Social and Developmental Psychology of the University of Rome "La Sapienza". For more information, see the website http://www.icelf.weebly.com.

Kulka (2008, p. 88), "family discourse is the most natural of settings for following the interaction between children and adults and its effects on socialization, and it offers unique opportunities to learn about the ways in which children's participation in familial multiparty interactions enhances their chances of achieving linguistically competent cultural membership of their society".

Many studies in language socialization approach have highlighted the way in which the practices of language socialization are realized by adults and children together (e.g. Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989; Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1999). For example, Pontecorvo, Fasulo, and Sterponi (2001) showed that at mealtime parents affect children and are at the same time affected by them. The authors stressed that during mealtime parents learn to be parents with their children, and children learn to be sons or daughters of their own parents. Hence, while children are engaged in the process of becoming competent members of a social group as children, parents are engaged in the process of becoming competent members of a social group as parents.

Furthermore, it has been also noticed that family interactions at mealtime provide children "with ample opportunities to gain practice in the full diversity of roles available" (Blum-Kulka, 2008, p. 91). For example, in middle-class dinner conversations in Israeli and Jewish American families (Blum-Kulka, 1997), as well as in Greek families (Georgakopoulou, 2002), children are actively involved as ratified participants for all types of family talk. Occasionally, however, children are positioned by parents as eavesdroppers. During some exchanges in Italian dinner conversations, Fatigante, Fasulo, and Pontecorvo (1998) observed that children were, at times, marginalized from participation, while being the topic of the ongoing talk.

One of the aspects most frequently analyzed in language socialization studies is the way in which children are socialized to rules and good manners (Aronsson, 1998; Becker, 1990; Fasulo, 2007; Gleason, Perlmann, & Greif,

1984). Some scholars in particular have shown that parents transmit rules to their children by means of the so-called metapragmatic comments; for instance, critical comments regarding lack of adherence to a parental rule or for demanding a proper behavior. (Becker, 1988; Fatigante, Fasulo, & Pontecorvo, 2004). Preferences for certain types of comments may be culture-specific. De Geer and colleagues observed that, for example, Swedish parents are more concerned in providing behavioral rules for their children than Estonian and Finnish parents (De Geer, 2004; De Geer, et al., 2002; Tulviste, et al., 2002). Blum-Kulka (1997) showed that Israelis parents are primarily concerned in providing rules for their children on correct language use (meta-linguistic comments), whereas Jewish Americans parents pay more attention to discourse management (turn-taking). Sterponi's (2003) sequential analysis of account episodes in Italian families shows that the discursive activity of accountability both instantiates the moral beliefs and practices of the Italian family and provides a locus for negotiating cultural norms. That being so, the discursive mechanics of account episodes constitute a medium for reproduction of the moral order.

Family mealtime interactions are also sites for the socialization of children into working family life. For example, Paugh (2005, p. 58) examined how children learn about "their parents' jobs and about work in general" as they listen to and interact with their parents. In examining narratives about work, Paugh showed that children hardly have the role of narrator or principal protagonist, though they did contribute to narratives about work, primarily by asking questions to which the parents responded. Furthermore, during mealtime children also learn "how to introduce, present, evaluate, and problem-solve work-related issues" (ibid., p. 72).

Other ways of enhancing and promoting language socialization in the family context are the "problem-solving" activities, such as, for example,

planning a family trip (Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989), and story-telling activities (Ochs et al., 1992). Dealing with family discourse in Israeli families, Nevat-Gal (2002) showed that the participation of young children to the family discussions can be favored by the use of humorous phrases by parents. In addition, commenting ironically on the attitudes or habits of children appears to have a socializing function when adopted by parents during mealtime conversations (Brumark, 2006; Rundquist, 1992).

2.3   Studies developed within the discursive social psychology approach

The discursive social psychology approach (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1998, 2010; Potter & Edwards, 2001; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) is a line of research in which a growing amount of attention has been devoted to family mealtime conversations in recent years. According to Potter and Edwards (2001), the founding fathers of this line of research, the discursive social psychology is an approach to psychology that takes the action-oriented and reality-constructing features of discourse as fundamental. As regards the method of investigation, this approach is largely based on conversation analysis and shares many of the theoretical principles of ethnomethodology, i.e. discourse can be investigated only from within located practices (Potter & Edwards, 2001; Wooffitt, 2005). It is, apparently, important and functional for the scope of the present research to draw a concise picture of these studies, because they provide an interesting − and, in some aspects, original − contribution to the study of family discourse.

The discursive social psychology approach builds on three core observations about the nature of discourse[12]. First, discourse is *situated*, that is, it is embedded in some kind of sequence of interaction and in some kind of context. This is similar to the conversational analysis notion that *talk is occasioned* (ten Have, 2004; Wooffitt, 2005). Furthermore, discourse is situated within a particular institutional setting; for instance, telephone helpline, school classroom, or family mealtime. Therefore, to understand discourse fully, one must examine it in situ, as it happens, bound up with its situational context. Second, discourse is *action-oriented*, that is, discourse is the primary medium for social action. Discursive social psychology uses the notion of action orientation to stress that separation of talk and action is a false dichotomy; it means overlooking the ways in which talk achieves things in itself (Potter & Edwards, 2001; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). Third, discourse is both *constructed* and *constructive*. It is constructed, as it is made up of linguistic building blocks; words, categories, idioms, repertoires, etc., which are used in a wide range of ways to present particular versions of the world. Discourse is also constructive, because human behaviors are not something that may putatively exist prior to talking but can also be realized through the talk itself (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). Following these theoretical principles, discursive social psychologists aim to reconstruct in family mealtime conversations the perceptions, moods, and points of view of each family member as they emerge from conversations when they speak and express feelings, attitudes, and evaluations during their everyday activities.

Wiggins and her colleagues carry out thorough and sustained analyses of family mealtime conversations from a discursive social psychology perspective. In a recent work, Wiggins (forthcoming) demonstrated how the enactment of

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[12] The theoretical principles I am going to discuss have been developed most clearly in Potter (1996) and Edwards (1997).

disgust by parents and children is an inherently social event. In this work, the author showed that disgust markers orient others in their choices about food and attend to family members' entitlements to know disgust. Laurier and Wiggins (2011) examined the interactional organization of satiety (fullness) and finishing the family meal. In this study, the authors showed that checks on completion are tailored according to the children's age and the intimate knowledge family members have of one another, and are attuned to contingencies, such as whether there is a further course to be offered. In addition to teaching children how to eat together with others, the family also transmits and transforms all kinds of other eating practices, such as how to comply, or not, with requests to finish. Wiggins's (2004a, p. 536) earlier work examined "the ways in which people construct, manage and undermine healthy eating". Analysis of these data shows the way in which a discussion on healthy eating was carried out and reconstructed during interactions as part of eating events. Wiggins's study revealed that discussions about healthy eating are "localized and contextualized within a particular interaction" (ibid., p. 545). In other works, Wiggins and her colleagues analyzed the way in which food appreciation and pleasure are constructed (Wiggins, 2002), how assessments of food are produced (Wiggins & Potter, 2003) and challenged (Wiggins, 2004b) in family mealtimes, and how the processes through which having "enough" food are negotiated (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007). Taken together, the studies realized by Wiggins and her colleagues have the merit to show the interpersonal nature of the perceptions, moods, and personal points of view of family members, i.e. each family member can, at some extent, influence the perceptions, moods, and personal points of view of all the other family members.

Other studies focused on the way family members' formulations are affected by the specific features of the activity of mealtime. According to Billig (1992, 1997), the choice of topic discussed by family members is strictly

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affected by the specific context of dinner. For example, the author observed that most people do not sit over dinner talking about the theory of the force of gravity, rather, they talk mostly about food and good table manners. In a recent work, Hepburn and Potter (2011) showed that parental threats differ from warnings and admonishments and that they closely relate to the asymmetry of power and roles among family members.

Although Anita Pomerantz and Lorenza Mondada cannot be labeled as discursive social psychologists, some of their work might be considered full-fledged discursive social psychology studies. Pomerantz (1978, 1984) shows that assessments of events are structured so as to minimize stated disagreement and maximize stated agreement between speakers. As noted by Potter and Edwards (2001), the studies realized by Pomerantz have had a major influence on the birth and development of the discursive social psychology approach. In a recent work, Mondada (2009) examined dinner conversation data from French families and explicated the way in which and when members used assessments about food. Through fine-grained conversation analysis, Mondada shows that food assessments can be used by family members for reorienting the participants' focus of attention or for blocking emerging sequential trajectories.

2.4 *The growing interest in argumentation practices in the family*

Thus far, we have seen how family mealtime is an activity which is under the lens of linguistic anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists, including educational, developmental, cognitive, and social psychologists. Alongside a number of studies that mark the importance of argumentation in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning activities in the school context (e.g. Mercer,

2000; Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2009; Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002; Schwarz, et al., 2008), family mealtime is also under the lens of scholars interested in argumentation, above all of developmental and educational psychologists. Two aspects in particular have attracted their interest. First, there is the study of the argumentative structures and the linguistic elements characterizing argumentative interactions among family members. Within this research area, which I would call *family argumentation studies*, the focus is on the argumentative dynamics among the family members, i.e. whether and how parents and children engage in argumentative discussions between themselves. Second, the argumentative skills of young children and how to improve these skills are research topics many scholars are currently working on extensively.

I present these studies in two different sections. In the first section, the results so far obtained by family argumentation studies are outlined, while in the second section, a literature review of studies on the argumentative skills of young children is presented. In the latter section, some studies that are not specifically focused on the family context are also taken into account because these studies provide important insights on children's argumentation.

2.4.1 Recent studies on family argumentation

In the last two decades, the study of family discourse is a research topic that has attracted considerable attention among scholars interested in argumentation. A significant contribution is represented by the work realized in the last twenty years by Pontecorvo and her colleagues, who centred their investigations on the everyday interactions of Italian families in order to investigate the practices of socialization of children aged between 3 and 9 years and the style of interaction with their parents. The research question that guides

the work of Pontecorvo is primarily educational in nature, because the family context is considered the primary learning setting for the socialization of young children to the practices, values, and rules typical of their culture (Pontecorvo, 1993b). The development of language proficiency is therefore fundamental for the socialization of young children, since it allows them to become competent members of their community.

The interest of Pontecorvo in studying the argumentative interactions during mealtime is due to the fact that during this activity it is frequently possible to observe how behaviors and points of view of family members are put into doubt. As a consequence, the family members often need to support their statements through argumentative reasoning. For example, Pontecorvo and Fasulo (1997) observed that in story-telling with their parents, children make use of sophisticated argumentative skills by calling into question the rules imposed by their parents. In this study, the authors also showed that by questioning the parental rules children make clear their desire to identify the reason why doing a certain action is bad and, on the contrary, not doing it is good.

According to Pontecorvo (1993a), the acquisition of argumentative strategies is a key element in the language socialization of children, because it is through the daily exchanges with their parents that children begin to learn to produce and sustain their standpoints in verbal interactions with others. Furthermore, Pontecorvo also stresses that in the study of argumentation in the family, the role of language cannot be separated from general socio-cultural knowledge (Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2009; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2010; Pontecorvo & Pirchio, 2000; Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002). The argumentative discussions, in fact, can favor not only the language socialization, but also the cultural socialization of children, as they are not intended to be mere conflictual episodes that must be avoided, but opportunities for children to learn the reasons on which the practices, values, and rules typical of their culture are based.

A number of recent studies have investigated the structure and the linguistic elements characterizing argumentative discussions among family members. In a work concerning the role of argumentative practices in the educational sphere, Muller-Mirza et al. (2009, p. 76) stressed that the argumentative attitudes learned in the family, in particular the capacity to deal with disagreement by means of reasonable verbal interactions, are to be considered "the matrix of all other forms of argumentation". Despite the focus on narratives being the first genre to appear in communication with children, the observations of conversations between parents and children during mealtime prove to be an activity which is essential in teaching children the argumentative strategies that they can use for a variety of goals in many different contexts (Arcidiacono & Bova, 2011a; Dunn, 1988; Hester & Hester, 2010), sometimes even by avoiding an argumentative discussion (Laforest, 2002). Analyzing a corpus of mealtime conversations in Swedish families, Brumark (2006, 2008) observed the presence of certain recurring argumentative features in mealtime conversations as well as the association between some argumentation structures and child age. For instance, children aged between 10 and 12 years engage in more argumentative discussions than younger children. Some other studies have also shown that different cultures and nationalities can be characterized by different argumentative styles in families (Arcidiacono & Bova, forthcoming, 2011b). They have also shown how relevant it is to know the properties of the family context accurately in order to analyze and evaluate the argumentative dynamics of mealtime conversations (Arcidiacono, Pontecorvo, & Greco Morasso, 2009).

The study of argumentation in the family context has attracted also the attention of developmental psychologists. For example, Dunn and Munn (1987) focused their attention on the topics over which family members engage in argumentative discussions. In this study, the authors observed that children

engage in argumentative discussions with their mothers on various topics, whereas with their siblings they primarily concern issues of rights, possession, and property. Later, Slomkowski and Dunn (1992) showed that children use self-oriented arguments, namely, talking about themselves. In contrast, parents use above all arguments which refer to children and not to themselves (other-oriented arguments). Taken together, the results of these studies indicate that the argumentative discussions in family are oriented towards the youngest child, and not towards the parents or the older siblings.

2.4.2 The argumentative skills of young children

A second line of research argumentative scholars currently pursue concerns the study of the argumentative skills of young children and how to improve these skills. Within this research strand, a number of studies have highlighted how children first learn to argue with others through interactions with their parents (Dunn & Munn, 1987; Hay & Ross, 1982) and other siblings (Hester & Hester, 2010; Ross, et al., 2006; Shantz, 1987; Slomkowski & Dunn, 1992). The family context offers children, in fact, even before the school context, the opportunity to experience their first argumentative discussions (Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2009; Stein & Albro, 2001). It has also been amply demonstrated that the ability of children to argue and negotiate improves over time, with the full development of linguistic, cognitive, and social skills (Benoit, 1993; Benoit & O'Keefe, 1982; Tesla & Dunn, 1992). Children may even win some argumentative discussions with parents or older siblings (Eisenberg, 1992; Perlmann & Ross, 1997). Later, when children enter school, they are offered many opportunities to engage in argumentative discussions and learn how to resolve disputes with their peers.

A fundamental question addressed in this type of argumentation research is at what age children start to show signs of the ability to construct arguments and engage in argumentative discussions. Studies addressing this issue and the answers provided are seemingly contradictory. As I will clarify in the course of this section, in reality this is not the case.

Most scholars agree with the claim that the capacity to understand and produce arguments emerges early in development (e.g. Anderson, et al., 1997; Clark & Delia, 1976; Mercer, 2009; Mercer & Sams, 2006; Mercier, 2011; Orsolini, 1989, 1993; Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992; Stein & Miller, 1993). In this regard, Dunn and her colleagues (Dunn & Munn, 1987; Herrera & Dunn, 1997; Slomkowski & Dunn, 1992) showed that in mother-child exchanges on differences of opinion over the "right" to perform certain actions, by age 4 children justify their own position by arguing about the consequences of their actions. By age 5, children learn how to engage in opposition with their parents and become active participants in family conflicts.

Compared with Dunn's view, according to Stein and her colleagues the age at which children acquire argumentative skills comes even earlier. In Stein's view, children are already familiar with conflict interactions by age 2. They become able to understand family disagreements and to participate in them by age 4. In domains that are familiar to them, they demonstrate some of the argumentative competences of older children and even of adults by age 5. For example, Stein and Trabasso (1982) posited that children are able to construct complex moral justifications by age 5 when the issue is well-known and appealing to them. The purpose of Stein and her colleagues' work is to demonstrate that the development of argumentation skills has an interpersonal root, and that children first learn to master their skills with their parents, siblings, and peers. In several studies (e.g. Stein & Albro, 2001; Stein & Miller, 1993), they showed that the structure and content of arguments are strictly regulated by

the purposes and the type of relationships of the arguers. In other words, the theory of Stein and her colleagues assumes that the weight of social relationships is always present in argumentative discussions.

Further research carried out by Stein and her colleagues has taken into account the role that personal relevance and value judgments play in determining the representation of a conflict (Stein & Albro, 2001; Stein, et al., 1995; Stein & Miller, 1990, 1993). The results of these studies confirm that children have a complex knowledge of argument in social situations that are to them personally significant. Similar results were also found by Eisenberg and Garvey (1981) and Howe and McWilliam (2001). Mercer, who has worked intensively and extensively on these topics over the last few years (Mercer, 2000, 2009; Mercer & Sams, 2006), also agrees with the theory of Stein and her colleagues, arguing that children have at least basic argumentative skills and can engage in argumentative discussions with adults effectively.

The claim that the capacity to understand and produce arguments emerges early in development seems to be contradicted by the work by Kuhn and her colleagues, who documented the poor performance of children in argumentative tasks (e.g. Kuhn, 1991). Similar results were also found by Golder and her colleagues (Golder, 1996; Golder & Coirier, 1994) and by Nickerson (1986).

According to Kuhn and her colleagues, epistemological understanding underlies and shapes argumentation (e.g. De Fuccio, et al., 2009; Felton & Kuhn, 2001; Kuhn, 1991, 1992; Kuhn, Shaw, & Felton, 1997; Kuhn & Udell, 2003). In particular, to properly comprehend argumentative processes, it is necessary to examine children's understanding of their own knowledge. Despite the fact that epistemological understanding progresses developmentally, Kuhn and her colleagues observed that in providing justification for a claim, young children have difficulty in differentiating explanation and evidence in an

argument. These findings lead Kuhn to affirm that young children do not have sufficient skills to engage in argumentative discussions with their parents.

The differences between the results of the studies of Stein and those of Kuhn, which appear to be mutually contradictory, can be explained for if we look at the different methodology applied in their studies[13]. The reason of these differences is well-formulated by Schwarz et al. (2009, pp. 150-151):

"In the two kinds of studies, the methodological tools were of a very different nature. For Kuhn, these were structured interviews or questionnaires, administered at different ages […] In contrast, Stein and her colleagues directly observed children in natural settings while settling disputes or negotiating a decision. The ability to challenge or to counterchallenge was observed in situ […] It is then clear from a theoretical point of view that the development of argumentation skills and their manifestation in a given situation is highly sensitive to context".

Schwarz and his colleagues put emphasis on the importance of evaluating the argumentative skills of young children in the real contexts in which they engage in argumentative discussions. Despite some differences in methodology and interpretation, the studies on the argumentative skills of young children have the merit to show that preschool children are able to understand and generate an argument, and to construct justifications in defense of a standpoint. Moreover, these studies bring to light the important function represented by family discussions, which are a sort of *laboratory* where children learn and improve the argumentative skills they can use in many different contexts.

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[13] For a detailed comparison of the works of Kuhn and Stein, see also Macedo (2011).

2.5   Open questions arising from the state of the art

The studies discussed in this chapter are intended to shed light on a number of implications and insights that can contribute to the present research. Below, Table 1 shows a basic overview of the results of the literature review on family discourse during mealtime. In Table 2, the key publications in the development of each research trend are presented.

Table 1. Overview of the literature on family discourse at mealtime

Research trend	Scholars	Focus of investigation	Period of major development
Ethnomethodology & conversation analysis	Garfinkel Sacks Schegloff Heritage Psathas Erickson Pomerantz C. Goodwin M.H. Goodwin, etc.	To identify and describe the sequential patterns that structure speech exchanges when they occur spontaneously in the context of human interaction	From the late 1970s to the mid 1990s
Development of linguistic competences & Language socialization approach	Snow Beals Aukrust Ochs Schieffelin Blum-Kulka Pontecorvo Aronsson, etc.	Everyday ordinary activities as a breeding ground for language socialization and development of linguistic competences in young children	From the mid 1980s to the late 1990s
Discursive social psychology approach	Potter Edwards Wetherell Wiggins, etc.	The application of ideas from discourse analysis to the study of social interactions	From the late 1990s to present
Family argumentation studies & Children's argumentative skills	Perret-Clermont Muller-Mirza Dunn Pontecorvo Arcidiacono Bova Brumark Stein Mercer Kuhn, etc.	The structure and linguistic elements of argumentative discussions among family members and the argumentative skills of young children and how to improve these skills	From the mid 1990s to present

Table 2. Key publications in the development of each research trend

Research trend	1965	1970	1980	1990	2000	
Ethno-methodology & Conversation analysis	Garfinkel (1967)	Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson (1974)	Pomerantz (1984) Heritage (1984) C. Goodwin & M.H. Goodwin (1987)	Sacks (1992) Psathas (1995)	Schegloff (2007)	
Development of linguistic competences & Language socialization approach			Snow (1983) Schieffelin & Ochs (1986) Ochs & Schieffelin (1984)	Beals (1993) Blum-Kulka (1997) Pontecorvo (1993)	Blum-Kulka & Snow (2002) Aukrust & Snow (1998) Aronsson (1998)	
Discursive social Psychology			Potter & Wetherell (1987)	Potter (1996)	Potter & Edwards (2001) Wiggins & Potter (2003)	
Family argumentation & Children argumentative skills			Stein & Miller (1993) Slomkowski & Dunn (1992) Pontecorvo & Fasulo (1997) Kuhn (1991)	Mercer (2000)	Brumark (2008) Bova & Arcidiacono (forthcoming) Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont (2009)	
	1965	**1970**	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	

The analysis of the literature showed that the studies so far realized cover a wide spectrum of issues regarding family discourse during mealtime. In this rich tradition of studies, four main research trends can be identified. The first consists of an extended body of studies developed within conversation analysis and theoretically inspired by ethnomethodology, devoted to studying the organizational structure of family discourse. The second consists of a series of studies based on anthropological, educational, and developmental perspectives, which consider family mealtime as a breeding ground for language socialization and the development of linguistic competences in young children. The third consists of a group of studies developed within the discursive social psychology approach which investigate the interactional dynamics among family members as manifested in situations in which they all express their feelings, attitudes, and evaluations during their everyday conversations. The studies on argumentation in the family represent the fourth research strand on family discourse at mealtime. Notably, two main issues have attracted the interest of many scholars: first, the argumentative structures as well as the linguistic elements characterizing the discussions in the family, and second, the argumentative skills of young children and how to improve these skills.

These four research trends contribute differently to various relevant aspects of the present research. The studies developed within conversation analysis have the merit of showing how a rigorous process of data gathering and transcription is required to thoroughly analyze how people interact with each other in ordinary conversations. The studies based on anthropological, educational, and developmental perspectives have shown the centrality of children in family life and therefore how important it is to take into consideration, in the analysis of family discourse, the differences in age, competences, and experiences among family members. Studies developed within the discursive social psychology approach have underscored the importance of

properly considering in the analysis of family discussions the type of relationships among family members and the type of activity in which the discussion occurs, as they can greatly affect the discursive choices of participants.

Finally, the studies in argumentation so far realized have the merit of highlighting the importance of argumentation in the family context. In this regard, we have seen that argumentation is an instrument through which to resolve differences of opinion and so avoid the emergence of conflicts between family members. Moreover, the argumentative practices are also an instrument by which children can develop a series of cognitive skills that are important – primarily, but certainly not exclusively – in the school context.

However, the review of the literature has also shown that few studies refer to the contemporary argumentation theories. In particular, the criteria adopted for the selection, analysis and evaluation of the argumentative discussions have been often based on theories that either do not refer to the developments of the last decades of the argumentation theory or do not even make any reference to the argumentation theory. A certain lack of conceptual and methodological instruments in the family has led to difficulties in comparing studies even on similar topics. For example, we have seen that the lack of shared methodological criteria in the analysis of the argumentative discussions has led to difficulties in comparing studies even on similar topics (cf. the works of Stein and Kuhn).

The present research seeks to address this lack of conceptual and methodological instruments in the literature on argumentation in the family. In the analysis of the argumentative discussions between parents and children, I opted for a methodology which is based on the contemporary argumentation theory. In the next chapter, I shall outline and discuss the methodology on which the present research is based.

3. A qualitative methodology for studying argumentation in the family

In the previous chapters we have seen that the studies carried out so far have the merit of highlighting the relevance of argumentation in the family context, but the lack of shared methodological criteria for the selection, analysis and evaluation of the argumentative discussions has constituted a real challenge in this sort of research. In fact, there is no broad consensus among scholars regarding the proper research methodology for studying argumentative interactions in the family.

Quantitative research is typically designed to test predetermined hypotheses that are formed from existing theory (a deductive process). Hence, quantitative research methods focus on the quantification of a phenomenon, relying on numbers, counts, and frequency-type data (Weathington, Cunningham, & Pittenger, 2010). Methods of data collection in quantitative research include structured interviews, content analysis according to a coding scheme, surveys (questionnaires), and group experiments (studies that involve control and experimental groups).

Qualitative research tries to develop a theory from the data collected (an inductive process) and thus focuses on describing a phenomenon, collecting and analyzing data from detailed observations, conversation scripts, or video transcriptions. Despite the prevalence of qualitative methods in some research areas (e.g. educational and clinical research), there has not been widespread acceptance of qualitative research in social sciences. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), the main reason for not using qualitative methods is due to the insufficient knowledge of these methods.

In recent years, argumentation scholars have shown the advantages of a qualitative approach to studying argumentation in contexts. In particular, the research work conducted in the last ten years by the Amsterdam School of Argumentation and by the Lugano Group, based on the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) and the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009a, 2010), has brought to light the importance of the argumentative dimension in various spheres of activities.

The research work carried on by the Lugano Group is above all centred on the study of argumentation in dispute mediation, finance, media and advertising, and economic press and corporate reporting discourse. For example, Greco Morasso (2011) provided a clear account of how contextual conditions characterizing mediation practice can affect the argumentative moves of participants. In this study, Greco Morasso showed how complex argumentative dynamics can be comprehensively addressed through a qualitative approach based on the pragma-dialectical theory integrated with the AMT. In a series of studies focused on takeover bids in the UK stock market, Palmieri (2010, 2012; Rigotti & Palmieri, 2010) showed how directors, by means of various strategies, fulfill their informative and argumentative obligations and simultaneously try to persuade shareholders. In particular, the author observed crucial argumentative differences between friendly and hostile bids. Recent studies conducted by Rocci and his colleagues on media and advertising (Mazzali-Lurati & Pollaroli, forthcoming; Rocci, 2009a; Rocci, Mazzali-Lurati, & Pollaroli, forthcoming) and economic press and corporate reporting discourse (Filimon, 2009; Miecznikowski, Rocci, & Zlatkova, 2012; Rocci, 2008b, 2012; Zlatkova, 2012), have also proved the effectiveness of this qualitative research method.

The research activity carried out by the Amsterdam School of Argumentation is principally centred on four domains of communicative

activity: legal, political, medical, and scientific (or academic). As far as the legal domain is concerned, Feteris (1999) provided a general overview of the various approaches to legal argumentation. Among the topics she examined is the use of pragmatic argumentation referring to the desirable (or undesirable) consequences of a legal decision (Feteris, 2002) and the examination of strategic maneuvering in legal discourse (Feteris, 2009). Other contributions to the examination of legal argumentation are made by Plug (1999, 2000), Jansen (2005), and Kloosterhuis (2006). Comprehensive projects concerning the influence of institutional constraints in the political domain were carried out by van Eemeren and Garssen (2010, 2011), who center their analysis on the institutional preconditions for strategic maneuvering in argumentative exchanges in the European Parliament. Other pragma-dialectical research projects focusing on a parliamentary context were undertaken by Plug (2010, 2011), Ihnen Jory (2010, 2012), Mohammed (2008, 2009), Andone (2010), and Tonnard (2011). Research in the political domain was also conducted by Lewinski (2010), who has examined how on-line technologies create new possibilities for public debate. Focusing on the medical domain, Goodnight and Pilgram (2011) have shown that doctors can build a patient's trust by enhancing ethos through stressing their expertise. Strategic maneuvering has also been investigated in medical advertising (van Poppel & Rubinelli, 2011) and, in particular, on health brochures (van Poppel, 2011). As for the scientific (or academic) domain, Wagemans (2011) suggested tools for the reconstruction and evaluation of argumentation from expert opinion by incorporating certain suggestions for critical questions posed by Walton and others (Walton, 1992, 1996, 2005; Walton, Reed, & Macagno, 2008) into the more general and systematic pragma-dialectical framework.

Altogether, the studies conducted by the Amsterdam School of Argumentation and the Lugano Group show that the qualitative research based

on the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation and the AMT provides the tools to investigate argumentation in different contexts. However, this research approach has so far not been applied in studies on argumentation in the family, and this aspect undoubtedly represents a challenge for the present research.

In this chapter, I shall comprehensively describe the theoretical and methodological instruments on which the analysis of the argumentative discussions between parents and children is based, namely, the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (§3.1.1 and §3.1.2) and the AMT (§3.1.3). Subsequently, the data corpus of the research (§3.2), the collection and transcription of the data (§3.3 and §3.3.1), and the criteria adopted for the analysis (§3.4) shall be discussed. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, practical problems in analyzing family mealtime conversations (§3.5) and common ethical issues present throughout the study (§3.6) will be considered.

3.1 Integrating the pragma-dialectical theory with the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT)

The study of the argumentative dynamics in the family requires an appropriate method of analysis. In the present research, in order to investigate the corpus of argumentative discussions between parents and children I will use a qualitative research approach based on the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, in its standard (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) and extended version (van Eemeren, 2010), integrated with the AMT (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009a, 2010). In what follows, the pragma-dialectical account of argumentation and the AMT will be described analytically. Although some elucidations have already emerged throughout the previous chapters, the nature of argumentation will now be comprehensively delineated.

3.1.1 The standard pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation and the ideal model of a critical discussion

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 1), the initiators and founding fathers of the pragma-dialectical approach, give the following definition of argumentation:

"A verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint".

This general definition accounts for many theoretically important aspects of the notion of argumentation. According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst, argumentation is: (a) a *verbal activity*, because it is realized by the use of language; (b) a *social activity*, because it is directed at other people; (c) a *dialectical activity*, since it is concerned primarily with conveying conclusions reached by rational reasoning; (d) a *rhetorical activity*, because it is aimed at convincing other people of the acceptability of our opinion.

The pragma-dialectical approach proposes the model of a critical discussion as an ideal definition of argumentation developing according to the standard of reasonableness. This model describes how argumentative discourse would be structured were such discourse to be solely aimed at resolving differences of opinion (ibid., p. 30). The model of a critical discussion spells out four stages that are necessary for a dialectical resolution of differences of opinion, i.e. the resolution of a dispute by means of critically testing the standpoints at issue (ibid., pp. 60-61):

- The first step is the *confrontation stage*, in which a difference of opinion emerges: "it becomes clear that there is a standpoint that is not accepted because it runs up against doubt or contradiction" (ibid., p. 60);

- In the *opening stage*, "the parties to the difference of opinion 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" (ibid., p. 60);

- In the proper *argumentation stage* of critical discussion, arguments in support of the standpoint(s) are advanced and critically tested. In particular, "it is crucial for the resolution of a difference of opinion that argumentation is not only advanced, but also critically evaluated. Without both these activities taking place, there can be no question of a critical discussion" (ibid., p. 61);

- Finally, the *concluding stage* is "the stage of a critical discussion in which the parties establish the result of an attempt to resolve a difference of opinion" (ibid., p. 61).

In the argumentative reality, various types of differences of opinion can emerge. Indeed, the nature of the difference of opinion actually arising determines the different types of confrontation between the parties. In pragma-dialectical terms, in a *single* dispute, only one proposition is at issue, whereas in a *multiple* dispute, two or more propositions are questioned; in a *non-mixed* dispute, only one standpoint with respect to a proposition is questioned, whereas in a *mixed* dispute, two opposite standpoints regarding the same proposition are questioned[14]. It is worth stressing that the model of a critical discussion is

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[14] For a detailed pragma-dialectical analysis of argumentative structures, see Snoeck Henkemans, 1992, 2000.

developed as a regulative ideal, rather than as a descriptive model: it defines a perfectly reasonable procedure of dialectical argumentation under optimal conditions, aimed exclusively at resolving differences of opinion on the merits[15] (van Eemeren, Garssen, & Meuffels, 2009). In the present study, the model of a critical discussion is adopted as a general framework for the analysis of argumentative discussions in the family context. In particular, it helps to identify and reconstruct argumentative moves (*heuristic* and *analytic* function) and evaluate their contribution to the resolution of the difference of opinion (*critical* function)[16] (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 58-59).

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[15] A "code of conduct" for reasonable discussants has been proposed that consists of ten fundamental rules – often referred to as the "Ten Commandments" – that must be taken into account in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 187-196): 1 *The freedom rule*: Parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints; 2 *The burden-of-proof rule*: A party who puts forward a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked to do so; 3 *The standpoint rule*: A party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party; 4 *The relevance rule*: A party may defend his/her standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint; 5 *The unexpressed premise rule*: A party may not falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party or deny a premise that he/she him/herself has left implicit; 6 *The starting point rule*: No party may falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point, or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point; 7 *The validity rule*: The reasoning in the argumentation must be logically valid or must be capable of being made valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises; 8 *The argumentation scheme rule*: A standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argumentation scheme that is correctly applied; 9 *The closure rule*: A failed defense of a standpoint must result in the protagonist retracting his/her standpoint, and a successful defense of a standpoint must result in the antagonist retracting his/her doubts; 10 *The usage rule*: Parties must not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they must interpret the formulations of the other party as carefully and accurately as possible. Any argumentative move that goes against any of the rules of the code of conduct obstructs or hinders the resolution process and is therefore to be considered *fallacious* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp.158-186).

[16] With regard to the heuristic, analytic, and critical functions of the model, van Eemeren, Houtlosser, and Snoeck Henkemans (2007, p.17) explain: "Assuming that argumentative discussions and texts and the argumentative moves made in such argumentative discourse have – at least potentially – the objective of resolving a difference of opinion in a critical way, we believe this model can be considered a template for the crucial tasks that parties involved in the difference of opinion have to perform. If it turns out that language users do not fulfill all these tasks in everyday argumentative discourse or do not fulfill all of them completely, it still holds

To conclude this section, Figure 1 shows a schematic overview of the standard version of pragma-dialectics:
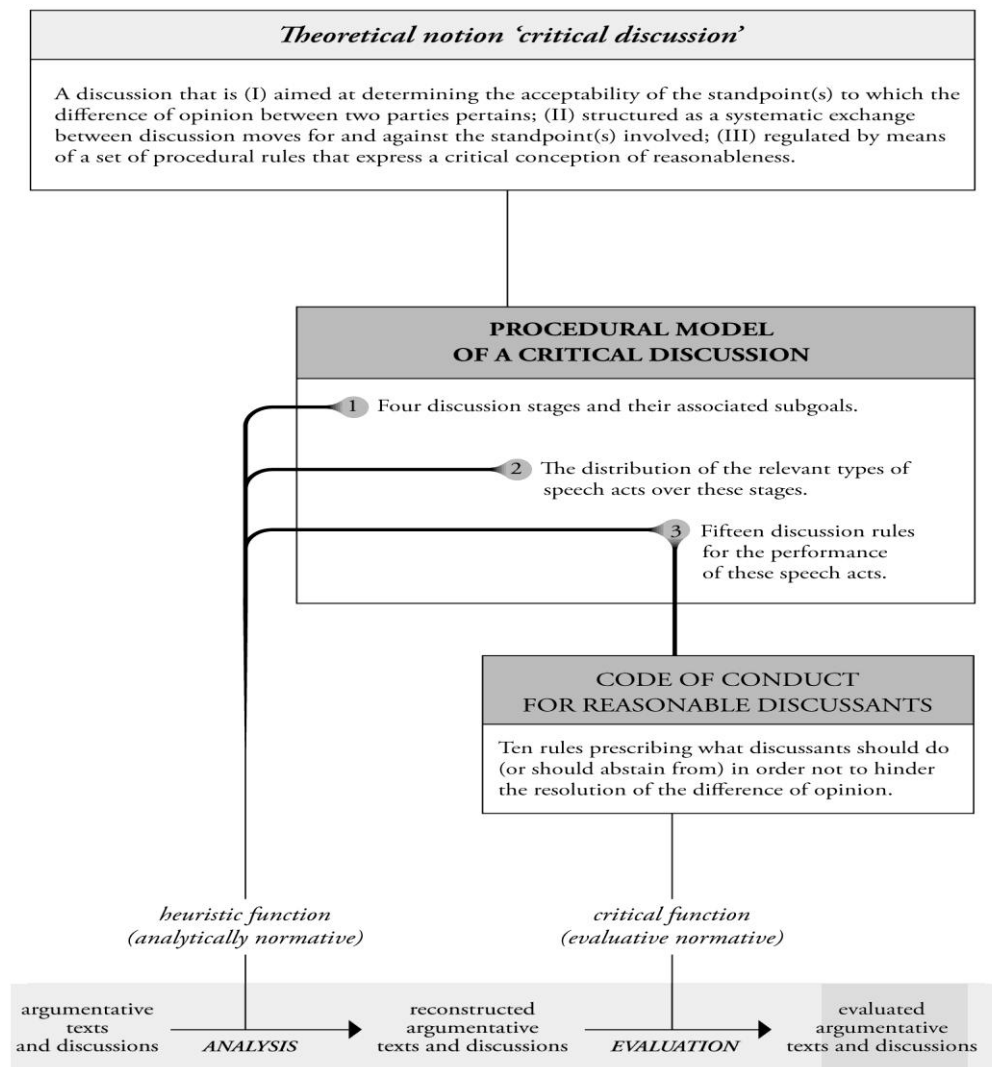
Figure 1: **Schematic overview of the standard version of pragma-dialectics (from Wagemans, 2010, p. 108)**

true that all the tasks specified in the model are functional for scrupulously resolving a difference of opinion, and so, technically, they should be performed one way or the other. Consequently, one of the uses of the model is to identify moves which in real world cases are not explicitly or completely expressed. Even in the case of moves that are apparently (or even actually) fallacious, we are of the opinion that it is methodologically acceptable to use the ideal model for conducting a critical discussion to identify these moves as argumentative moves".

3.1.2 The extended version of pragma-dialectics and the notion of strategic maneuvering

As recently observed by van Eemeren (forthcoming), "at the end of the twentieth century, a crucial step in the further development of pragma-dialectics was taken when the theorizing was extended by taking, together with the dimension of reasonableness, also the dimension of effectiveness of argumentative discourse into account". In the *extended version of pragma-dialectics*, both these dimensions are considered as crucial within an argumentative discourse. The tension inherent in pursuing these two aims simultaneously calls for continual *strategic maneuvering* to keep the balance (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, 2002a; van Eemeren, 2010, 2011). The notion of strategic maneuvering is a theoretical tool for showing how the simultaneous pursuit of the dialectical aim and the rhetorical aim can be achieved. By maneuvering strategically, arguers pursue their desire to persuade their audience with a commitment to reasonableness. Such delicate balancing of the dialectical and rhetorical goals of argumentation takes place by means of systematic, coordinated and simultaneous management of three inseparable aspects of strategic maneuvering:

- *Topical potential*. The first aspect of maneuvering strategically to be considered is the selection of the most expedient moves to make one's own position stronger. In an argumentative discussion, every single move involves a choice from the topical potential;

- *Audience demand*. The second aspect of strategic maneuvering puts the emphasis on the role of the audience. The moves made in each stage of the discourse should comply with audience demand, namely, the addressee's preferences;

- *Presentational techniques.* The third aspect in maneuvering strategically pertains to the selection of appropriate presentational devices at the communicative and stylistic level. Indeed, strategic maneuvering is realized in delivering the discourse through appropriate communicative means, in particular by "exploiting the Gricean maxims of Manner in a specific and deliberate way" (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002a, p. 140).

Because they relate to different kinds of choices which need to be made in strategic maneuvering, these three aspects must all be considered in the analysis, both separately and in their mutual interaction. The key idea of the extended version of pragma-dialectics is that strategic maneuvering is a phenomenon of argumentative reality that occurs in concrete situations under specific contextual conditions. In the various communicative domains, different kinds of *communicative activity types* have developed to serve "the institutional needs of a particular macro-context of communicative activity" (van Eemeren, 2010, p. 149). As van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2005, p. 76) explain:

> "Argumentative activity types are conventionalized entities that can be distinguished by "external" empirical observations of the communicative practices in the various domains or, as Thomas Goodnight would have it, "spheres" of discourse. Argumentative activity types manifest themselves in various institutionalized variants, some of which are culturally established forms of communication with a more or less fixed format".

Accordingly, the impact of contextual constraints on the way in which arguers make strategic choices in their discussions is relevant both in highly-formal types of activity and in daily informal activities such as family mealtime conversations. To conclude this section, Figure 2 shows a schematic overview of the extended version of pragma-dialectics:
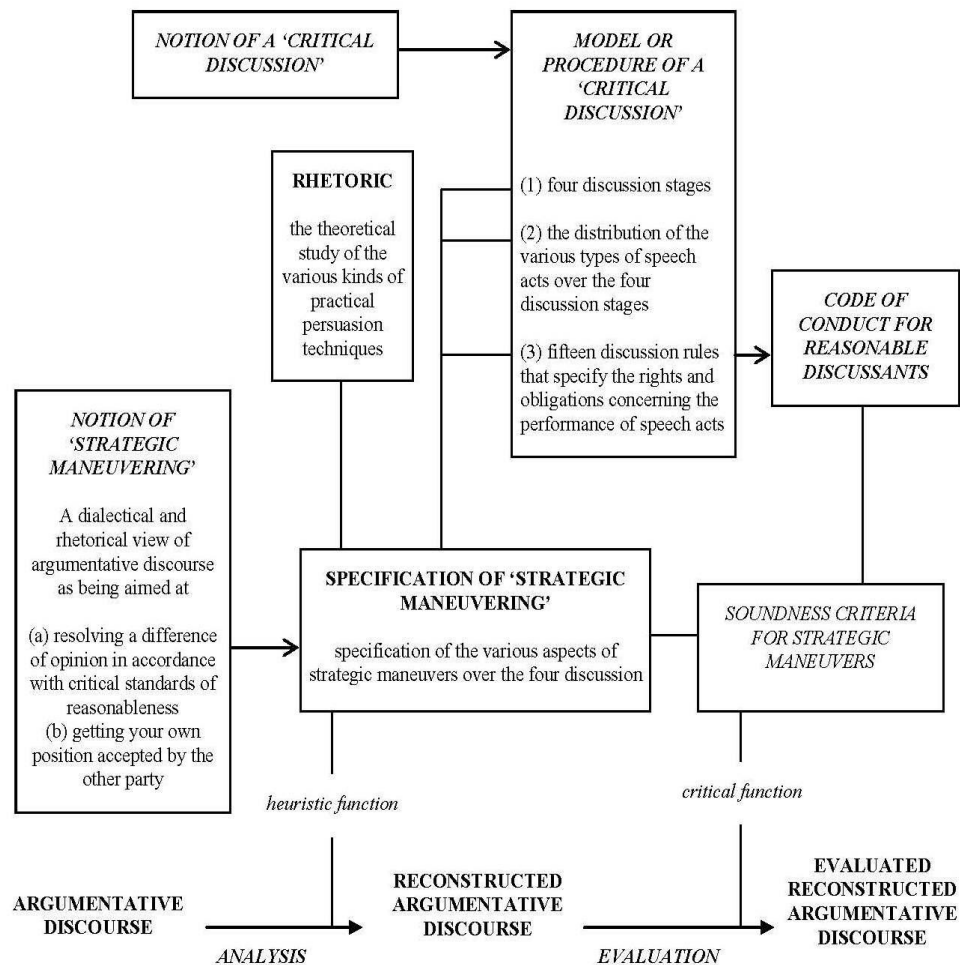
Figure 2: **Schematic overview of the extended version of pragma-dialectics (from Wagemans, 2009, p. 67)**

3.1.3 The Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) and the analysis of the inferential configuration of arguments

The Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) (Rigotti, 2006, 2008, 2009; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009a, 2010) is the theoretical tool by which in the

present research I intend to analyze the reasoning behind the arguments put forward by parents and children. According to Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2010, p. 490), who elaborated this theoretical tool, the AMT is an instrument to systematically reconstruct the inferential configuration of arguments[17], namely, "to illustrate the structure of reasoning that underlies the connection between a standpoint and its supporting arguments".

In order to reconstruct the inferential configuration of an argument, according to the AMT it is necessary to find the implicit premises on which the argument is based. Two fundamental components should be distinguished in identifying the inferential relation binding the premises to the conclusion of an argumentation: a *procedural component* and a *material component*[18]. As Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2010, p. 489) affirm, "the procedural component is based on the semantic-ontological structure, which generates the inferential connection from which the logical form of the argument is derived. The material component integrates into the argument scheme the implicit and explicit premises bound to the contextual common ground".

The procedural component develops along three levels. The first level is the ontological relation, namely, the *locus*[19], which is defined as "the source

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[17] As observed by Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009, p. 42): "The theoretical framing of the AMT model has been elaborated by taking into account the contribution of the ancient rhetorical tradition (in particular, *Topics*, *Rhetoric* and *De Sophisticis Elenchiis* by Aristotle, and *Topics* by Cicero), and the late ancient and Medieval elaborations by Boethius (*De topicis differentiis*, Stump, 2004), Abelard (see De Rijik, 1970), Peter of Spain (*Summulae Logicales*, Bochensky, 1947) and Buridan (*Summulae de dialectica* see Klima, 2001). But the AMT model is also positioned in the framework of the current research and debate on argumentation, and in particular on argumentation schemes (Garssen, 2001; Walton et al., 2008)".

[18] Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2010, p. 493) suggest to re-read the pragma-dialectical distinction between the procedural and material starting points in the opening stage of a critical discussion (for this distinction, see van Eemeren, 2010, p. 242; Houtlosser, 2002, p. 20) and to apply it "as an instrument to specify how, in argument schemes, there is a dimension overcoming the logical principle".

[19] As Rigotti (2008) remarks, contemporary argumentation theorist refers to the term *locus* through the notion of *argument scheme* (cf. Garssen 2001, 2002; Walton et al. 2008).

from which arguments are taken […] the ontological relation on which a certain argumentative reasoning is based" (ibid., p. 494). The locus is not a physical place, but a conceptual one, a sort of mental space, from which the argument is drawn. The authors provide some examples to clarify further the notion of locus:

> "Consider the relationship between definiendum and definitum, the cause-effect relationship, the analogy (comparability) relationship, and so on. Such ontological relations are evoked by the *names* of the loci themselves: one speaks for example of the locus *ex* auctoritate, or the locus *ab* oppositis, and so on, nowadays translated into English with the expression argument from (from authority, from opposition)" (ibid., p. 494).

Rigotti (2009) distinguishes three main categories of loci[20]. The first one is represented by *syntagmatic loci*. As Rigotti puts it (2009, p. 166): "We speak of syntagmatic loci to indicate all the classes of arguments that refer to aspects that are ontologically linked to the standpoint, either directly or indirectly, such as the extensional relations of terms, dependent on the semantic content, on the hierarchy of predicates, on the relationship between the whole and its constituent parts; included in this group of loci are also the classes of arguments assuming as a hooking point those pieces of world, traditionally called causes, effects, circumstances and concomitances, that condition the state of affairs the standpoint refers to". Examples of syntagmatic loci are the following: *locus from definition*, *loci from extensional implications* (species and genus, whole and parts, quantifiers, proper and accident, place, time), *loci from causes* (locus from the formal cause, from the material cause, from final cause, from the efficient

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[20] For a detailed description of the taxonomy of loci, see Rigotti, 2009, pp. 166-168 and Greco Morasso, 2011, pp. 127-129.

cause, and from instrumental cause), *locus from implications and concomitances*, and *locus from correlates*.

The second category of loci is represented by *paradigmatic loci*. According to Rigotti (ibid., pp. 166-167): "We speak of paradigmatic loci referring to classes formed by arguments that are based on paradigmatic relations, both of opposition and of analogy (similarity)". Among the syntagmatic loci, the following ones can be enumerated: *locus from opposition*, *locus from analogy* (with the subcategories, of likeliness, difference, and isomorphism), *locus from "all the more…" and "all the less…"*, *locus from alternatives*, and *locus from termination and setting up*.

Finally, the third category of loci is represented by *complex loci*. They are characterized "by being on the borderline between paradigmatic and syntagmatic loci" (ibid., p. 167). Included in this category are the *locus from authority*, *locus from promising and warning*, *locus from conjugates*, *locus from derivate*.

A comprehensive taxonomy of loci is illustrated below, in Figure 3:

ARGUMENTATIVE LOCI

A. Syntagmatic loci

1) From definition

2) From extensional implications
- species and genus
- whole and parts
- quantifiers
- proper and accident
- place
- time

3) From causes
- efficient
- material
- formal
- final
- instrumental

4) From implications and concomitances

5) From correlates

C. Complex loci

1) From authority

2) From promising and warning

3) From conjugates

4) From derivate

B. Paradigmatic loci

1) From opposition

2) From analogy, likeliness difference, and isomorphism

3) From "all the more" and "all the less."

4) From alternatives

5) From termination and setting up

Figure 3: Taxonomy of loci (from Rigotti, 2009, p. 168)

The second level of the procedural component is the inferential connections called *maxims*. Maxims are defined as inferential connections. Some examples of maxims provided by the authors (ibid., p. 495 and p. 499) are:

"If a certain goal is to be achieved, it is reasonable to activate a causal chain allowing to reach it […] If something was the case for a circumstance of the same functional genus as X, this may be the case X".

The third level of the procedural component is a logical form, such as the *modus ponens* or the *modus tollens*, activated by the maxims. More specifically, provided that a certain ontological relation is the case, any inferential connection or maxim generated by it activates through its application logical from in an argument scheme. For example (ibid., p. 495).

> "The maxim *if the cause is the case, the effect is too* activates the logical form of *modus ponens*. Different maxims may activate identical or different logical forms. The maxim *if the effect does not take place, the cause does not either* activates a *modus tollens*".

The procedural component is not sufficient for a proper reconstruction of argument schemes. According to Rigotti and Greco Morasso, "argument schemes claim to account for the relation between real arguments used in real-life discussions and real standpoints they support […] the validity of the maxim is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the soundness of an argumentative move: another level of premises must be taken into account" (ibid., p. 498). In the AMT, this second level of premises is represented in the material component.

The material component includes two different classes of context-bound premises. The first level coincides with the Aristotelian notion of *endoxon*, i.e. general principles, values, and assumptions that typically belong to the specific context, and which are "accepted by the relevant public or by the opinion leaders of the relevant public" (ibid., p. 501). The second level of the material component is the *datum*, basically coinciding with punctual information and facts regarding the specific situation at hand, and broadly corresponding to the same concept as in Toulmin's model (1958) and is typically explicit, representing the information which is made clear in the discussion. The logical conjunction of the endoxon with the datum leads to the *preliminary conclusion*

of the material component coinciding with the *minor premise* of the procedural component. This point of intersection is crucial in the perspective of the AMT: in fact, it represents the junction between the material and the procedural starting points and shows how different types of premises are combined in real argumentation. As Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009, p. 52) maintain:

> "The maxim is responsible for the inferential mechanism and defines the law, while the endoxon links the argument to a shared opinion in the community. We could even say that the topical component ensures the inferential force, while the endoxical component provides the persuasive effectiveness. In other words, topics guarantees the inferential consistency of the procedure, but, if the procedure is not combined with an endoxon, it remains a mere logical mechanism with no hold whatsoever on the public".

In order to gain more familiarity with the AMT model, the following table includes the proper definition of its key notions (from Rigotti, 2006):

Table 3. Definitions of the key notions of the AMT model

Topics	Component of argumentation theory by which ideally all relevant arguments in favor of and against any standpoint are generated by specifying their inferential structure through a system of loci (ibid., p. 162).
Locus	Sub-generator" of argumentative procedures consisting of one or more maxims in the form of truth conditions that bind the truth value of the standpoint to the acceptance by the considered public of propositions referring to specified aspects of the ontology of the standpoint (ibid., p. 163).
Endoxon	An opinion that is accepted by the relevant public or by the opinion leaders of the relevant public (ibid., p. 163).
Maxim	Implications establishing a connection between argument and standpoint basically of the form p→q that generate inferential processes; each inferential process defines, within the locus, the form of a subclass of arguments that are produced in connection with proper endoxa (ibid., p. 163).
Argument	The actual application of a maxim to one or more proper endoxa, thus deducing the standpoint from the maxim for a certain public that shares the above-mentioned endoxa (ibid., p. 163).

The analysis of the arguments based on the AMT can be effectively integrated as part of the reconstruction of the topical potential relative to strategic maneuvering in the argumentation stage of an argumentative discussion (van Eemeren, 2010; Rigotti, 2006, Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2010). This is due to the fact that the analysis of argumentation based on the AMT offers very precise details on the premises on which the arguments are built. As Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2010, p. 506) contend, "thanks to the explicit distinction between the material and the procedural component, the AMT allows to establish whether the possible faults of an argumentative move depend on the use of an invalid maxim or on a false, incorrect or partial anchoring to the arguers' material starting point".

Despite its particular concern for the inferential aspects of argumentation, the AMT, de facto, "accounts not only for the logical aspects of the development of argumentation, but also for its embeddedness in the parties' relationship" (Greco Morasso, 2011, p. 126). Beyond the possibility of analyzing the process of reasoning underlying an argument, this aspect represents the main reason why I have chosen to use the AMT to analyze argumentative discussions in the family.

3.2   Corpus of data

The present research takes as its empirical base a quasi-homogeneous corpus constructed from two different sets of data, named *sub-corpus 1* and *sub-corpus 2*. Sub-corpus 1 consists of 15 video-recordings (and related transcriptions) of mealtime conversations in five Italian families collected by Pontecorvo and her colleagues at the University of Rome "La Sapienza". Sub-corpus 2, created by myself between December 2008 and November 2009 in

Ticino (Switzerland), consists of 15 video-recordings (and related transcriptions) of mealtime conversations in five Swiss families. The criteria adopted in the selection of the Swiss families mirror the criteria adopted in the creation of sub-corpus 1 by Pontecorvo and her colleagues: the presence of both parents and at least two children, of whom the younger is of preschool age (three to six years) and the second is older. All participants are Italian-speaking. Participating families did not receive any financial reimbursement for their participation in the study.

3.2.1 Sub-corpus 1 (Italian families): sample characteristics

At the beginning of research sub-corpus 1 (Italian families) was already at my disposal, including its complete transcriptions[21]. Included in sub-corpus 1 were five middle- to upper-middle-class Italian families, all residents of Rome. Most parents at the time of data collection were in their late 30s (M = 37.40; SD = 3.06). Fathers were slightly older than mothers (Fathers M = 38.40; SD = 3.20 vs. Mothers M = 36.40; SD = 2.88). All families in sub-corpus 1 had two children.

Detailed information on family constellations in sub-corpus 1[22] are presented in Table 4:

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[21] A corpus of video-recordings of family mealtime conversations held by a large number of Italian families has been gathered by Clotilde Pontecorvo and her colleagues at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" (for more information, see Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007, pp. XIII-XVI) from the late '90 to early 2000. Thanks to Clotilde Pontecorvo, a part of this broad corpus of video-recordings of family mealtime conversations has been used as part of the data corpus of the present research.

[22] In order to ensure the anonymity of participants, all names in this dissertation, including first names, are pseudonyms (see §3.6.2).

Table 4: Sub-corpus 1 (Italian families). Length of recordings, participants, average age of participants

Family group	Italian (sub-corpus 1)	
Length of recordings in minutes	20–37	
Mean length of recordings in minutes	32.41	
Participants		
FAM_1	**FAM_4**	
Mom: Ester (34)	Mom: Flavia (37)	
Dad: Paolo (38)	Dad: Sergio (37)	
Child 1: Silverio (8)	Child 1: Samuele (9,11)	
Child 2: Gabriele (5,4)	Child 2: Adriana (4,4)	
FAM_2	**FAM_5**	
Mom: Marta (33)	Mom: Paola (40)	
Dad: Gianfranco (34)	Dad: Fabrizio (42)	
Child 1: Giorgia (6,6)	Child 1: Marco (10,6)	
Child 2: Clara (3,1)	Child 2: Leonardo (3,9)	
FAM_3		
Mom: Sara (38)		
Dad: Matteo (41)		
Child 1: Luca (10,9)		
Child 2: Luisa (3,10)		
Mothers	5	
Fathers	5	
Adults, total	10	
Sons	6	
Daughters	4	
Children, total	10	
Children aged from 3 to 6	5	
Younger and older siblings	5	
Total participants	20	
Average age of participants		
Mothers	36.40 (SD 2.881)	
Fathers	38.40 (SD 3.209)	
Parents	37.40 (SD 3.062)	
Children, age 3-6	3.20 (SD .447)	
first-born	9.00 (SD 2.00) (4 sons; 1daughter)	
second-born	3.20 (SD .447) (2 sons; 3 daughters)	

3.2.2 Sub-corpus 2 (Swiss families): recruitment of the families and sample characteristics

The creation of sub-corpus 2 took place from December 2008 to November 2009. The families were selected through the *snowball technique* (also known as *chain referral sampling*) (Goodman, 1961; Heckathorn, 1997, 2002), by which the candidate families contacted helped me to find others. The process of selection was carried out in Ticino, primarily in the Lugano area, and all families in this study expressed a keen interest in participating.

After an initial contact by phone, I visited the families in their own homes and I described to parents the research plan. The families were informed that this study aimed to investigate the style of their mealtime conversations, but nothing was said about the specific interest in argumentative discussions. As specified in a release letter signed by myself and the parents, all families gave us permission to tape, provided the data would be used only for scientific purposes and privacy would be guaranteed (see §3.6.1). At the end of the transcription phase, the families were given a copy of the video as a token of gratitude for their participation.

Included in sub-corpus 2 were five middle- to upper-middle-class Swiss families, all residents of the Lugano area. At the time of data collection, most parents were in their mid-30s (M = 35.90; SD = 1.91). Fathers were slightly older than mothers (Fathers M = 37.00; SD = 1.58 vs. Mothers M = 34.80; SD = 1.64). Families had two or three children.

Detailed information on family constellations in sub-corpus 2 is presented in Table 5:

Table 5: Sub-corpus 2 (Swiss families). Length of recordings, participants, average age of participants

Family group	Swiss (sub-corpus 2)	
Length of recordings in minutes	19-42	
Mean length of recordings in minutes	35.12	
Participants		
FAM_1	**FAM_4**	
Mom: Luisa (36)	Mom: Cristina (34)	
Dad: Marco (38)	Dad: Massimo (36)	
Child 1: Paolo (7)	Child 1: Stefano (8,5)	
Child 2: Laura (4,5)	Child 2: Alessandro (4,6)	
Child 3: Elisa (3,2)		
	FAM_5	
FAM_2	Mom: Chiara (37)	
Mom: Maria (34)	Dad: Andrea (37)	
Dad: Giuseppe (39)	Child 1: Francesco (9,3)	
Child 1: Manuela (7,4)	Child 2: Michele (4,2)	
Child 2: Filippo (5,1)		
Child 3: Carlo (3,1)		
FAM_3		
Mom: Sara (33)		
Dad: Carlo (35)		
Child 1: Giovanni (7,3)		
Child 2: Carla (4,8)		
Child 3: Alessia (3,4)		
Mothers	5	
Fathers	5	
Adults, total	10	
Sons	6	
Daughters	7	
Children, total	13	
Children aged from 3 to 6	8	
Younger and older siblings	5	
Total participants	23	
Average age of participants		
Mothers	34.80 (SD 1.643)	
Fathers	37.00 (SD 1.581)	
Parents	35.90 (SD 1.912)	
Sons	5.83 (SD 1.835)	
Daughters	4.86 (SD 2.268)	
Children, age 3-6	4.40 (SD .548)	
first-born	7.60 (SD .894) (3 sons; 2 daughter)	
second-born	4,40 (SD .548) (2 sons; 3 daughters)	
third-born	3 (SD .000) (1 son; 2 daughters)	

3.3   Data collection

To minimize researcher interference, family members were told to act as normally as possible, and the recordings were made by the families themselves. This means that the researchers did not affect the setting of the interactions. However, even though the family members were told to act as they normally do without the video camera, and despite their seeming indifference towards the video camera, the intrusion in their life routine that the participation in my research involved cannot be denied. In a next section (§3.5), I shall discuss practical problems faced in collecting family mealtime conversations.

The equipment was delivered to the family and I demonstrated how to use the video equipment and how to assemble the tripod. Families videotaped their meals three times over a four-week period. For videotaping, the camera was placed at an angle that showed the dining table, and the mealtime conversations were recorded in their entirety, i.e. since the family began to gather around the table and stopped when they left the table. The length of the recordings varies from 20 to 40 minutes. As regards the technical aspects, DV cameras were used as they allow storage in a durable physical form. The data were transferred to digital form with a dedicated PC and the digital copy of each interaction was reproduced twice and copied onto two DVDs which were stored in different buildings in order to ensure maximum durability of the data (for further information on the video-recording process, see also §3.4).

In a first phase, all mealtime conversations were fully transcribed in their totality and revised by two researchers until a high level of consent (80%) was reached. Verbal utterances and nonverbal expressions with a clear communicative function relevant to the meal activity were identified and clearly described in the transcription. This methodology allowed a detailed analysis of verbal interactions among family members during the recording sessions.

Afterwards, I reviewed together with the family members all the transcriptions at their home. This procedure made it possible to ask the family members to clarify passages that were unclear in the eyes of the researchers on account of low level of recording sound and vague words and constructions. Information on the physical setting of the mealtime, i.e. a description of the kitchen and of the dining table, was also made for each family meal. In the transcription of the conversations, this "good practice" has proved very useful for understanding some passages that, at first sight, appeared unclear. The direct experience of the entire process of corpus construction (cf. the concept of *fabrication du corpus* in Mondada, 1998), including the recording of the interaction (construction of primary data) and the transcription (construction of secondary data), has allowed both the application of the *availability principle*, that is, "the analytical task of recording (and, in the same way, of digitising, anonymizing transcribing, annotating, etc.) is to provide for the availability of relevant details - which indeed makes the analysis possible" (Mondada, 2006, p.55), and a fuller experiential understanding of the specific situations.

3.3.1 Procedures for the transcription of oral data: The CHILDES standard transcription system (CHAT)

All family meals were transcribed in their totality with the CHILDES standard transcription system (CHAT) (MacWhinney, 1989), with some modifications introduced to ease readability. Italian data are presented in the original, using Courier New font, whereas the English translation is added below using Times New Roman Italic font.

The transcript follows CHAT in using the following conventions:

*	indicates the speaker's turn
[...]	not-transcribed segment of talking
(( ))	segments added by the transcriber in order to clarify some elements of the situation
[=!]	segments added by the transcriber to indicate some paralinguistic features
xxx	inaudible utterance(s)
%act:	description of speaker's actions
%sit:	description of the situation/setting

Several deviations from CHAT were introduced. First, punctuation symbols, as employed by Schiffrin (1994) and Blum-Kulka (1997), were used to indicate intonation contours:

,	continuing intonation
.	falling intonation
:	prolonging of sounds
?	rising intonation
!	exclamatory intonation

Second, additional symbols were added:

→	maintaining the turn of talking by the speaker
%pau:	2.5 sec
@End	end of the family meal

In all examples, all turns are numbered progressively within the discussion, and family members are identified by role (for adults) and by name (for children). The following transcript segment from Swiss data (sub-corpus 2),

where a child (Alessandro) and his mother are discussing because of the child's request to take a pill from the medicine container, illustrates some of the markings used:

FAM_SWISS_4_(1)[23]; Mom (34); Dad (36); ALE Alessandro (4,6); STE Stefano (8,5)

	%sit:	**ALE tocca e guarda il contenitore delle medicine** *ALE touches and looks at the container with the pills*
1.	*ALE:	**io: me la prendo una di queste qui** *I'm: going to take one of these*
→	*ALE:	**si!** *yes!*
2.	*MOM:	**non puoi Alessandro!** *you can't, Alessandro!*
3.	*ALE:	**eh:?** *What:?*
4.	*MOM:	**non puoi::** *you can't::*
	%act:	**scuotendo la testa** *shaking her head*
5.	*ALE:	**perché no?** *why not?*
6.	*MOM:	**perché i bambini, devono prendere delle medicine speciali** *because children, have to take special medicines*
→	*MOM:	**non possono prendere le medicine degli adulti** *they can't take the same medicines as adults*
→	*MOM:	**altrimenti, si sentono male** *otherwise, they will get ill*
7.	*ALE:	**e: tu prima ti sei sentita male?** *and before did you also feel ill?*
8.	*MOM:	**no:: perché io sono un'adulta** *no:: because I'm an adult*

---

[23] Number "4" indicates that this is family number four of the five Swiss families constituting sub-corpus 2. Number "1" in parentheses indicates the number of the meal, out of a total of three meals, video-recorded by this family.

```
9.    *ALE:   ed io?
              and me?
10.    *MOM:  tu sei ancora: un bambino
              you are still: a child

       %pau:  1.0 sec

       %sit:  ALE sbatte la scatola delle medicine sul tavolo MAM tende
              la mano verso di lui per fargli mangiare un pezzetto di
              frutta ALE volta la testa di scatto e lentamente esce dalla
              cucina dirigendosi verso DAD e STE
              Alessandro bangs the medicine container on the table. MOM reaches toward him to try
              and make him eat a piece of fruit. ALE turns his head away quickly and slowly leaves
              the kitchen to go toward DAD and STE
```

3.4   Definition of argumentative situation and analytical procedure

Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously by following a cyclical approach, i.e. data-analysis-data, in order to ensure internal consistency in theory building and adequate adherence to reality (Rigotti & Cigada, 2004; Valsiner & Conolly, 2003). The analysis of discourse was limited to and focused on the study of *analytically relevant argumentative moves*, i.e. "those speech acts that (at least potentially) play a role in the process of resolving a difference of opinion" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 73). The discussion was considered as argumentative if the following two criteria were satisfied:

- At least one standpoint put forth by a family member is questioned by one or more family members.
- At least one family member puts forward at least one argument either in favor of or against the standpoint being questioned.

In each family meal, I initially selected four argumentative discussions (N = 120). Later, I reduced the number of argumentative discussions for analysis to 40% of the total argumentative discussions that had initially been selected (N = 120 → N = 48, of which 24 were from sub-corpus 1 and 24 from sub-corpus 2), relying on the fact that a randomized cut can ensure an unbiased treatment in the selection of the argumentative discussions. Finally, all 48 argumentative discussions were translated from Italian to English[24].

Considering that the pragma-dialectical approach aiming at the reconstruction of an analytical overview of arguments and the AMT focusing on the inferential configuration of arguments are complementary, as they cover two relevant and different levels of the organization of the argumentative process, this research has integrated these approaches as two steps of the same process of analysis. In the first phase of the analysis (Chapter 5), the argumentative discussions will be reconstructed in terms of the model of critical discussion. To do so, the following components will be identified:

- The difference of opinion in the confrontation stage. The type of difference must also be categorized distinguishing single non-mixed (elementary form), single mixed, multiple non-mixed, or multiple mixed.
- The premises agreed upon in the opening stage. These premises serve as the point of departure for subsequent discussion.
- The arguments and criticisms advanced, implicitly or explicitly, during the argumentation stage.
- The outcome of the discussion achieved in the concluding stage.

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[24] I want to thank my colleagues of the Institute of Argumentation, Linguistics and Semiotics (IALS) of the Università della Svizzera Italiana and Laurlyn Staker for their supervision of the translation from Italian to English of the argumentative discussions.

This analysis results in an *analytic overview*, which provides a reconstruction of the various components of an argumentative discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 71-88). In fact, in an analytic overview, "all ingredients of the discourse relevant to resolving a difference of opinion on the merits are thus identified and described in terms of well-defined analytical categories, so that the overview constitutes an appropriate point of departure for a systematic evaluation of the argumentative discussion concerned" (van Eemeren, 2011, pp. 142-143).

In the second phase of the analysis (Chapter 6), I will use the AMT to reconstruct the inferential configuration of the arguments advanced by parents and children. In the analysis, the following components will be identified:

- The *maxim* on which the argumentation is based and the respective *locus* at work.
- The *endoxon*, that is, the premises shared by the discussants.
- The *datum*, that is, punctual information and facts regarding the specific situation at hand (usually representing that part of the argument which is made explicit in the text) to which the argument is linked.
- The *minor premise* of the topical component, which coincides with the *first conclusion* of the material component.
- The *final conclusion*, that is, the standpoint to be supported.

The Y-structure[25] (so-called because its form looks like the letter Y) in Figure 4 is the graphical tool adopted for representing the AMT's reconstruction:

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[25] Instances of applications of the AMT can be found in Bigi (2012), Filimon (2009), Palmieri (2009, 2012), Rigotti and Palmieri (2010), Greco Morasso (2011, 2012, forthcoming), Zlatkova (2012), and Bova and Arcidiacono (forthcoming).
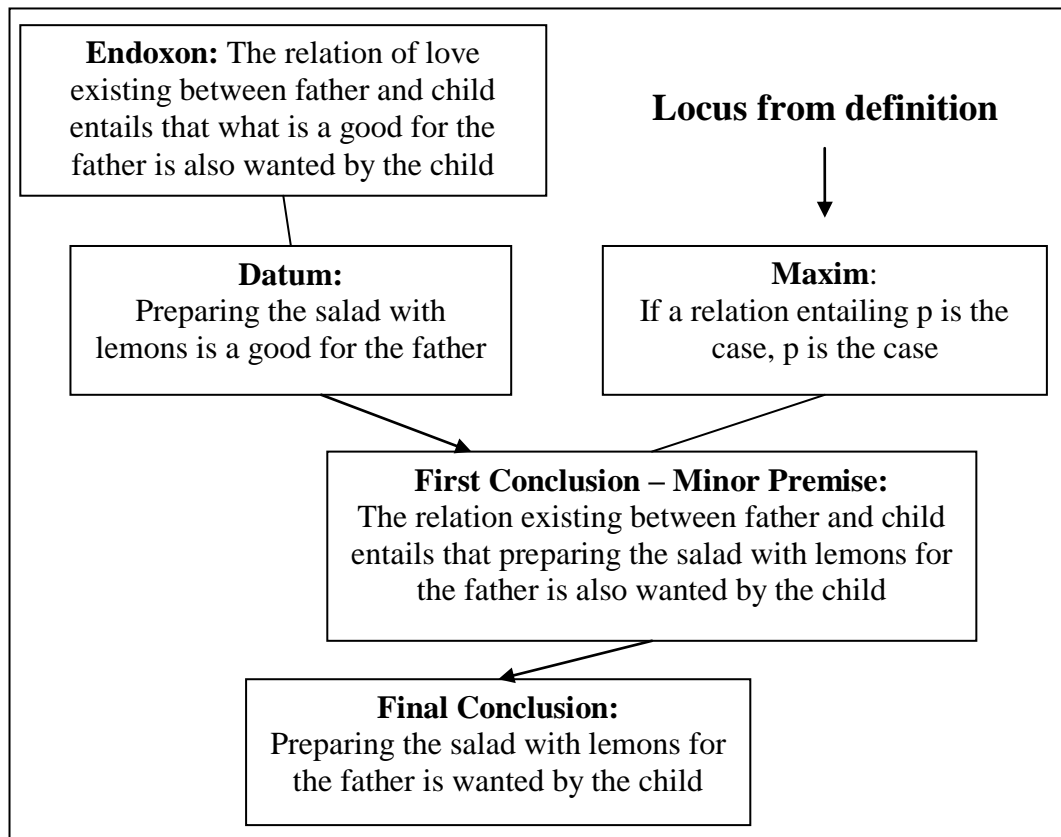
Figure 4: **The Y-structure representing the AMT's reconstruction of an argumentative passage in one of the mealtime conversations**

Represented in the Y-structure illustrated above is the analysis of the inferential configuration of an argument advanced by a mother during a discussion with her son, Gabriele. In this example, the child wants to play with the lemon that was on the meal-table. The mother disagrees with her son, since she needs the lemon to prepare the salad. The argument put forward by the mother is the following: "Because, Gabriele, your dad wants to eat a good salad today". I shall present in detail the analysis of the inferential configuration of this argument through the AMT in a later section (§6.1.3). For now, I will only describe how the AMT is applied to reconstruct the reasoning behind an argument. Specified on the right-hand side of the diagram is the inferential

principle, i.e. the maxim, on which the mother's argumentation is based: "If a relation entailing p is the case, p is the case". This maxim is engendered from the locus from definition. In order for this maxim to generate the final conclusion, which coincides with the standpoint to be supported, the following minor premise of the topical component is needed: "The relation existing between father and child entails that preparing the salad with lemons for the father is also wanted by the child". This leads to the final conclusion that "Preparing the salad with lemons for the father is wanted by the child". The topical component is only one part of the inferential configuration of the argument. The fact that "Preparing the salad with lemons for the father is wanted by the child" needs further justification. Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, a second line of reasoning (material component) is developed to support the former one. Unlike the maxim, this is not an inferential rule but a factual statement that must be backed by contextual knowledge. The endoxon shared by Gabriele and her mother concerns the common knowledge about the feeling that each child has for his/her father: "The relation of love existing between father and child entails that what is a good for the father is also wanted by the child". The datum constituting the minor premise of the endoxical syllogism is that "Preparing the salad with lemons is a good for the father". This leads to the first conclusion of the endoxical syllogism – which coincides with the minor premise of the topical component – that "The relation existing between father and child entails that preparing the salad with lemons for the father is also wanted by the child". Finally, the last part of the analysis will be devoted to identify the prevailing strategic maneuvers used by parents and children in their argumentative discussions.

In Table 6, an analytical description of the process of selection and analysis of the argumentative discussions is illustrated.

Table 6: Process of selection and analysis of the argumentative discussions

	conceptual tools of analysis	
first phase (Ch. 5)	standard version of pragma-dialectics ideal model of a critical discussion	*Selection of the argumentative discussions (analytically relevant argumentative moves)* ↓ *Reduction of the number of argumentative discussions to be analyzed through randomized cut* ↓ *Analytical overview (reconstruction of the various components of an argumentative discussion)*
	conceptual tools of analysis	
second phase (Ch. 6)	extended version of pragma-dialectics argumentum model of topics (AMT)	*Analysis of family members strategic maneuvering in the aspects of topical choice, audience demand, and presentational devices* ↕ *Reconstruction of inferential configuration of arguments*

3.5 *Practical problems in collecting family mealtime conversations*

Collecting mealtime conversations poses several challenges. Some are technical ones associated with recording quality and difficulty of transcription. Multiparty interactions are more difficult to transcribe than monologues and dyadic interactions. In this regard, Pan, Perlmann, and Snow (2000) affirmed that the time invested in transcribing 30 minutes of a mealtime conversation can be often much longer than the time involved in transcribing a dyadic interaction of similar length.

Problems facing transcribers include discriminating among family members, especially if there is more than one child; the frequent impossibility of determining who the addressees are; and situations in which children move from the meal-table or do not participate in the conversation. Other challenges have to do with ecological validity, i.e. ensuring that the taped mealtime is as natural as possible, and with the research design adopted for the study. Even though the family members were told to act as they normally do, the fact of being video-recorded provoked, at times, a shift of family members' attention towards the video camera, like in the following example:

(1) **FAM_SWISS_1_(1)**; Mom (36); Dad (38); Paolo (7); Elisa (3,2)

Figure 5. Elisa looks at the video camera

1.	***PAO:**	**papà:: guarda!**
		Dad:: look!
2.	***DAD:**	**cosa?**
		what?
3.	*PAO:	**guarda:: Elisa guarda verso la videocamera!**
		look:: Elisa is looking at the video camera!
4.	*MOM:	**Elisa, quella non funziona ((la videocamera)) è rotta**
		Elisa, the video camera does not work it's broken
5.	***PAO:**	**davvero? [: guardando verso DAD]**
		really? [: looking at DAD]
6.	***DAD:**	**no:: no:: [:! con un tono di voce molto basso]**
		no:: no:: [:! with a very low tone of voice]
7.	*MOM:	**la prossima volta XXX dobbiamo nasconderla**
		the next time, we need to hide it
8.	*DAD:	**si: hai ragione**
		yes: you're right

Because of their desire to give a good impression of themselves in front of the camera (*social desirability*), family members during the video-recording of their meals might not be inclined to behave as they normally do. This is indeed unavoidable and the researcher has no control over it. Such a bias is present in all types of research which deal with people and respect the basic ethical principle of informed consent of participants. The only thing the researcher can do in these cases is to be aware of the problem and to consider it in the analysis and the discussion of the results. In the creation of sub-corpus 2, the video-recordings were made by the families themselves (§3.2.2). I made this methodological choice because the presence of the researcher during mealtime could encourage even more the tendency of families towards social desirability than being on their own. In this case, I have opted for "the lesser of two evils".

Further challenges derive from the advantages and disadvantages of the research design adopted for the study of mealtime conversations. On the one hand, the limited number of recordings (N = 30) favored a more careful analysis but did not allow certain quantifications, such as the correlation between categories. A larger database would probably permit more quantitatively reliable data for certain statistical relationships. On the other hand, careful studies of a small number of conversations in a natural setting may give rise to a more penetrating and "data-close" analysis of the argumentative dynamics among family members.

Using mealtime conversations does not automatically solve the problem of obtaining optimal family interaction data (Pan, Perlmann, & Snow, 2000). No data are perfect. Nevertheless, mealtime conversations are a highly informative source for the study of family discourse, and generally they are an invaluable source for studying the dynamics of family interactions.

3.6   Ethical issues

Respect of the privacy of the participants is one of the most important issues in research (Berg & Lune, 2012; Salkind, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The ethical framework that guided this study included informed consent from the participants, anonymity and confidentiality.

3.6.1 Informed consent

All participants were approached by means of an information sheet outlining in clear language the general purpose of the study and providing information about how the video data would be used. Consent letters were written in accordance with Swiss Psychological Society (SPS) and American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, specifically the format outlined in the fifth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2009). As specified in a release letter signed by myself and the parents, families gave us permission to video-record their mealtimes, provided the data would be used only for scientific purposes and privacy would be guarded. An example of a template letter asking for active parental consent is presented in the Appendix.

3.6.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

In line with the ethical framework guiding my research, the families were assured that their anonymity would be maintained at all stages of the study. Anonymity was maintained across studies through the use of a single master

sheet which contained the name of each participant and their participant number. All names in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Transcriptions, video-recorded material, and information on the families were treated in the strictest confidence and seen only by researchers. Segments of video-recorded data were used for research purposes only. The package also made clear to participants that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time and that any concerns they had about the ethics of the study could be referred to myself for clarification at any time.

4. Argumentative characterization of family mealtime conversations

"The need for argumentation, the requirements of argumentation, and the structure of argumentation are all adapted to a context in which doubts, opposition, objections, and counterclaims arise" (van Eemeren, 2011, p. 142).

This passage from van Eemeren's 2011 article, "In Context. Giving contextualization its rightful place in the study of argumentation", in the journal *Argumentation* underlines the importance of the notion of context in the study of argumentation. Van Eemeren's words are not isolated in the actual landscape of argumentation studies. Analogously, many leading argumentation scholars stress how understanding the dynamics of context is indispensable for analyzing and evaluating real arguments in terms of their full significance (Dascal, 2003; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009b; Walton & Krabbe, 1995). Unlike abstract logical structures or vague theoretical concepts, argumentation – quoting yet again from van Eemeren (2011, p. 148) – is "an empirical phenomenon that can be observed in a multitude of communicative practices".

In the present work, I have tried to put this principle (i.e. fully understanding the dynamics of context in order to analyze and evaluate argumentative discussions), into practice. I believe that the analysis of the main features characterizing the family mealtime is the key to a relevant argumentative analysis that can grasp the distinctive dynamics of mealtime conversations and points to the relevance of argumentation to these dynamics. Consequently, it is not sufficient to have only a general idea about such an

activity, but it is necessary to become familiar with it through a rich understanding of its main features, including its rules and conventions.

Mealtime is the term used to describe all meals consumed during the day. In many cultures, meals include breakfast, lunch, and an evening meal referred to colloquially as dinner or tea[26]. For many families, mealtime is a commonplace, "a densely packed event" (Fiese, Foley, & Spagnola, 2006, p. 77), a mundane and ordinary activity in which they engage routinely. It is how this very ordinary activity is accomplished and the kind of restrictions and opportunities it creates for argumentation that are of interest to me in this chapter.

In this endeavor, I will refer to the model of communication context (Rigotti & Rocci, 2006) and the notion of argumentative activity type (van Eemeren, 2010, 2011; van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2007), to describe analytically the constitutive aspects of mealtime in families with young children, and to single out the rules and conventions which can affect how family members make strategic choices in argumentative discussions in such activity. These two steps of analysis work at different but complementary levels. In fact, the model of communication context aims to describe analytically the constitutive aspects of (any) context, while through the notion of argumentative activity type it is possible to investigate how the properties of the activity in which argumentation occurs impose constraints on arguers' strategic choices in argumentative discussions. The results of this two-part analysis are meant to give an answer to the first research question *(Question 1)*: What kind of restrictions does family mealtime impose on argumentation and what kind of opportunities are created for argumentation?

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[26] Research about mealtime practices, however, is usually concerned with lunchtime and dinnertime.

The present chapter is arranged as follows. In the first part, the model of communication context (§4.1) and the notion of argumentative activity type (§4.2) will be comprehensively described. Subsequently, the constitutive aspects of mealtime in families with young children will be presented (§4.3 and §4.4). In the last part of the chapter we shall see which restrictions and opportunities (cf. the notion of *constraints* in van Eemeren, 2010) the activity of family mealtime impose on family members' strategic maneuvering (§4.5).

4.1 The Rigotti & Rocci model of communication context

Rigotti and Rocci (2006) propose a model focusing on the constitutive aspects of the context of communication, which is represented in the following figure:
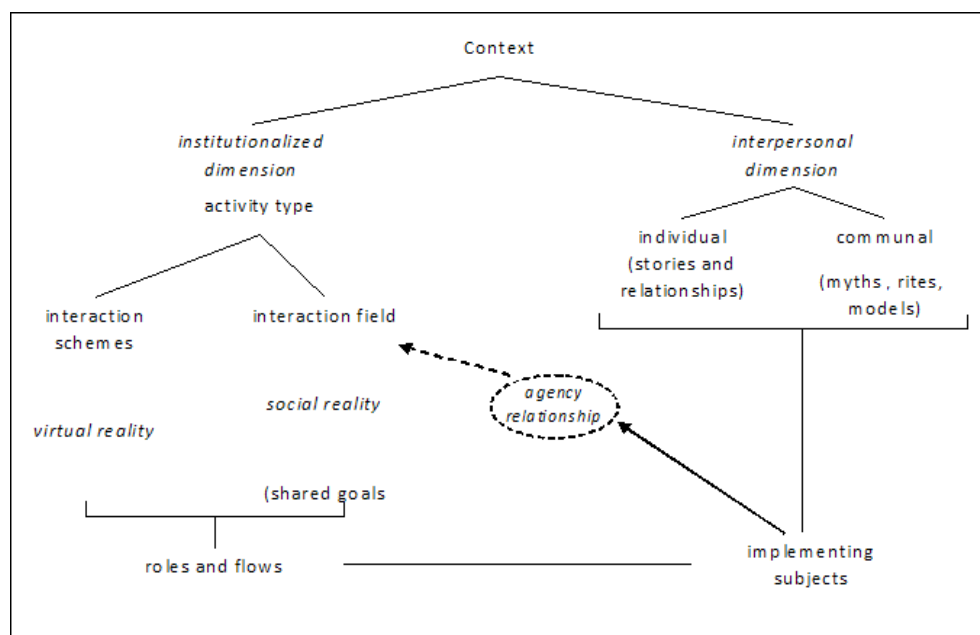
Figure 6: The model of communication context (Rigotti & Rocci, 2006, p. 171)

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As Figure 6 shows, Rigotti & Rocci model distinguishes an *institutionalized* and an *interpersonal* dimension within a communication context. The central notion within the institutionalized dimension of context is that of *activity type*, a notion first developed by Levinson[27] (1979/1992) and introduced into argumentative studies in a more precisely defined work as *communicative activity type* by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007; van Eemeren, 2010, 2011).

According to Levinson (1979/1992, p. 69):

"Activity types are a fuzzy category whose focal-members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions".

Rigotti and Rocci (2006, p. 168) share Levinson's definition of activity type, but they believe that this notion "needs to be further analyzed and decomposed into more primitive components in order to illuminate two different aspects of the functioning of contexts". In their model of communication context, activity type is defined as a derived notion generated by the merging of two aspects of the context, which can be profitably distinguished as *interaction field* and *interaction schemes* (ibid., p. 172). In Rigotti and Rocci's terms (ibid., p. 172):

"The interaction field is that piece of social reality where the communicative interaction takes place and it is defined by specific

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[27] Examples of activity types given by Levinson (1979/1992, p. 69) are teaching, a job interview, jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, and a dinner party.

(hierarchically organized) shared goals, which all the interagents share beyond their individual goals and which define the interagents' mutual commitments".

The second component of the institutionalized context is defined as follows (ibid., p. 173):

"The interaction schemes are not actual pieces of social reality but culturally shared "recipes" for interaction congruent with more or less broad classes of joint goals and involving scheme-roles presupposing generic requirements. *Deliberation*, *negotiation*, *advisory*, *problem-solving*, *adjudication*, *mediation*, *teaching* are fairly broad interaction schemes; while more specific interaction schemes may correspond to proper "jobs". The same interaction schemes can be found in different interaction fields: for instance we can find deliberation by a board of directors in a business and deliberation by a city council in public administration".

In order to make an interaction scheme constitute a real activity, it needs to be applied to an interaction field[28], as "the roles of the interaction scheme need to be made to correspond to compatible roles in the interaction field" (ibid., p. 173). In agreement with Levinson (1979/1992), Rigotti and Rocci (2006, p. 172) acknowledge that any communicative interaction, including argumentation, is embedded in an activity type.

Along with an institutionalized dimension, an interpersonal dimension is also involved within a communicative interaction. In particular, Rigotti and Rocci (2006, pp. 174-175) observe that two "types of interpersonal solidarity"

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[28] The notions of interaction field and interaction scheme are close to the pragma-dialectical notions of *domain of communicative activity* and genre of communicative activity (for this distinction, see van Eemeren, 2011).

take place. The first type concerns interpersonal relationships between individuals, i.e., the type of relationship between the parties and the nature of feelings characterizing this relationship. The second type concerns beliefs and behaviors typical of a community, which can be defined as the *proper culture* of an individual, i.e., values and behaviors shared by most people within a certain community (cf. Muller & Perret-Clermont, 1999).

In an activity type, one of the two constitutive dimensions might be dominant. For instance, in some activity types such as parliamentary debate and court proceedings, the institutionalized dimension is predominant over the interpersonal dimension. In contrast, in other activity types such as family mealtime conversations and children's playground conversations, the interpersonal dimension is predominant over the institutionalized dimension. This is due to the fact that rules and conventions of some activity types can impose, at a certain extent, specific constraints to the behavior of participants. Even in such cases, both the institutionalized and the interpersonal dimensions of the context need to be taken into account to reach a full understanding of the dynamics characterizing the activity type concerned. In some cases, in fact, one of the two dimensions of the context can have effects on the other dimension, i.e. the interpersonal dimension can affect the institutionalized dimension, and viceversa. For example, Greco Morasso (2011), focusing on the practices of mediation, in which the institutionalized dimension plays a central role, has shown that in a case of dispute mediation between a father and his daughter, the specific type of relationship which linked the two parties was the crucial factor on which the mediators based his strategy in order to resolve the conflict.

Following the Rigotti & Rocci model of communication context, the institutionalized and interpersonal dimensions of family mealtime conversations are described in §4.3 and §4.4.

4.2 Argumentative activity type in the perspective of extended pragma-dialectics

One area on which pragma-dialecticians have worked intensively in the last ten years is the relevance of the *context* in which argumentation occurs. Interest in the study of context has caused van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007; van Eemeren, 2010, 2011) to integrate within the pragma-dialectical theory, alongside the notion of strategic maneuvering, the notion of *argumentative activity type*. In the extended version of pragma-dialectics the notions of strategic maneuvering and argumentative activity types are two theoretical notions that are distinct but not separate, as they clearly complement each other. The notion of strategic maneuvering provides the means to highlight the role that the arguers' empirical aim of being rhetorically effective plays in shaping argumentative exchanges. The notion of argumentative activity type, instead, highlights the role that contextual conventions play in shaping arguers' strategic maneuvering, i.e. their pursuit of the goal of balancing reasonableness and effectiveness.

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007) started to involve the notion of context in their theory when they concentrated on understanding how contextual constraints have an impact on the way in which arguers make strategic choices in argumentative discussions. The contextual constraints are defined by the authors as "conventions imposed on an argumentative discourse by the activity type in which argumentation occurs" (ibid., pp. 61-63).

In the extended version of pragma-dialectics, van Eemeren (2010, 2011) has recently distinguished four levels of context, described as follows (definitions taken from van Eemeren, 2011, pp. 144-145):

- The *micro-context*, or *linguistic-context*, is the text immediately preceding or following the extract at issue.
- The *meso-context* is the "situation" – sometimes also referred to as the "constituation" – in which the reconstructed extract occurs.
- The *macro-context* is the "communicative activity type" in which the argumentative discourse takes place.
- The *intertextual* or *interdiscursive-context* consists of other speech events with which the extract at issue, or the speech event in which it occurs as a whole, is connected.

Van Eemeren (2011, p. 145) maintains that the macro-context (also defined as *communicative activity type*), is "the most relevant dimension of context when it comes to conventionalization". In particular, in analyzing and evaluating an argumentative discourse, it is important to consider the constraints imposed on the strategic maneuvering by the macro-context in which the argumentative discourse takes place. In this regard, he writes (ibid., p. 148):

> "Due to the context-dependency of communicative practices, the possibilities for strategic maneuvering between dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness taking place in the argumentative discourse conducted in such practices are to some extent determined by the institutional preconditions[29] prevailing in the communicative practice concerned. This makes it necessary to situate the analysis and evaluation of strategic maneuvering in the macro-context of the "communicative activity type" in which the maneuvering occurs".

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[29] As van Eemeren (2011, p. 148) affirms, he uses the terms institution, institutional, and institutionalized "in a very broad sense to refer to any established macro-context in which certain communicative conventions have developed".

Although some communicative activity types might be non-argumentative, van Eemeren (ibid., p. 150) observed that "in a great many of communicative activity types, directly or indirectly, argumentation plays a part, whether structurally or incidentally, so that the activity types concerned are partly or wholly argumentative". In particular, "communicative activity types which are inherently argumentative can be called *argumentative activity types*, but in analytical practice the term argumentative activity type is used for all communicative activity types that have an argumentative dimension[30]" (ibid., p. 152).

As far as family mealtime is concerned, it is not an inherently argumentative activity because family members do not sit at the table with the aim of convincing the other family members about the validity of their opinions. At least, this is not their initial goal. Nevertheless, family mealtime conversations are a communicative activity in which differences of opinion often emerge. Therefore, they have an argumentative dimension and can be considered full-fledged an argumentative activity type.

To identify the conventions which may impose constraints on the way arguers make strategic choices in argumentative discussions, van Eemeren (2011, p. 150) maintains that argumentative activity types are to be characterized by describing three aspects of such activities:

- The specific institutional aim they are supposed to serve.
- The procedural format.

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[30] The impact of contextual constraints on the way in which arguers make strategic choices in their discussions is easily distinguishable in highly-formalized argumentative activity types, such as Prime Minister's Question Time in the Parliament (Mohammed, 2008) or a decision of the Dutch Supreme Court (Feteris, 2002). However, it also plays a role in daily informal argumentative activity types (van Eemeren, 2011, pp. 148-152).

-       The institutional conventions that need to be taken into account[31].

The investigation of the contextual constraints imposed by the activity of mealtime on family members' strategic maneuvering   will be presented in section §4.5.

4.3   The institutionalized dimension

We have seen (§4.1) that the Rigotti & Rocci model distinguishes an institutionalized and interpersonal dimension within a communication context. The central notion within the institutionalized dimension of context is that of activity type, which in turn is generated by the merging of two aspects of the context, interaction schemes and interaction field. As far as interaction schemes are concerned, mealtime in families with young children is an activity type that can be defined as *rich* and *complex*. In what follows, I will clarify through the presentation of a series of examples why I use these two characterizations.

First, unlike other activity types where one type of interaction scheme largely characterizes the activity type concerned, family mealtime is a rich activity type because it cannot be characterized by only one specific interaction scheme. For example, in a trade treaty or a custody mediation, the interaction schemes of "negotiation" and "mediation" characterize these activity types (van Eemeren 2011; Greco Morasso 2011). Consider, instead, the following dialogue

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[31] Van Eemeren (2011, p. 150) presents an example of a characterization in terms of an argumentative activity type of the General Debate in Dutch Parliament: "A General Debate in Dutch Parliament has the institutional aim of confronting the government of the day with the views of the elected representatives of the people concerning policy plans and their financial backing. The institutional conventions of the communicative activity type of a General Debate are established by parliamentary tradition and its format is laid down in parliamentary procedure".

where a mother shows her 6-year-old daughter (Giorgia) the proper way to cut meat:

(2) **FAM_ITA_2_(2)**; Mom (33); Giorgia (6,6)

Figure 7: Image of Italian family 2

1.	*GIO:	**mamma, non ci riesco** *Mom, I can't do it*
2.	*MOM:	**cosa?** *what?*
3.	*GIO:	**a tagliarla ((la carne))** *cut it ((the meat))*
4.	*MOM:	**guarda, adesso ti mostro io come si fa** *look, now I will show you how you can do it*
	%act:	**MOM mostra a GIO come tagliare la carne** *MOM shows GIO how to cut the meat*
5.	*MOM:	**guarda [:! indicando la carne]** *look [:! pointing at the meat]*
6.	*GIO:	**è facile!** *it's easy!*

In the excerpt above, the mother teaches her 6-year-old daughter (Giorgia) the right way to cut the meat. In this case, the conversation is characterized by the interaction scheme of "teaching". In the following excerpt, the mother, instead, engages in "negotiation" with her 8-year-old son (Silverio) in order to convince him to eat the French beans:

(3) **FAM_ITA_1_(3)**; Mom (34); Silverio (8)

1.	*MOM:	**ora ti metto anche i fagiolini, va bene?** *now, I'll put some French beans in as well, OK?*
→	*MOM:	**li mangi, non è vero?** *you eat those, don't you?*
2.	*SIL:	**io: invece dei fagiolini, io voglio mangiare il polipo** *instead of the French beans I want to eat the octopus*
3.	*MOM:	**Silverio, un po' di fagiolini li devi mangiare** *Silverio, you must eat some French beans*
4.	*SIL:	**no!** *no!*
5.	*MOM:	**si!** *yes!*
6.	*SIL:	**mangio il polipo,** *I'll eat the octopus,*
→	*SIL:	**no i fagioli** *not the beans*
7.	*MOM:	**non è la stessa cosa!** *it's not the same thing!*
8.	*SIL:	**ma: io voglio il polipo** *but: I want the octopus*
9.	*MOM:	**prima ti mangi un po' di fagiolini, e poi ti mangi il polipo** *first eat a little of the beans, and afterwards you can eat the octopus as well*
→	*MOM:	**dai:: pochi pochi** *come on:: just a little*
10.	*SIL:	**va bene, ma poi mangio il polipo** *OK, but afterwards I'll eat the octopus as well*

```
11.     *MOM:       va: bene::
                    OK::
```

The next excerpt shows how, in a Swiss family, the father acts as a good "mediator" with his 7-year-old daughter (Manuela) and 5-year-old son (Filippo):

```
(4) FAM_SWISS_2_(1); Dad (39); Manuela (7,4); Filippo (5,1)


1.      *MAN:       guarda [:! guardando DAD] sta finendo tutto
                    il ketchup [:! indicando FIL]
                    look [:! looking at DAD] he's taking all the ketchup [:! pointing at FIL]

2.      *FIL:       no::
                    no::

3.      *DAD:       Filippo, facciamo una cosa
                    Filippo, let's do this

→       *DAD:       Manuela ti da qualcuna delle sue patatine, e
                    tu le lasci un po' di ketchup.. d'accordo?
                    Manuela gives you some of her French fries, and you give her a little
                    ketchup.. do you agree?

4.      *MAN:       per me va bene
                    it's fine for me

5.      *DAD:       per te, Filippo?
                    for you, Filippo?

6.      *FIL:       va bene
                    OK
```

The three excerpts presented above show that during mealtime family members often make use of different types of interaction schemes, e.g. teaching, negotiation, mediations. For this reason, I would define family mealtime as a rich activity regarding the interaction schemes applied by family members in their conversations.

Second, family mealtime is not only a rich but also a complex activity type regarding the interaction schemes. This is due to the fact that different interaction schemes might at times overlap within the same conversation, making it difficult to distinguish the one from the other. An example of this

dynamics is illustrated in the following dialogue, where a mother seems simultaneously to advise, to negotiate, and to teach her 7-year-old son (Paolo):

(5) **FAM_SWISS_1_(2);** Mom (36); Paolo (7)

1.	*PAO:	**a me non piacciono le tabelline!**
		I don't like Pythagoras' table!

→	*PAO:	**sono difficili!**
		it's hard!

2.	*MOM:	**sono importanti però, lo sai**
		it's important though, you know

3.	*PAO:	**oh:: e tu come hai fatto ad impararle?**
		oh:: and how did you come to learn it?

4.	*MOM:	**io le leggevo tante volte, poi le ripetevo ad alta voce, ed infine le scrivevo sul quaderno**
		I used to read it many times and to repeat it aloud, and finally I used to write it down in a notebook

5.	*PAO:	**quante volte le leggevi?**
		how many times did you read it?

6.	*MOM:	**tante:: almeno dieci!**
		many:: at least ten times!

7.	*PAO:	**dieci? sono troppe dieci!**
		ten? Ten, it's too much!

8.	*MOM:	**no::**
		no::

9.	*PAO:	**si:: io le voglio leggere, al massimo tre volte**
		yes:: I want to read it at most three times

10.	*MOM:	**allora, facciamo che le leggi non dieci.. ma cinque volte, va bene?**
		then, we decide that you will read it not ten but five times, OK?

11.	*PAO:	**OK, cinque**
		five, OK

→	*PAO:	**e tu pensi che dopo le imparo?**
		and then do you think I'll learn it?

12.	*MOM:	**io penso che cinque volte sia sufficiente**
		I think that five times is sufficient

→	*MOM:	**altrimenti: le leggi altre cinque volte!**
		otherwise, you will read it five more times!

```
13.      *PAO:        eh:::
                      eh:::

         %act:        ridono entrambi
                      they both laugh
```

Turning to the second dimension of the institutionalized dimension, i.e. the interaction field, family mealtime represents more than a particular time of day at which to eat. Rather, it is a *social activity type* that is organized and produced by the family members in "a locally situated way" (Mondada, 2009, p. 559) using the resources of talk and interaction. Mealtime in families with young children is no less embedded in socio-cultural routines and norms than other social events, yet it also has its own distinctive features. As shown by Irive (1979), on a continuum of formality, it occupies an interim position between mundane, day-to-day informal encounters and formal public events, as it has certain common organizational principles that are largely accepted and shared in many different cultures; for example, parents and children are seated around the table and the food is accessible to all participants. As illustrated in the following excerpt, it is common practice that, before the meal begins, the mother calls the children to sit at the table:

(6)

```
1.     MOM:         la cena è sul tavolo! andiamo bambini, venite, e
                    sedetevi a tavola!
                    dinner's on the table! come on children, come and sit down at the table!
```

As Turner (1972, cited in Levinson 1979/1992, p. 72) has pointed out, the possible ways of starting an activity are contingent on aspects of its structural organization. Relating to the example above, the mothers' requests to their children to sit at the table often represents the starting-point for this activity type.

Mealtime in families with young children could vary spatially and temporally (Ochs et al., 1989). This means that there are conventions not only for how to perform and regulate the physical activity of having a meal, but also for the nonverbal and verbal activities allowed during the meal (Goffman, 1981). A shared convention is that mealtime is a *co-located activity*. Co-location means that members may overhear the talk of other members. Co-location also means that once the talk is initiated, it may lapse and then be reinitiated, and so family members are in a "continuing state of incipient talk" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 325). This process is clearly illustrated in the next extract, where the discussion between the mother and her 4-year-old son (Alessandro) lapses and then resumes:

(7) **FAM_SWISS_4_(2)**; Mom (34); Stefano (8,5); Alessandro (4,6)

1. ***MOM:** **no Alessandro**
       no Alessandro

→   ***MOM:** **no!**
       no!

→   ***MOM:** **quella gomma è per la lavagnetta,**
       that rubber is for the drawing board

→   ***MOM:** **e non si usa su altre cose**
       and you cannot use it on other things

    *MOM: **non hai più fame, Stefano?**
       aren't you hungry, Stefano?
2. ***STE:** **per favore:: niente. [:! facendo cenni di negazione col capo]**
       please no more [:! moving his head as if to say no]

3. ***MOM:** **non hai più fame?**
       aren't you hungry?

4. ***STE:** **no:: sono sazio.**
       no:: I'm full

5. ***MOM:** **solo un poco di verdura?**
       only a few vegetables?

6. ***STE:** **no:: sono proprio sazio.**
       no:: I'm really full

7	*MOM:	ci siamo fino a qua, Alessandro? *have you got it, Alessandro?*
→	*MOM:	per le penne e le matite, puoi usare la gomma da cancellare *for erasing pen and pencil marks you can use the rubber*
8.	*ALE:	però:: *but::*
9.	*MOM:	cosa c'è? *what?*
10.	*ALE:	io voglio provare, però *but I want to try it*
11.	*MOM:	no tesoro *no sweetheart*
12.	*ALE:	no:: *no::*
13.	*MOM:	no tesoro, fidati che so quello che ti dico *no sweetheart, trust me because I know what I am talking about*
→	*MOM:	qualche volta puoi provare *sometimes, you can try*
→	*MOM:	altre volte non si prova, ci si fida di quello che dicono i genitori *other times you can't try and you must trust what your parents tell you*

Important features of mealtime are also the variability of its temporal dimension and of the number of participants. In fact, family members may eat at different times and the mealtime can involve more than just one or two people (Ochs et al., 1989). For example, it is possible to observe conversations between two family members, between all family members, or even two conversations occurring at the same time. Therefore, not all mealtime conversations are necessarily multiparty[32], but the potential for multiparty talk is always a

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[32] Multiparty talk is a "distinct phenomenon" and one that Sacks (1995, p. 523) suggests is not merely a "variant of two-party conversation". It occurs when three or more people are co-present and engaged in interaction, and has implications for the "technical organization of talk" (Schegloff, 1995, p. 31), such as the allocation of turn-taking. As identified by Sacks (1995, p. 95), the pattern of turn-taking in two-party conversation takes the form of "A-B reduplicated". This "pattern of alternation" (Schegloff, 1995, p. 32) cannot be extrapolated to three or more party conversations. Thus, the "formula for two-party conversations, ABAB" (Sacks, 1995, p.

possibility at mealtime. The following dialogue is a good illustration of how two conversations, one between the mother and her 9-year-old son (Samuele), and another between the father and his 4-year-old daughter (Adriana), can occur simultaneously:

(8) **FAM_ITA_4_(1)**; Mom (37); Dad (37); Samuele (9,11); Adriana (4,4)

	%sit:	**Samuele sta bevendo la Coca-Cola** *Samuele is drinking Coca-Cola*
1.	*DAD:	**non più Coca-Cola, Samuele** *no more Coca-Cola, Samuele*
→	*DAD:	**adesso: ti do un po' di riso** *now I'll give you some rice*
2.	*SAM:	**non voglio nient'altro!** *I don't want anything else*
3.	*MOM:	**hai sonno Adriana?** *are you sleepy, Adriana?*
4.	*ADR:	**solo un pochettino.** *just a little bit*
5.	*SAM:	**no:: sono pieno:** *no:: I'm full:*
	%act:	**SAM guarda verso DAD** *SAM looks towards DAD*
6.	*MOM:	**allora vai a letto ((Adriana))** *go to sleep then ((Adriana))*
7.	*DAD:	**ti ho detto, basta Coca-Cola ((Samuele))** *I told you, stop drinking Coca-Cola ((Samuele))*
	%act:	**DAD guarda verso SAM** *DAD looks towards SAM*

Talking while eating is not acceptable everywhere. When it is, it is usually regulated by norms of what is appropriate to say, at which moment, to whom, and so on. In certain cultures, verbal activities are reduced to a necessary

---

523) does not become "ABCABCABC" if there are three parties but can become ABCBACABA, or ABCACBCBA, and so on.

minimum. For example, it is interesting to report the case of a rural French family depicted by Margaret Mead (Mead, 1959, cited also in Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 11) in her film *Four Families*, where the meal is completely task-oriented, generating only occasional remarks associated with the business of having dinner but containing no extended conversation.

However, in most urban well-educated Western populations, meal talk is not only permitted but also called for and expected. For example, the next extract shows how the mother invites her 5-year-old son (Filippo), who was talking with his 3-year-old brother (Carlo), to share with the rest of the family his opinion on "doing sports":

(9) **FAM_SWISS_2_(3)**; Mom (34); Filippo (5,1); Carlo (3,1)

   %sit: **FIL sta parlando con un tono di voce basso a CAR**
        FIL is talking in a low tone of voice to CAR

1. *FIL: **è importante!**
        it's important!

2. *CAR: **cosa?**
        what?

3. *FIL: **fare attività sportiva**
        doing sports

→ *FIL: **ti fa diventare più forte!**
        it makes you stronger!

   %act: **MOM e DAD si guardano e sorridono**
        MOM and DAD look at each other and smile

4. *MOM: **cosa hai detto ((Filippo)) ?**
        what did you say ((Filippo)) ?

5. *FIL: **cosa?**
        what?

6. *MOM: **perché è importante fare sport?**
        why is it important to do sports?

→ *MOM: **noi tutti vogliamo sentire perché**
        we all want to hear why

7. *FIL: **perché ti fa diventare più forte! [:! FIL fa il**

gesto di mostrare i muscoli del braccio
because it makes you stronger! [:! FIL makes a gesture to show his arm muscle]

      %act: **tutti ridono**
                        everyone laughs

Regarding the topics family members discuss, mealtime conversations are *unpredictable events* as they are characterized by substantial but not total freedom in relation to the issue that can be tackled. A "multiple agenda" (Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 9) is played out at mealtime, and often totally unforeseen topics are addressed. As in the following example, where the content of the question asked by the 6-year-old daughter provokes surprise in both parents:

(10) **FAM_ITA_2_(3);** Mom (33); Dad (34); Giorgia (6,6)

1.   ***MOM:**   **la salsa di pomodoro, era proprio buona:: è stata fatta con i pomodori del nonno!**
                     the tomato sauce was really good:: it was made with Grandpa's tomatoes

2.   ***GIO:**   **perché la nonna dice che il nonno è brutto e cattivo?**
                     why does Grandma say that Grandpa is ugly and bad?

3.   ***DAD:**   **cosa?**
                     what?

      %act: **MOM e DAD si guardano con un'espressione sorpresa**
                     MOM and DAD look each other with an expression of surprise

→   ***DAD:**   **perché dice che il nonno è così?**
                     why does she say that Grandpa is like that?

4.   ***GIO:**   **perché lei dice sempre così al nonno:: brutto e arrogante**
                     because she always says this to Grandpa:: ugly and arrogant

5.   ***DAD:**   **al nonno?**
                     to Grandpa?

      %act: **DAD guarda MOM con un'espressione sorpresa**
                     DAD looks at MOM with an expression of surprise

6.   ***MOM:**   **si:: ma secondo me, la nonna vuole bene al nonno**
                     yes:: but I think that Grandma loves Grandpa

```
7.      *DAD:       litigano spesso, si: ma io penso che se sono
                    insieme da così tanti anni, è perché si vogliono
                    bene
                    they quarrel quite often but I think as they have been together for a long time
                    it's because they love each other

8.      *GIO:       è vero: questo è vero
                    it's true this is true
```

Not all topics are open for discussion at mealtime. For instance, money, politics, and sex are usually viewed as less suitable themes for mealtime conversations, above all in the presence of young children (Blum-Kulka, 1997). This is due to the fact that even when no guests are present, the presence of children affects the choice of what is acceptable and what can be mentioned at mealtime (Fiese et al., 2006; Ochs, 2006; Tulviste et al., 2002). These unmentionables comply with a covert formal rule for topic selection that is shared by all members within the family, although the interpretations attached to these avoidance practices may vary according to culture and families. In the corpus, I found some interesting instances of such avoidance practices by parents. The next extract, for example, shows how an Italian mother invites her husband, who was commenting on a political news item, to move from this topic to another because, for her, politics is not an appropriate topic for mealtime:

(11) **FAM_ITA_3_(2);** Mom (38); Dad (41)

Figure 8: The mother and the father talk, looking at each other

1.   ***DAD:**   **ma ti rendi conto? ((rivolgendosi a MOM))**
                         but can you believe it? ((talking to MOM))

→   ***DAD:**   **ci sono anche persone che hanno il coraggio di votare uno come questo qui**
                         there are even people who have the courage to vote for a person like him

2.   ***MOM:**   **no no, ora cambiamo argomento**
                         no no now change the subject

3.   ***DAD:**   **ma hai sentito cosa ha detto oggi?**
                         did you hear what he said today?

4.   ***MOM:**   **no no, ma ora cambiamo argomento, non parliamo di questo a tavola**
                         no no but now let's change the topic, don't discuss this at the meal table

5.   ***DAD:**   **ah:: va bene, hai ragione**
                         ah:: OK, you're right

To conclude, in this section we have seen that during mealtime conversations different interaction schemes – for example, teaching, negotiation, and mediation – are often applied by family members and that, at times, they can

overlap within the same conversation, making it difficult to distinguish the one from the other. We have also seen that family mealtime has certain common organizational principles that are accepted and shared in many different cultures, e.g. all family members are seated around the table, the food is accessible to all participants, and members can overhear the talk of other members. Moreover, this activity is a multiparty interaction in which, even though not all topics are acceptable for discussion, talk is not only permitted but also called for and expected.

In the next section, I shall describe the second constitutive dimension of the activity of family mealtime, i.e. the interpersonal dimension.

4.4   The interpersonal dimension

In Rigotti & Rocci model the interpersonal dimension of a communicative context is constituted of two types of interpersonal solidarity. The first type concerns interpersonal relationships between individuals, whereas the second type concerns beliefs and behaviors typical of a certain community. In the following example, where the father asks his 10-year-old son (Marco) about what he has learned at school that day, we shall see how both types of interpersonal solidarity are to be considered for a proper understanding of the dialogue between the father and his son:

(12) **FAM_ITA_5_(2);** Dad (42); Marco (10,6)

Figure 9: Italian family 5 at the dining table

1.   ***DAD:**   **senti, ma oggi che cosa hai imparato a scuola? ((**
                                  rivolgendosi a MAR))
                                  listen but what did you learn at school today? ((talking to MAR))

2.   ***MAR:**   **cosa?**
                                  what?

3.   ***DAD:**   **che cosa hai imparato a scuola oggi?**
                                  what did you learn at school today?

4.   ***MAR:**   **sempre le solite cose.**
                                  always the same things

5.   ***DAD:**   **cosa vuol dire le solite cose?**
                                  what does always the same things mean?

6.   ***MAR:**   **no:: tipo italiano:: matematica.**
                                  no:: I mean Italian:: math

7.   ***DAD:**   **e cosa volevi fare? cinese?**
                                  and what did you want to do? Chinese?

8.   ***MAR:**   **no:: no:: con tutti quei disegni è proprio**
                                  difficile!
                                  no:: no:: with all those signs it's too hard!

In order to fully understand this dialogue, it is important to take into account the type of relationship between the father and his son, but it is equally important to consider the parental behavior models which are typical of their community, i.e. the cultural context of the interaction field (Muller & Perret-Clermont, 1999). Addressing topics related to children's personal lives, such as what they do during the day, what kind of activities they do at school, and who their friends are, is a typical parental behavior at mealtime adopted by western families (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Ochs, 2006; Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1999). However, this behavior has been typical of western families for twenty or thirty years now, but has not always been so (Fiese et al., 2006). For this reason, analysis of verbal interactions between parents and children should take into account not only the type of relationship between the parties, but also the way in which what is typical or not of a certain community can affect the parties' behavior.

An aspect characterizing parent-child interactions during mealtime is the asymmetrical distribution of rights. Parents exhibit particular rights in these kind of interactions, which usually would not be accorded in adult-adult interactions (Ochs & Shohet, 2006). This means that parents typically ascribe more rights to themselves than those who typically may have "restricted conversational rights" (Speier, 1976, p. 101)[33]. For instance, parents can enforce silence when children play together, whereas such as intervention in adult activity by children would be considered impolite. Moreover, if a child interrupts a discussion between adults, the adult may invoke their right to demand politeness.

An example of this dynamics is illustrated in the following dialogue:

---

[33] Speier (1976, pp. 101-102) identifies six features of children's restricted rights in adult-child interactions: (a) rights to enforce silence, (b) rights to intervene during the conversation, (c) rights to require politeness, (d) rights to terminate children's talk, (e) dismissal rights, and (f) removal rights.

```
(13) FAM_ITA_3_(2); Mom (38); Luca (10,9)
```

```
1.        *MOM:        Luca, questa sera non hai proprio fame
                       this evening you are not hungry at all, Luca

→         *MOM:        non hai mangiato quasi niente!
                       you hardly ate anything!

2.        *LUC:        ma non dire sciocchezze, non è vero!
                       but do not talk nonsense, it is not true!

3.        *MOM:        Luca, innanzitutto rispondi in modo educato, e
                       adesso finisci di mangiare!
                       Luca first of all answer politely and now finish eating!
```

In the corpus, I found several instances of a powerful style employed by fathers. Look at the following example:

```
(14) FAM_SWISS_5_(1); Mom (37); Dad (37); Francesco (9,3)
```

```
1.        *MOM:        Francesco, ora finisci di mangiare i pomodori
                       Francesco, now finish eating your tomatoes

2.        *FRA:        ma papà, tu non li mangi i pomodori?
                       but Dad, you don't eat tomatoes? Do you?

3.        *DAD:        finisci di mangiare i pomodori, papà può
                       mangiare quello che vuole.
                       finish eating the tomatoes, Dad can eat whatever he wants
```

Some scholars (e.g. Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005) pointed out that this type of fathers' behavior might be interpreted as serving the need of fathers to present themselves as the source of authority and power in front of their children. However, despite these manifestations of a powerful style, it would be misleading to portray fathers as being always true to a domineering male stereotype. For example, in the corpus of the present research it is the mother rather than the father who typically makes continuous demands of the children. Furthermore, I also observed that fathers have a high level of conversational involvement in the many facets of children's lives and, on most occasions, children are granted participatory rights as ratified conversational partners. They

engaged parents in topics of their own interest and were included in discussions of topics of general interest. In particular, the most frequent expressions of adaptation to children's needs during mealtime could be seen in the attention paid to their food needs:

(15)

"Non hai fame, Paolo?"
"Aren't you hungry, Paolo?"

"Giorgia, vuoi la pasta?"
"Giorgia, do you want the pasta?"

"Sono troppi questi spaghetti, Alessandro?"
"Is this too much spaghetti, Alessandro?"

Children's wishes and preferences are taken into account and respected by parents not only for food but also for conversational needs and engaging in conversational scaffolding, especially in collaborative storytelling (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Goodwin, 1997; Ochs et al., 1992b). Such scaffolding rests on the assumption that at mealtime even the youngest children are ratified conversational partners. In this regard, it is particularly illuminating to look at the following dialogue, where the mother asks her 4-year-old daughter (Adriana) to help her to finish the narration of a daily event:

(16) **FAM_ITA_4_(3);** Mom (37); Dad (37); Adriana (4,4)

1.	*MOM:	**oggi io, la nonna e Adriana, abbiamo fatto una passeggiata in montagna!**
		today Grandma, Adriana and I took a walk in the mountains!
2.	*ADR:	**si si**
		yes
3.	*MOM:	**era una bellissima giornata, c'era un bel sole**
		it was a beautiful day and there was nice sunshine
4.	*DAD:	**quanto avete camminato?**
		how long did you walk?

```
5.      *MOM:       più di due ore!
                    more than two hours!

→       *MOM:       a un certo punto: abbiamo perso la nonna
                    at some point we lost Grandma

→       *MOM:       e ci siamo fermati ad aspettarla.
                    and we stopped waiting for her

→       *MOM:       poi, è arrivata dopo dieci minuti
                    then, after ten minutes she came

→       *MOM:       e indovina cosa ci ha detto? ((rivolgendosi a
                    DAD))
                    and try to guess what she said?((talking to DAD))

6.      *DAD:       cosa?
                    what?

7.      *MOM:       Adriana, cosa ha detto la nonna? continua tu!
                    Adriana, what did Grandma say? finish telling the story!

8.      *ADR:       ha detto:: che si era fermata a raccogliere dei
                    fiori!
                    she said that she stopped to pick some flowers!

9.      *DAD:       ah ah [:! ridendo]
                    ah ah [:! laughing]

        %act:       anche MOM e ADR ridono
                    MOM and ADR laugh too
```

The use of a wide range of supportive strategies by parents encourages children to initiate their own topics. These practices usually occur during mealtime and concern topics of personal relevance to the child (Beals, 1997; Snow & Beals, 2006). More subtle but equally important patterns of parental supportive behavior are those practices that symbolically signify the acceptance of the child as co-participant to discussion. For example, look at the brief contribution by the 7-year-old son (Giovanni) to a conversation that seems, at first glance, adult-dominated in terms of both participation and choice of topic:

```
(17) FAM_SWISS_3_(2); Mom (33); Dad (35); Giovanni (7,3)

1.      *DAD:       magari, possiamo andare qualche giorno a Parigi
                    prima di Natale
                    maybe we can go to Paris for a few days before Christmas time
```

2.	*MOM:	**perché no? magari** *maybe, why not?*
→	*MOM:	**e con i bambini possiamo andare a Disneyland!** *and with the kids we can go to Disneyland!*
3.	*DAD:	**noi due, è da tanto che non ci andiamo. e con i bambini non ci siamo mai andati** *it is a long time since we went to Paris and we have never been with the kids*
4.	*MOM:	**è vero.** *right*
→	*MOM:	**potrebbe essere una buona idea, questa** *this could be a good idea*
5.	*DAD:	**nel periodo natalizio,** *at Christmas time*
→	*DAD:	**è bello quel periodo.** *it's a nice time of year*
6.	*MOM:	**si si.** *yes*
7.	*GIO:	**ma a Parigi: andiamo con l'aereo?** *but do we go to Paris by plane?*
8.	*DAD:	**certo, perché?** *sure, why?*
9.	*GIO:	**non possiamo andare in macchina?** *can't we go by car?*
10.	*MOM:	**ma Giovanni, è lontano per andare in macchina** *but Giovanni, it's too far to go by car*
11.	*DAD:	**da quando hai paura dell'aereo?** *when did you start to be scared of planes?*
12.	*GIO:	**io non ho paura dell'aereo!** *I'm not scared of planes*
13.	*DAD:	**quindi, qual è il problema?** *so, what's the matter?*
14.	*GIO:	**niente:: è bello viaggiare in macchina.** *nothing, it's nice to travel by car*
15.	*DAD:	**ah:: quindi preferisci la macchina:: non l'aereo.** *ah:: so you prefer the car:: not the plane*
→	*DAD:	**ma: guarda che anche l'aereo è ancora più bello! è più veloce** *but, look:: the plane is even better! it's faster*
16.	*GIO:	**e: lo so, ma io preferisco la macchina** *yes I know but I prefer the car*

In this example, Giovanni is treated by his parents as an equal co-participant in the conversation. It is interesting to observe how the question advanced by Giovanni to his parents ("*but do we go to Paris by plane?*") has the effect of changing the topic of discussion. The focus is no longer on Paris, as Giovanni and his parents now discuss whether traveling by car is better than traveling by plane.

It is typical during mealtime that parents and children not only talk about daily events, food, and more general family matters, but also reflect on how they feel. According to Fiese and her colleagues (2006, p. 80), "this provides an opportunity for validation of emotions and assurance that others share concern about your feelings". This aspect is illustrated in the following dialogue, where the mother expresses concern for her 4-year-old daughter (Carla):

(18) **FAM_SWISS_3_(1)**; Mom (33); Carla (4,8)

1.   *MOM: **avete giocato a pallavolo a scuola?**
                    did you play volleyball at school?

2.   *CAR: **no:: [: con un'espressione triste]**
                    no:: [: with a sad expression]

3.   *MOM: **come mai?**
                    how come?

4.   *CAR: **io volevo giocare a pallavolo, ma altri volevano
                    giocare a calcio!**
                    I wanted to play volleyball but others wanted to play football!

5.   *MOM: **tutti? e le tue amiche?**
                    everyone? and your girlfriends?

6.   *CAR: **anche loro volevano giocare a calcio!**
                    they wanted to play football too!

→   *CAR: **ed io non volevo.**
                    and I didn't want to

7.   *MOM: **oh: poverina:: ed eri triste?**
                    oh: poor you:: and you were sad, weren't you?

8.   *CAR: **si [:! con un'espressione triste]**
                    yes [:! with a sad expression]

```
9.      *MOM:           oh: poverina:: non preoccuparti, la prossima volta
                        sono sicura che giocherete anche a pallavolo.
```
*oh: poor you:: don't worry I'm sure that the next time you will play
volleyball as well*

To conclude, in this section we have seen that mealtime is not just about food and eating, but it is a social activity type in which parents and children have intensive and complex interactions. After having described the constitutive aspects of the activity of family mealtime, in the next section we shall see which constraints of the activity of family mealtime can affect the strategic choices of parents and children in argumentative discussions.

4.5   Contextual constraints on strategic maneuvering of family members

The analysis of the constitutive aspects of family mealtime shows that this activity is more than a clock-time indicating a particular time of day at which to eat. The specific institutional aim of the activity of family mealtime is certainly wider, and includes the coming together of all family members to discuss and share experiences, opinions, and feelings. As observed by Anita L. Vangelisti (2004), it is by discussing together that parents and children day by day construct their family. The definition of the institutional aim of mealtime in families with young children can be therefore stated as follows: The institutional aim of mealtime in families with young children is the coming together of all family members, to eat together and share and exchange experiences, opinions, and feelings.

As to the procedural format, we have seen that family mealtime is both a multiparty and co-located activity in which at least three people are present. At mealtime, we can observe conversations between just two members of the

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family, among all family members, or multiple simultaneous conversations. Co-location in close proximity means that family members may overhear the talk of other members. It also means that conversation, once it has been initiated, may lapse and be reinitiated; in this way, members are in a "continuing state of incipient talk" (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:325).

As to the institutional conventions, in the previous section I have explained that mealtime conversations in families with young children are characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of rights, due to differences in roles, competences, and experiences between parents and children. Moreover, family mealtime has certain common organizational principles which are largely accepted and shared across cultures: all family members are seated around the table and the food is accessible to all participants. I have also shown that at mealtime, different interaction schemes – for example, teaching, negotiation, and mediation – are applied by family members and that, at times, they can overlap within the same conversation, making it difficult to distinguish one from another. Even though not all topics are allowed (e.g., money, politics, and sex) because of the presence of young children, mealtime conversations are unpredictable events characterized by a substantial freedom as far as the issues considered appropriate for discussion are concerned. All the rules and conventions of the activity of family mealtime can be seen as capable of exerting influence on the three aspects of strategic maneuvering (see van Eemeren 2010:93-127).

Choice from the topical potential. Given the substantial freedom afforded in the introduction of topics for discussion, mealtime conversations impose virtually no constraints on the choice from the topical potential by parents and children. Multiple agendas are often played out, with various topics addressed. This is due to the specific conditions of mealtime, one of the few moments during the day in which the entire family can be expected to come and discuss

together. However, some topics such as politics, sex, and money are usually viewed as less suitable themes for mealtime conversations. We have seen that this is due to the fact that even when no guests are present, the presence of children affects the choice of what is acceptable and what can be mentioned during family mealtime conversations. In the corpus, I found some interesting instances of such avoidance practices by parents. The next extract, for example, shows how an Italian mother invites her husband, who was commenting on a political news item, to move from this topic to another because, for her, politics is not an appropriate topic for mealtime:

(19) **FAM_ITA_3_(2);** Mom (38); Dad (41)

1.	*DAD:	ma ti rendi conto? ((rivolgendosi a MOM)) *but can you believe it? ((talking to MOM))*
→	*DAD:	ci sono anche persone che hanno il coraggio di votare uno come questo qui *there are even people who have the nerve to vote for a person like him*
2.	*MOM:	no no, ora cambiamo argomento *no no now change the subject*
3.	*DAD:	ma hai sentito cosa ha detto oggi? *did you hear what he said today?*
4.	*MOM:	no no, ma ora cambiamo argomento, non parliamo di questo a tavola *no no but now let's change the topic, don't discuss this at the meal table*
5.	*DAD:	ah:: va bene, hai ragione *ah:: OK, you're right*

Adaptation to audience demand. The differences in roles, age, and competences between parents and children impose specific institutional preconditions that impose constraints on the choices they make in their argumentative discussions. For example, the analysis of the interpersonal dimension of mealtime in families with young children has shown that the asymmetrical distribution of rights typifies parent-child interactions. An

institutional precondition of mealtime conversations in families with young children is that parents grant themselves greater and broader rights than those ascribed to children. An example of this dynamics is well-illustrated in the following dialogue between a mother and her 8-year-old son (Luca):

(20) **FAM_ITA_3_(2)**; Mom (38); Luca (8,9)

1.   *MOM: Luca, questa sera non hai proprio fame
                    this evening you are not hungry at all, Luca

→   *MOM: non hai mangiato quasi niente!
                    you've hardly eaten anything!

2.   *LUC: ma non dire sciocchezze, non è vero!
                    don't talk nonsense, it is not true!

3.   *MOM: Luca, innanzitutto rispondi in modo educato, e
                    adesso finisci di mangiare!
                    Luca first of all answer politely and now finish eating!

Selection of presentational devices. Also in this case, the differences in roles, age, and competences between parents and children impose specific constraints on their strategic maneuvering in argumentative discussions. In the corpus, I frequently observed that parents adapted their linguistic choices to the competences and knowledge of children. For example, when the topics of discussion relate to school or the teaching of proper table-manners, the parents used a less humorous, more direct argumentative style with their children. The following dialogue, where a mother uses simple language and takes into account what her 4-year-old daughter (Adriana) knows and can readily comprehend, provides a clear illustration of this process:

(21) **FAM_ITA_4_(3)**; Mom (37); Adriana (4,4)

1.   *MOM: Adri, domani non so se possiamo andare a giocare al
                    parco
                    Adriana, I am not sure if we can go to the playground tomorrow

```
2.      *ADR:        no:: perché? io voglio::
                     no:: why? I want to::

3.      *MOM:        oggi era nuvoloso, e domani dovrebbe piovere
                     today was cloudy and it is supposed to rain tomorrow

4.      *ADR:        che?
                     what?

5.      *MOM:        domani dovrebbe piovere, perché le nuvole sono piene
                     d'acqua
                     tomorrow it should rain because the clouds are full of water

6.      *ADR:        sono piene?
                     they are full?

7.      *MOM:        si, per questo domani dovrebbe piovere.
                     yes so tomorrow it should rain
```

5. The initial phase of the argumentative discussion

The empirical analysis of a corpus of argumentative discussions is a necessary complement to the work done to this point: the review of the literature examining family discourse at mealtime (Chapter 2), the systematic description of the methodology applied in this research (Chapter 3), and the description of the institutional conventions of family mealtime and how they can impose constraints on family members' strategic choices in argumentative discussions (Chapter 4). The present chapter intends to answer the following research questions: (*Question 2*) On what types of issues do parents and children engage in argumentative discussion? (*Question 3*) How do parents and children contribute to the inception and development of an argumentative discussion?

As stated in §3.4, the analysis of argumentative discourse will be focused on the study of *analytically relevant argumentative moves* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), i.e. those speech acts that can play a role in resolving differences of opinion. In particular, a discussion is considered as argumentative if the following two criteria are satisfied:

- At least one standpoint put forth by a family member is questioned by one or more family members.
- At least one family member puts forward at least one argument either in favor of or against the standpoint being questioned.

The theoretical tool adopted for the first phase of the analysis is the ideal model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). The analysis

of the argumentative discussions between parents and children results in an *analytical overview* that provides a detailed reconstruction of the various components of an argumentative discussion. For reasons of space, not all 48 separate argumentative analyses representing the entire corpus of argumentative discussions will be illustrated in the next two chapters. In discussing the results, I shall present a selection of the analyses representative of the results obtained from the entire corpus of argumentative discussions.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. After presenting the types of issues parents and children most frequently engage in argumentative discussions (§5.1), I shall examine the specific contribution of parents and children in the beginning and development of an argumentative discussion (§5.2 and §5.3). Finally, I shall discuss the main findings of the first phase of analysis (§5.4).

5.1 *Recurrent issues leading family members to engage in argumentative discussions*

The first significant aspect highlighted by the analytical reconstruction concerns the nature of the issues parents and children engage in argumentative discussions. What first emerges is that argumentative discussions revolve around two general types of issue: *parental prescriptions* and *children's requests* (Fig. 10):
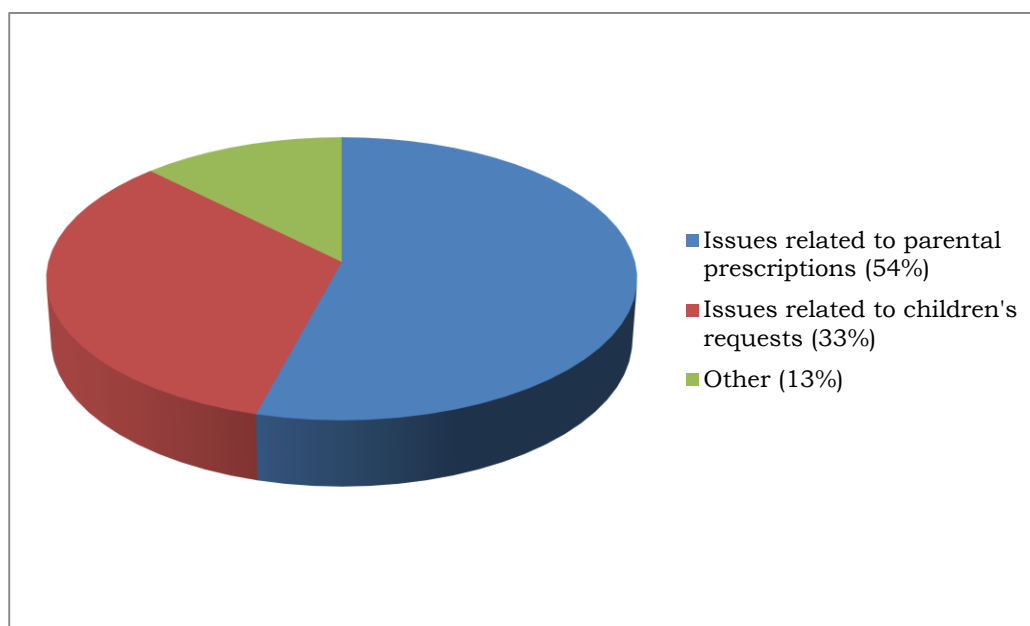
Figure 10: Issues family members engaged in argumentative discussions

In most of the 48 discussions (87%) I have analyzed, the issues discussed can be described through one of the following two questions:

1)   "*Should child X do Y?*" (26/48; 54%)

2)   "*May child X do Y?*" (16/48; 33%)

The first question allows to consider all issues related to parental prescriptions, whereas the second allows consideration of all issues related to children's requests. The main difference between these two types of issues is related to who, the parent or the child, initially advanced the standpoint. The parental prescriptions are initially triggered by a parental standpoint, while the second type of issues is initially triggered by a child's request.

In the corpus, parental prescriptions primarily concern activities closely related to mealtime, such as having to eat a certain food or adopting proper

table-manners. The following sequence offers a clear illustration of how a parental prescription can trigger the beginning of an argumentative discussion between a mother and her 5-year-old son, Filippo:

(22) **FAM_SWISS_2_(2)**; Mom (34); Filippo (5,1)

Figure 11: Swiss family 2 seated at the table

1.	*MOM:	**Filippo, devi mangiare un poco di questo formaggio**
		Filippo, you must eat a little of this cheese
2.	*FIL:	**no!**
		no!
3.	*MOM:	**si! perché solo il pane non è abbastanza.**
		Yes! Because bread alone is not enough
4.	*FIL:	**no, non voglio il formaggio**
		no, I do not want the cheese
5.	*MOM:	**questo è quello che ha comprato il nonno però:: è delizioso.**
		this is the one Grandpa bought, though:: it is delicious
6.	*FIL:	**davvero?**
		really?

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```
7.      *MOM:      si, lo ha comprato il nonno
                   yes, Grandpa bought it

8.      *FIL:      mhm:: ((sembra pensieroso))
                   mhm:: ((he seems thoughtful))

9.      *MOM:      è delizioso.
                   it is delicious

        %act:      MOM mette un pezzo di formaggio nel piatto di FIL
                   che inizia a mangiare volentieri (sta sorridendo) il
                   formaggio
                   MOM puts a piece of cheese in FIL's plate who starts eating willingly (he is
                   smiling) the cheese
```

The sequence starts with the mother telling her son that he needs to eat a little cheese along with his bread. The child initially disagrees with his mother: he does not want to eat the cheese. In reconstructing this argumentative discussion, this phase of the discussion between the mother and her son represents the confrontation stage. In fact, in this phase of the discussion the mother's standpoint (*Filippo must eat a little cheese*) has been met by the child's refusal. In line 3, the mother advances an argument to support her standpoint; the child, in line 4, does not provide a counter argument to defend his position, replying instead by reasserting his original stance. In line 5, the mother puts forward two arguments to further her perspective: "*this is the one Grandpa bought*", and "*it is delicious*". These two arguments, more than the first, succeed in catching the child's attention. To resolve the child's doubts, the mother repeats once again these two arguments in lines 7 and 9. The sequence that goes from line 3 through line 9 represents the argumentation stage. The concluding stage concerns a non-verbal act – the mother puts a piece of cheese on the child's plate – which concludes the sequence. The child goes on to eat the cheese willingly, showing in this way to accept his mother's standpoint.

The analytical overview of the discussion between Filippo and his mother is summarized below, in Table 7:

Table 7: Analytical overview of the example (22)

Type of difference of opinion	Single Mixed Dispute
Issue	*Does Filippo have to eat a little of the cheese?*
Standpoint(s)	(a.) Filippo must eat a little cheese (Mother) (b.) I do not want the cheese (Child)
Mother's argument(s)	(a.1) Just bread is not enough (a.2.1) It is delicious (a.2.2) This is the cheese Grandpa bought (coordinated to a.2.1)

In the corpus, parents and children often engage in argumentative discussion on account of parental prescriptions related to food or the teaching of proper table-manners. Some examples found in the corpus include:

– Does Stefano have to eat the rice?

– Does Giorgia have to finish eating?

– Does Manuela have to eat the meat?

– Does Silverio have to eat the salad?

– Does Laura have to eat the watermelon?

– Does Luisa have to eat something more before eating the grapes?

– Does Gabriele have to eat a little potatoes?

– Does Alessandro have to eat the tortellini?

Parental prescriptions do not pertain exclusively to mealtime-related activities, but also to the behavior of children in social interactions outside the family. Also in this latest case, parental prescriptions often lead to argumentative discussions.

(23) **FAM_ITA_1_(3);** Dad (38); Silverio (8)

Figure 12: Italian family 1 at the dining table

1.   ***SIL:**   **oggi, la maestra non mi ha fatto andare al bagno**
the teacher didn't let me go to the bathroom today

2.   ***DAD:**   **devi ascoltare le regole della maestra!**
you must listen to the teacher's rules!

3.   ***SIL:**   **perché diceva, che possiamo andare solo alla fine della lezione**
because she said that we can only go at the end of the lesson

→   ***SIL:**   **quando: suona la campanella**
as the bell rings

4   ***DAD:**   **e tu, cosa hai fatto?**
and what did you do?

5.   ***SIL:**   **io le ho detto che non era giusto**
I told her that it wasn't right

6.   ***DAD:**   **non devi rispondere male alla maestra, devi ascoltare quello che ti dice!**
you should not answer back the teacher, you must listen to what she says!

7.   ***SIL:**   **ma io, dovevo andare in bagno**
but I had to go to the bathroom

8	*DAD:	è maleducato rispondere alla maestra, lo sai?
		it's bad manners to answer back the teacher, you know?
9.	*SIL:	si lo so.
		yes, I know
10.	*DAD:	e allora non lo fare più!
		so do not do it anymore!
11.	*SIL:	mhm:: ((con un'espressione triste))
		mhm:: ((with a cheerless expression on his face))

This sequence begins with the child informing his father that at school that day the teacher had not permitted him to go to the bathroom. In line 2, the father immediately makes his standpoint explicit, saying that the child must follow the teacher's rules, so opposing the child's standpoint. The child, in line 3, provides the reasoning the teacher used to justify the prohibition. In line 4, the father shows himself to be more interested in knowing the behavior of his son than in judging the reasoning underlying the teacher's prohibition (*and what did you do?*). In line 5, the child tells his father that he told the teacher that the prohibition was, in his eyes, not right. In line 6, the father disapproves of the child's behavior (*you shouldn't answer back the teacher, you must listen to what she says*). According to the model of a critical discussion, this phase represents the confrontation stage.

In line 7, the child opts not to evade the burden of proof and puts forward an argument to support his standpoint (*but I had to go to the bathroom*). In line 8, the father does not try to evade the burden of proof either, and advances an argument in defence of his standpoint (*it's ill-mannered to answer back to the teacher*). Now, child and father are going through the argumentation stage.

The child accepts the argument put forward by the father in line 9, while the father then warns his son in line 10 against repeating such behavior. The cheerless expression noted on the child's face concludes the sequence, hinting at the fact that he is sorry to have disappointed his father. However, this is only a

hypothesis that only the child could confirm. The analytical overview is summarized below, in Table 8:

Table 8: Analytical overview of the example (23)

Type of difference of opinion	Single Mixed Dispute
Issue	*Does Silverio have to respect the teacher's rule?*
Standpoint(s)	(a.) The teacher's rule was not right (Child) (b.) You must listen to what the teacher says (Father)
Child's argument(s)	(a.1) But I had to go to the bathroom
Father's argument(s)	(b.1) It is ill-mannered to answer back the teacher

Parental prescriptions related to the behavior of children outside the family largely focus on the school context and, in particular, on children's behavior during interactions with teachers and schoolmates. For example, other issues related to the social behavior of children were the following:

– Does Giorgia have to invite all her schoolmates to her birthday party?
– Does Francesco have to apologize to his schoolmate Antonio?
– Does Manuela have to lend her crayons to her friend Valentina?

In the corpus, one-third (16/48; 33%) of the discussions leading parents and children to engage in argumentative discussions were triggered by children's requests. The following example provides an illustration of how a request by the 4-year-old son, Alessandro, led to an argumentative discussion with his mother:

(24) **FAM_SWISS_4_(1)**; Mom (34); Alessandro (4,6)

      %sit: **ALE tocca e guarda il contenitore delle medicine**
                    ALE touches and looks at the container with the pills

1.   *ALE: **io: me la prendo una di queste qui**
                    I'm: going to take one of these

→	*ALE:	si! *yes!*
2.	*MAM:	non puoi Alessandro! *you can't, Alessandro!*
3.	*ALE:	eh? *what?*
4.	*MOM:	non puoi:: ((scuotendo la testa)) *you can't:: ((shakes his head))*
5.	*ALE:	perché no? *why not?*
6.	*MOM:	perché i bambini, devono prendere delle medicine speciali *because children, have to take special medicine*
→	*MOM:	non possono prendere le medicine degli adulti *they can't take the same medicines as adults*
→	*MOM:	altrimenti, si sentono male *otherwise, they will get sick*
7.	*ALE:	e tu, prima ti sei sentita male? *and before did you also feel sick?*
8.	*MOM:	no, perché io sono un'adulta *no, because I'm an adult*
9.	*ALE:	ed io? *and me?*
10.	*MOM:	tu sei ancora: un bambino *you are still: a child*
	%pau:	1.0 sec
	%sit:	ALE sbatte la scatola delle medicine sul tavolo MAM tende la mano verso di lui per fargli mangiare un pezzetto di frutta ALE volta la testa di scatto e lentamente esce dalla cucina dirigendosi verso PAP e STE *Alessandro bangs the medicine container on the table. MOM reaches toward him to try and make him eat a piece of fruit. ALE turns his head away quickly and slowly leaves the kitchen to go toward DAD and STE*

The sequence begins when the child tells his mother of his intention to take a pill from the container. The child announces his action with a pre-sequence – line 1, "*I'm going to…*" – and reinforces his position by concluding his remark with "*yes*". The mother, in lines 2 and 4, disagrees with the child's

behavior, twice repeating "*You can't*". This phase of the discussion corresponds with the confrontation stage, as there is a standpoint (*I want to take a pill from the medicine container*) that meets with the mother's refusal, (*You can't, Alessandro*).

The opening stage, in which the parties decide to try to resolve the difference of opinion and explore whether there are premises worthy of discussion, is largely implicit. The child wants to take one of the pills of the container. We could infer that he already knows that, in order to take the pill, he would need his mother's permission. Starting from shared premises, the mother and the child enter into the argumentation stage. The child asks his mother in line 5 why he cannot take the pill, asking, "*why not?*". In doing so, the child makes no effort to defend his position by putting forward arguments on his own behalf; instead, he invites his mother to explain why he cannot take the pills and, accordingly, to assume the burden of proof. The mother does not avoid justifying her prohibition, putting forward her argument in line 6, saying, "*Because children have to take special medicines*". The subject of the mother's claim is no longer her son, but the wider category of children ("they *can't take*....they *will get sick*"). This intervention, however, evokes a general rule – *children have to...* – to which also Alessandro is subject.

In line 7, the child asks for clarification, which can be paraphrased as: *Has it already happened to you as well?* In doing so, the child shows that he does not yet understand his mother's argument. The mother's answer is clear and explicit in line 8, "*No, because I'm an adult*". This also serves to reveal her social position relative to her child. In line 9, the child makes a further request for clarification in order to allow him to understand his status (adult or child?). The mother's answer, in line 10, is clear and explicit: Alessandro is still a child. The common pause which follows marks the conclusion of the exchange. According to the model of a critical discussion, the sequence from lines 5 to 10

represents the argumentation stage. The concluding stage involves the non-verbal act of the child banging the medicine container on the table. This is meant to show that the child has accepted his mother's standpoint and will not take the pills.

The analytical overview of the discussion between Alessandro and his mother is summarized below, in Table 9:

Table 9: Analytical overview of the example (24)

Type of difference of opinion	Single Mixed Dispute
Issue	*Can Alessandro take a pill from the medicine container?*
Standpoint(s)	(a.) You can't (Mother) (b.) I want to take a pill from the medicine container (Child)
Mother's argument(s)	(a.1.1) Because children have to take special medicine (a.1.2) They can't take the same medicine as adults (coordinated to a.1.1)

In the corpus, the issues triggered by children's requests cover a wide range of topics. Some exemplar issues triggered by children's requests and discussed at mealtime include:

- Can Adriana eat the mango?
- Can Alessandro use that eraser?
- Can Gabriele play with the lemons?
- Can Dad sing along with Marco?
- Can Alessandro take the crayon?
- Can Giovanni play on the computer?
- Can Francesco whisper in his Dad's ear?

The remaining six issues (6/48; 12.5%) on which parents and children engage in argumentative discussions refer to various topics: the sporting activities of children, a cartoon, the importance of reading to children, and the quality of the relationship between the grandmother and grandfather. Given the wide variety of topics, I have chosen not to describe them as a specific type of issue, but to consider each of them individually.

–   Who is in charge of the family?
–   Did Laura listen to Grandma?
–   What is the wingspan of a swallow?
–   Did Michele make his football coach angry?
–   Does Grandma love Grandpa?
–   Is reading important?

With the recurrent issues which lead parents and children to engage in argumentative discussions thus identified, we can now investigate how parents and children contribute to the inception and development of an argumentative discussion.

5.2   *The burden of proof on parents' shoulders*

According to the model of a critical discussion, to properly reconstruct an argumentative discussion crucial is the moment at which one discussant assumes the "burden of proof", i.e. when he/she accepts the need to defend a standpoint by providing arguments to support it (van Eemeren et al., 1993). In our corpus of argumentative discussions, the burden of proof is regularly assumed by parents. The children, instead, often but not always, evade the burden of proof, by not

being expected to provide any reasoning to support their standpoints. The
following excerpt allows us to clearly illustrate these dynamics:

(25) **FAM_ITA_5_(1)**; Mom (40); Marco (10,6)

1.	*MAR:	**mamma [:! a bassa voce]** *Mom [:! a low tone of voice]*
2.	*MOM:	**eh** *eh*
3.	*MAR:	**voglio parlare [:! a bassa voce]** *I want to talk:: [:! a low tone of voice]*
→	*MAR:	**ma non è possibile [:! a bassa voce]** *but it is not possible [:! a low tone of voice]*
→	*MAR:	**perché la mia voce è brutta [:! a bassissima** **voce]** *because my voice is bad [:! a very low tone of voice]*
4.	*MOM:	**no assolutamente!** *absolutely not!*
→	*MOM:	**no::** *no::*
5.	*MAR:	**dai:: ((col tono di chi dice una cosa evidente))** *please Mom:: ((with the tone of someone who says something obvious))*
6.	*MOM:	**perché?** *why?*
→	*MOM:	**io non penso proprio.** *I do not think so*
→	*MOM:	**una bella voce, da uomo** *a beautiful voice,[the voice] of a man*
→	*MOM:	**grossa bella.** *big beautiful*
7.	*MAR:	**no:** *no:*
8.	*MOM:	**stasera:: se si sentirà il rumore del pane** **chioccarello [:! sorridendo]** *tonight:: if we hear the sound of crisp bread ((the noise when crisp bread is being chewed)) [:! smiling]*
9.	*MAR:	**bene, ma adesso mica fino a questo punto!** *fine, but not to this point !*

The dialogue begins with Marco's negative assumption (*I want to talk but it is not possible because my voice is bad*), but it is the mother who assumes the burden of proof. In fact, the child does not defend his initial assumption by providing arguments, refusing to assume the burden of proof since, for him, his assumption needs no defence (*please Mom::*). On the contrary, the mother provides arguments to defend her standpoint and, therefore, assumes the burden of proof.

Although the corpus of argumentative discussions analyzed in this qualitative research is, from a quantitative point of view, insufficient to provide statistically significant data, it is worth noting that in the 48 argumentative discussions analyzed, parents advanced at least one standpoint in 45 instances, while children did so in 29 instances. In the 45 instances in which parents advanced at least one standpoint, they assumed the burden of proof, i.e. they advance at least one argument in support of their standpoint, in 43 instances (95%). In the 29 instances in which children advanced at least one standpoint, they assumed the burden of proof only in 15 instances (51%) (see Figure 13).
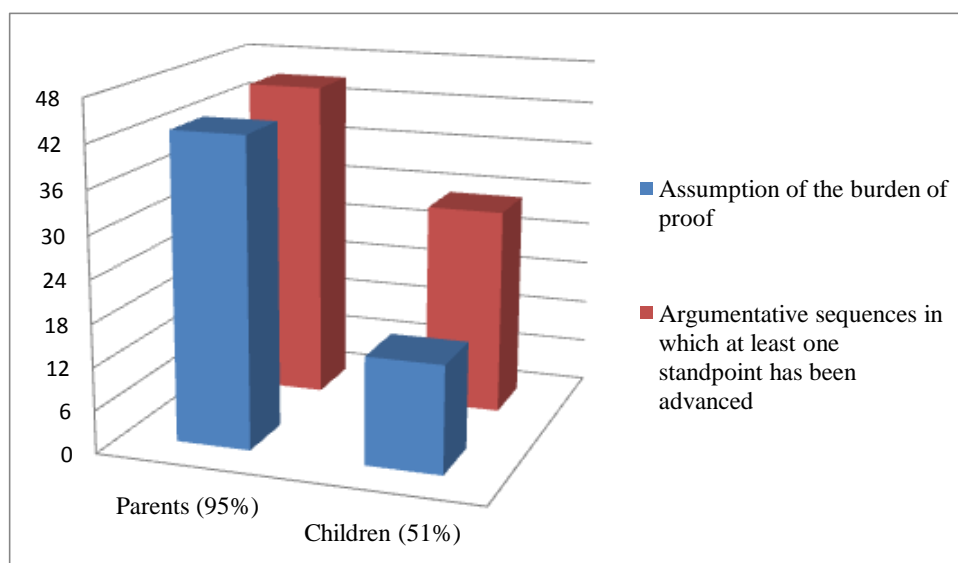
Figure 13:   **Comparing the assumption of the burden of proof by parents and**
by children

The data corpus of the present research is constituted of 48 argumentative discussions, but the sum of the times that parents and children advanced their own standpoint and assumed the burden is higher than 48. This is due to the fact that in an argumentative discussion both parties can advance more than one standpoint, e.g. in the case of a *multiple* dispute (Snoeck Henkemans, 2000). Moreover, the burden of proof is not always exclusively assumed by a single party. The following excerpt offers a clear illustration of how parents and children can both assume the burden of proof in the same argumentative discussion:

```
(26) FAM_ITA_2_(1); Mom (33); Giorgia (6,6)

1.      *MOM:        non alzarti da tavola,
                     don't leave the table

→       *MOM:        finché non abbiamo finito di mangiare tutti quanti.
                     until everyone has finished eating
```

	*MOM:	**ora, ti metto anche i fagiolini va bene?**
→		*now I will give you some French beans as well, ok?*

	*MOM:	**li mangi, non è vero?**
→		*you do eat those, don't you?*

2.	***GIO:**	**mamma, io invece dei fagiolini mangio il polipo**
		Mommy instead of the French beans, I'll eat some octopus

3.	***MOM:**	**Giorgia, un po' di fagiolini li devi anche mangiare**
		Giorgia, you must eat a few French beans as well

	*MOM:	**solo il polipo non é sufficiente**
→		*just octopus is not enough*

4.	***GIO:**	**no::**
		no::

5.	***MOM:**	**si!**
		yes!

6.	***GIO:**	**mangio il polipo, no i fagioli**
		I'll eat the octopus, not the beans

	*GIO:	**perché é troppo tutti e due**
→		*because eating both of them is too much*

7.	***MOM:**	**solo il polipo non é sufficiente**
		just octopus is not enough

8.	***GIO:**	**ma io voglio il polipo.**
		but I want the octopus

9.	***MOM:**	**Giorgia, prima devi mangiare un po' di fagiolini, e poi ti puoi mangiare il polipo**
		Giorgia, first you have to eat some French beans and afterwards you can eat octopus

	*MOM:	**dai:: pochi pochi su:**
→		*come on:: just a little:*

10.	***GIO:**	**ma poi mangio il polipo.**
		but after I'll eat the octopus

11.	***MOM:**	**va bene::**
		ok:

In this excerpt, the child and her mother have two different standpoints: Giorgia wants to eat the octopus without eating any French beans, while her mother wants Giorgia to eat both the French beans and the octopus. The mother, in lines 3 and 7, repeats the phrase "*Just octopus is not enough*", while, in line 6,

the child responds to her mother that eating both would be too much. This is a clear example in which both parent and child have assumed a burden of proof.

To conclude, in this section we have seen that parents assume the burden of proof more often than children, while children often – but not always, as is shown in the dialogue between Giorgia and her mother – evade the burden of proof, and seem not to be expected to provide reasons in support of their standpoints. This finding indicates that the burden of proof is largely on parents and, accordingly, also the decision to begin and develop an argumentative discussion. However, as will be discussed in the following section, children play an equally important argumentative role.

5.3   Different functions of children's Why–questions

In the previous section we have seen that parents assume the burden of proof more often than children. This finding, however, must not lead us to underestimate the argumentative role of children. The results of the analysis, in fact, show that children, by means of their questioning, lead their parents to justify the reasons on which their rules and prohibitions are based. One specific type of question asked by children to their parents, more than others, seems to have an important role from an argumentative perspective: the *Why–question*. In the 30 mealtime conversations constituting the general corpus of the research, I found 51 instances in which children asked Why-questions to their parents[34].

---

[34] As noted in §3.3, all the participants in the research were speakers of Italian. It is important to observe how, in Italian, the word "perché" is used both to ask "why" and as a response, similar to the English word "because". In attempting to identify all Why–questions asked by children included in the data, we did not consider each instance of "perché" used by children when speaking with their parents; we took into account only those with an interrogative function.

Reviewing the literature, Children's Why-questions have long held the attention of many scholars in diverse research fields, but above all in developmental and cognitive psychology and in linguistics. The first studies date back to early 20th century. Stern (1924), who was interested in investigating the most essential sides of children's minds as they develop as far as their sixth year, in his seminal work "Psychology of early childhood" divided the development stages in which questions usually emerge into two periods. The first, named *naming period*, concerns the names of objects, and occurs at the end of children's second year. During this period, the questions that children produce refer to objects that are present or to actions related to an ongoing activity. The second, named *when and why period*, typically occurs between 3 and 4 years old. In this period, children begin to form questions about absent objects or people, or events with no immediate connection with the present. According to Piaget (1929) however, children begin to ask Why-questions because of a specific developmental need. He observed that children ask questions – in particular, Why-questions – to obtain more information in order to fill gaps in their knowledge. In accordance with Piaget, Isaacs (1930) argued that the need to ask Why-questions arose when the child has to deal with anomalies, deviations, contrasts, or differences which stimulate a sense of unease or unsettledness.

A series of later studies have emphasized the fact that children begin to ask different types of questions in different phases of development. Ervin-Tripp (1970) found that children most often begin asking Who questions first, and after, they begin to ask questions pertaining to conceptual time periods, thoughts, and ideas by means of Why-, How-, and When-questions. Also Tyack and Ingram (1977) and in more recent years Rowland and her colleagues (2003) support the idea of the subsequentiality of children's questions. Tyack and Ingram (1977) examined children's production and comprehension of questions with the aim of discerning typical patterns in question acquisition. They

observed that children first, as early as aged 2, learn to ask What- and Where-questions, followed by Why-, How-, and When-questions. These last require a great capacity for abstract thinking, and for this reason they appear later in the development. Similar to what was found by Tyack and Ingram (1977), Rowland and her colleagues (2003) also found that children first learn to ask Where- and What-questions, and only after Why-, How- and When-questions.

More recent studies have shown that the ability of children to answer as well as ask Why-questions, and to clarify the reasons on which their answers are based, increase rapidly between the ages of 2 and 5 years (Loukusa et al., 2008; Valian and Casey, 2003). This aspect plays an important role in the development of children's verbal skills and therefore in their capacity to interact with adults and peers. According to Chouinard, Harris and Maratsos (2007:vii), "asking questions allows children to gain information they need to move their knowledge structures closer to an adult-like state". By focusing on pre-school-aged children (aged 2–5 years), the authors observed that when parents do not provide, or cannot provide satisfactory answers to a child's question, the child perseveres in asking his/her question to gain the requested information. Chouinard and her colleagues also observed that during the development children learn to formulate Why-questions more efficiently in order to gather the information they want to find out. In the authors' view, the ability of asking this type of questions constitutes an efficient cognitive development mechanism. In a recent work focused on preschool children aged 2–4 years, Frazier et al. (2009) examined children's Why-questions and their reactions to the answers they received in conversations with adults. Similar to what was found by Chouinard, Harris and Maratsos (2007), they observed that children agree and ask further questions following adult explanations. On the contrary, children keep asking Why-questions and provide their own explanation following unsatisfactory or non-existent explanations by parents.

Altogether, this concise review of the most relevant literature on children's Why-questions indicates that what drives children to ask Why-questions to their parents is essentially the need to acquire new information. In most cases, the studies so far realized bring attention to the *causal-explanatory function* (henceforth, referred to as explanatory function) of children's Why-questions, i.e. how this type of question allows children to ask for knowledge of the reasons that have caused an event. In the general corpus, In most cases, children asked Why-questions with an explanatory function (N= 40; 78%). In particular, they frequently asked Why-questions to their parents to acquire an explanation of an event with an immediate connection to the present[35]. This function is seen, for example, in an exchange between a father and his 9 year-old son, Francesco. Looking out the window, Francesco notes that, unlike previous days, it is not raining. He then asks his father:

(27)

1.   FRA: **papà, perché non piove oggi?**
                 Daddy, why isn't it raining today?

2.   DAD: **perché oggi le nuvole sono piene d'acqua**
                 because today, the clouds are full of water

→   DAD: **ma la vogliono tenere tutta per loro, ancora un po'!**
                 but they want to keep it just for themselves a little longer!

In responding to his child's Why-question, the father provides an explanation, adapting the content and language of his answer to the child's level of understanding. Through his Why-question, the child seeks to know the cause

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[35] This finding is not in line with what was found by some previous studies (e.g. Stern, 1924; Tyack and Ingram, 1977), which stressed that children ask Why-questions above all to know the reason of events with no immediate connection to the present (*abstract thinking*). The plausible explanation of this finding can be due to the types of issues typically discussed by parents and children during mealtime. In the general corpus of the research, family members often discuss events closely related to mealtime such as having to eat a certain food or adopting proper table-manners.

of a non-event, and he and his father are in agreement that the event is true. The children observed asked explanatory Why-questions also to figure out the reasons on which the parents' reactions to their behaviors were based. This aspect is illustrated in the following discussion between a mother and her 8 years old son, Stefano:

```
(28) FAM_SWISS_4_(1); Mom (34); Stefano (8,5)

        %act:       MOM da un'occhiata rapida a DAD
                    MOM gives a quick glance towards DAD
1.      *MOM:       sono talmente stanca, che non riesco neanche a
                    mangiare [:!riprendendo a mangiare]
                    I'm too tired to even eat [:! begins eating again]

2.      *STE:       0 [:! ride sguaiatamente da fuori campo]
                    0 [:!  laughs loudly from off camera]

3.      *MOM:       Stefano, questa risata mi sta facendo davvero
                    arrabbiare
                    Stefano, your laughter is getting on my nerves.

        %pau:       1.0. sec

4.      *STE:       perché mamma ((da fuori campo))?
                    why Mommy?((off screen))

5.      *MOM:       la trovo stupida.
                    I find it very stupid
```

In line 1, the mother says that in that moment she is not feeling good. The reaction by Stefano to his mother's statement is not a typical example of emphatic behavior: he starts laughing loudly (line 2). The mother is clearly disturbed by her son's behavior and plainly communicates her thoughts to him (line 3). At this point, the child asks his mother the reason why she is upset (line 4). The mother, still visibly disturbed by his behavior, concludes the sequence with a fairly brusque reply: *I find it very stupid* (line 5). In this dialogue, there is no difference of opinion between the mother and the child. Even though the child wants to know why his behavior has upset his mother, he is not casting doubt on the fact that his mother is upset because of his behavior. As a

consequence, the child's Why-question serves to solicit an explanation from his mother.

This study has also exposed an additional function of children's Why–questions. In the corpus, in fact, I observed that children asked Why-questions not only to know the reasons of events already ascertained and the reasons on which no difference of opinion between children and parents are based, but also to put into doubt the validity of the reasons on which the parents' opinions are based, and to know the purpose of accomplishing the action queried. The Why-questions with an argumentative function, however, were less frequent than those with an explanatory function. In fact, in the corpus I found children had asked Why-questions with an argumentative function 11 times (22%).

For example, the argumentative Why-question was used by children to ask for the reasons on which the rules, prohibitions, commands, invitations, suggestions, and recommendations were based, as in the following dialogue between a mother and her 5 years old son, Gabriele:

(29) **FAM_ITA_1_(2);** Mom (34); Gabriele (5,4)

1	*GAB:	**mamma:: guarda!** *Mom:: look!*
→	*GAB:	**guarda cosa sto facendo con il limone** *look what I'm doing with the lemon*
→	*GAB:	**sto cancellando!** *I'm rubbing it out!*
→	*GAB:	**sto cancellando questo colore!** *I'm rubbing out the color!*
	%sit:	**MAM prende dei limoni e si china di fronte a GAB di modo che il suo viso risulti all'altezza di quello di GAB** *MOM takes the lemon and bends down in front of GAB so that her face is level with his*
	%sit:	**MAM posa alcuni limoni sul tavolo** *MOM places the lemon on the table*

```
2        *GAB:      dai:: dammelo
                    give it to me

3        *MOM:      eh?
                    eh?

4        *GAB:      posso avere questo limone?
                    can I have this lemon?

5        *MOM:      no:: no:: no:: no::
                    no:: no:: no:: no::

6        *GAB:      perché no?
                    why not?

7        *MOM:      perché no? perché Gabriele, mamma ha bisogno dei
                    limoni.
                    why not? because Gabriele, Mom needs the lemons

8        *GAB:      perché mamma?
                    why Mom?

9        *MOM:      perché, Gabriele, tuo papà vuole mangiare una
                    buona insalata oggi [:! con un tono di voce basso e
                    dolce]
                    because, Gabriele, your Dad wants to eat a good salad today [:!
                    with a low and sweet tone of voice]

10       *GAB:      ah:: va bene mamma
                    ah:: ok Mom
```

In this dialogue, we observe a difference of opinion between the child and his mother, since they have two opposite standpoints. Therefore, the child's Why-questions (lines 6 and 8) have both an argumentative function because the child, by asking this type of question, is opposing to his mother's prescription.

Typically, Why-questions with an argumentative function are followed by arguments advanced by parents which justify their opposite standpoint. An example that illustrates this aspect is the following dialogue between Manuela and her father:

(30) **FAM_SWISS_2_(3)**; Dad (39); Manuela (7,4)

```
1.       MAN:       questo poco di pasta lo posso lasciare? ((sollevando
                    leggermente il suo piatto per mostrarne il contenuto
                    al papà))
                    Can I leave this little bit of pasta? ((slightly raising the plate to show the
                    contents to her father))
```

Here the expression *this little bit* aims to obtain a concession. The father, on the contrary, replies with a prohibition:

```
2.      DAD:        no, non puoi
                    no, you can't
```

At this point, the daughter, interested in challenging the parental prohibition, asks:

```
3.      MAN:        perché papà?
                    why Dad?
```

In his answer, the father clearly rebuts the daughter's argument based on *this little bit*:

```
4.      DAD:        non ne hai mangiato per niente, Manuela.
                    you have eaten nothing, Manuela
```

In this dialogue, there is a difference of opinion between the child and her father. The child wants to leave a little bit of pasta that is still on her plate, while the father disagrees with her daughter (*no, you can't*) (line 2). By asking a Why-question (line 3), the child shows her willingness to know the reasons on which the father's prohibition is based. At this point, the father puts forward an argument in support of his standpoint (*you have eaten nothing, Manuela*) (line 4).

The following dialogue – already discussed in §5.1 – between the 4-year-old Alessandro and his mother is an illustration of an additional feature of children's Why-questions with an argumentative function:

```
(31) FAM_SWISS_4_(1); Mom (34); Alessandro (4,6)

        %sit:       ALE tocca e guarda il contenitore delle medicine
                    ALE touches and looks at the container with the pills
```

```
1.      *ALE:       io: me la prendo una di queste qui.
                    I'm: going to take one of these

→       *ALE:       si!
                    yes!

2.      *MAM:       non puoi Alessandro!
                    you can't, Alessandro!

3.      *ALE:       eh?
                    what?

4.      *MOM:       non puoi. [:! scuotendo la testa]
                    you can't [:! shakes his head]

5.      *ALE:       perché no?
                    why not?

6.      *MOM:       perché i bambini, devono prendere delle medicine
                    speciali
                    because children, have to take special medicine

→       *MOM:       non possono prendere le medicine degli adulti
                    they can't take the same medicines as adults

→       *MOM:       altrimenti, si sentono male.
                    otherwise, they will get ill
```

In this dialogue, there is a difference of opinion between Alessandro and his mother, since they have two opposing standpoints. Alessandro sees a medicine container and he is attracted to it. He tells his mother that he is going to take a pill from the container, but the mother disagrees with her son. Through his Why-question, Alessandro makes clear that he wants to know the reason why he cannot take the pill, i.e. the reason for the prohibition imposed by his mother. Argumentatively speaking, the child asks a Why-question to request the *burden of proof*[36] by assuming a waiting position before accepting or putting into doubt the parental prescription. As a matter of fact, by asking a Why-question the child challenges his mother to justify her standpoint.

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[36] Van Eemeren (2010:213-240) provides a comprehensive discussion on the notion of "burden of proof" and its relevance for argumentation. In this regard, see also van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002b).

In a series of recent studies, Rocci (2008c, 2009b) has shown that the presence of significant linguistic indicators such as "*Why not?*" and "*Because*" suggests that an argumentative discussion is taking place, i.e. an attempt to solve a disagreement between a party who defends a certain standpoint and a party who challenges this standpoint. Similarly, in this study children's Why-question appears to be in a number of cases a linguistic indicator[37] of beginning of an argumentative discussion between parents and children during everyday conversations at home. In most cases, the aim of children's Why-questions with an argumentative function is to know the purpose of accomplishing the action queried by parents. Children, asking this type of question, did put into doubt parental rules and prescriptions, which are frequently implicit or based on rules not initially known by or previously made explicit to the child[38].

Both the explanatory and argumentative types of Why–questions have a *knowledge-seeking function,* i.e. children asking such questions are seeking knowledge of something. This results is similar to what found by previous studies on this topic (e.g. Piaget, 1929, Isaacs, 1930; Chouinard et al., 2007; Frazier et al., 2009). There is one aspect, however, that clearly distinguishes between the two: the presence or absence of a difference of opinion between the parties. The explanatory Why–questions aim to gain an understanding of the causes of an event already ascertained and acknowledged by parents and children. The explanation, in fact, moves from an ascertained fact, and aims not

---

37 For a comprehensive study on linguistic indicators of argumentative moves, see van Eemeren, Houtlosser, and Snoeck Henkemans (2007).

38 As observed by Ervin-Tripp and Strage (1985), parental prescriptions which are implicit or based on rules not initially known by children base their strength and effectiveness mainly on parents' authority. In this regard, Bova and Arcidiacono (2012) have shown that the parents' authority can be an effective argumentative strategy adopted by parents with their children only if the following two conditions are met: 1) the nature of the relationship between the person who represents the authority (often, but not always, the parents) and the person to whom the argument is addressed (the child) is based on the certainty of positive feelings, rather than on fear of punishment, and 2) the reasons behind a prescription are not to be hidden from the child's eyes, but are to be known and shared by parents and children.

to justify – as facts require no justification – but to identify the reasons why the fact is true or the event occurred. The argumentative Why–questions, instead, presuppose a difference of opinion between parties, as argumentation starts from a questionable thesis, and ideally ends with conclusive proof[39] (Fig. 14).
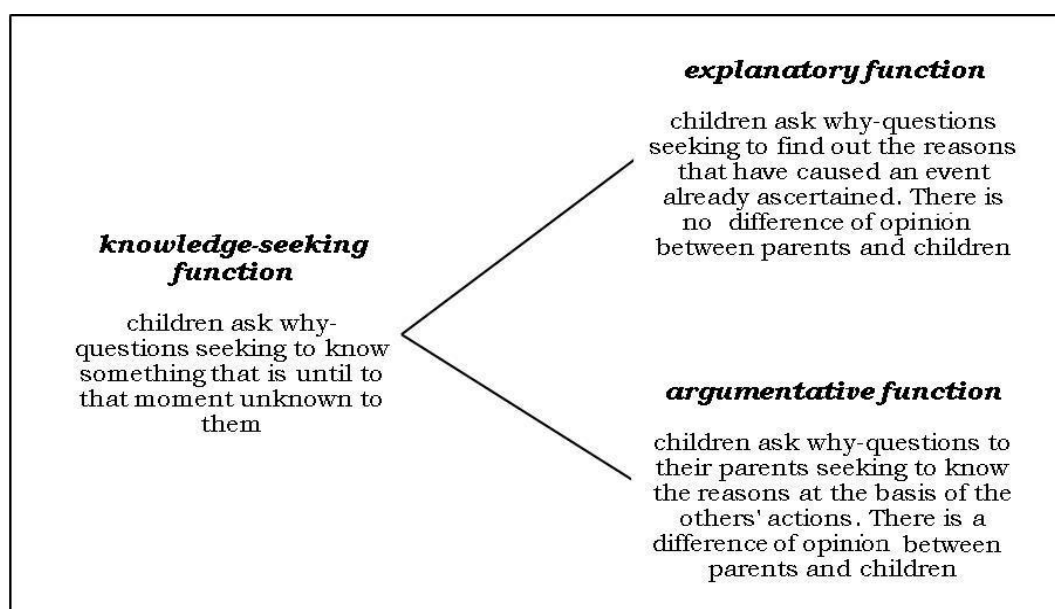
Figure 14: Functions of children's Why–questions

Finally, I want to stress another function related to argumentation of children's Why–questions. The children, through their Why–questions, place the burden of proof on parents. In doing so, they assume a waiting position before accepting or casting doubt on the parental prescription. For example, in the last excerpt we have seen that Alessandro wants to know the reason why he cannot

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[39] According to Walton (2004, p. 72), the difference between the explanatory and argumentative functions of Why-questions concerns the starting point of explanation and argumentation: "The purpose of an argument is to get the hearer to come to accept something that is doubtful or unsettled. The purpose of an explanation is to get him to understand something that he already accepts as a fact". For a detailed study on the differences between argumentation and explanation, see also Snoeck-Henkemans (1999, 2001).

take a pill from the container; by asking a Why–question, Alessandro is implicitly saying to his mother: "I am waiting to hear your reasons. Only after that will I be able to decide if your prohibition is proper or not". This does not actually mean that Alessandro will then decide whether or not to obey the mother's prescription, but that Alessandro puts himself in a waiting position before deciding if the mother's prescription is acceptable to him or not. Argumentatively speaking, this behavior can be seen as a specific form of strategic maneuvering adopted by Alessandro to make his mother justify her ban.

5.4 Parents and children co-construct the beginning of their argumentative discussions

In this chapter, I initially focused my investigation on the types of issues parents and children most frequently engage in argumentative discussions. The findings show that argumentative discussions between parents and children revolve around two general types of issues: parental prescriptions and children's requests. Parental prescriptions are initially triggered by a standpoint advanced by parents, whereas the second type of issue is triggered by a request initially advanced by children. In particular, parental prescriptions often concern activities largely related to mealtime, such as having to eat a certain food or adopting correct table-manners, while children's requests refer to a wide range of topics, from issues closely related to mealtime, to issues more generally related to children's daily life.

Next, the analysis has shown that parents and children have two distinct but equally crucial functions to fulfill in order for an argumentative discussion to occur. On the one hand, the burden of proof is essentially always on the parents.

As a result, the decision to engage in an argumentative discussion with their children rests essentially on the parents' shoulders as well. Essentially on the parents' shoulders, but not exclusively. On the other hand, in fact, even if it is true that parents more often put forward arguments to support their standpoints than children, what emerges from the analysis is that children, through their questioning, encourage their parents to justify their rules and prohibitions. In this regard, the Why–question with argumentative function (we have also seen the explanatory function of this type of question) represents a linguistic indicator of the beginning of an argumentative discussion. The children's Why-question is also used as a specific means of shifting the burden of proof, allowing the child to assume a waiting position before accepting, doubting, or rejecting a parental prescription.

These results suggest that the decision to start an argumentative discussion is "co-constructed" by parents and children. This calls to mind the neo-Piagetian notion of "*co-construction of knowledge*" (Doise & Mugny, 1984; Perret-Clermont, 1980), i.e. the process in which more than one person is involved in the construction of new knowledge. In fact, during mealtime conversations, the presence and inclusion of children seems to favor the beginning of argumentative discussions and represents a *stimulus factor*, inducing parents to reason with their children.

6. Prevailing strategic maneuvers and types of conclusion of the argumentative discussions

In this chapter, I shall present and discuss the findings of the second phase of the empirical analysis. This last phase of analysis is aimed to single out the prevailing strategic maneuvers adopted by parents and children in the argumentation stage of the argumentative discussions (*Question 4*), and to investigate how they conclude their argumentative discussions (*Question 5*). Combined, this and the previous phase of analysis provide a comprehensive picture of the argumentative interactions between parents and children during mealtime, moving from the reasons which trigger their inception and development to the possible types of conclusions.

In order to analyze the prevailing strategic maneuvers and to reconstruct systematically the inferential configuration of the arguments advanced by parents and children, I refer to the extended pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation integrating the notion of strategic maneuvering (van Eemeren, 2010), and on the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2010). As done in the previous chapter, in discussing the results I present a selection of the analyses representative of the results obtained from the larger set of analyses conducted on the entire corpus of argumentative discussions.

This chapter is organized as follows: in the first part, the prevailing strategic maneuverings adopted by parents (§6.1) and children (§6.2) are presented. In the last part of the chapter, we shall see how parents and children actually conclude their argumentative discussions (§6.3).

6.1 *Prevailing strategic maneuvers adopted by parents*

The analysis of the prevailing strategic maneuvers adopted by parents involved the 45 argumentative discussions in which they put forward at least one argument to support their own standpoint. The findings show that the arguments advanced by parents can be ascribed to three main categories. In the following sections, we shall look at each of them in detail.

6.1.1 Quality and quantity

A great many of the arguments used by parents with their children refer to the concepts of quality (positive or negative) and quantity (too much or too little). These arguments are often used by parents when the discussion they engage in with their children is related to food, as in the following dialogue between a mother and her daughter, Adriana, aged 4 years and 4 months:

```
(32) FAM_ITA_4_(3); Mom (37); Adriana (4,4)
```

```
1.      *MOM:       Adriana, devi mangiare l'insalata.
```
Adriana, you must eat the salad

```
2.      *ADR:       no:: non mi piace ((l'insalata))
```
no:: I don't like it

```
3.      *MOM:       Adriana, devi mangiare l'insalata perché è
                    nutriente.
```
Adriana, you must eat the salad because it is nutritious
```
4.      *ADR:       mhm::
```
mhm::

```
        %act:       ADR inizia a mangiare l'insalata ma sembra
                    controvoglia
```
ADR starts eating the salad, but seems unwilling

In this dialogue, the mother emphasizes the health properties of salad to convince her daughter that she should eat it. The reconstruction of the inferential configuration of this argument (Fig. 15), by means of the AMT, shall allow us to identify the reasoning that underlies it:

Endoxon:
Eating nutritious food leads to positive outcomes for Adriana

Locus from final cause

Datum: Salad is a nutritious food

Maxim: If action X leads to a positive outcome for x, then action X should be done by x

First Conclusion – Minor Premise:
Eating salad has a positive outcome for Adriana

Final Conclusion: Adriana should eat salad
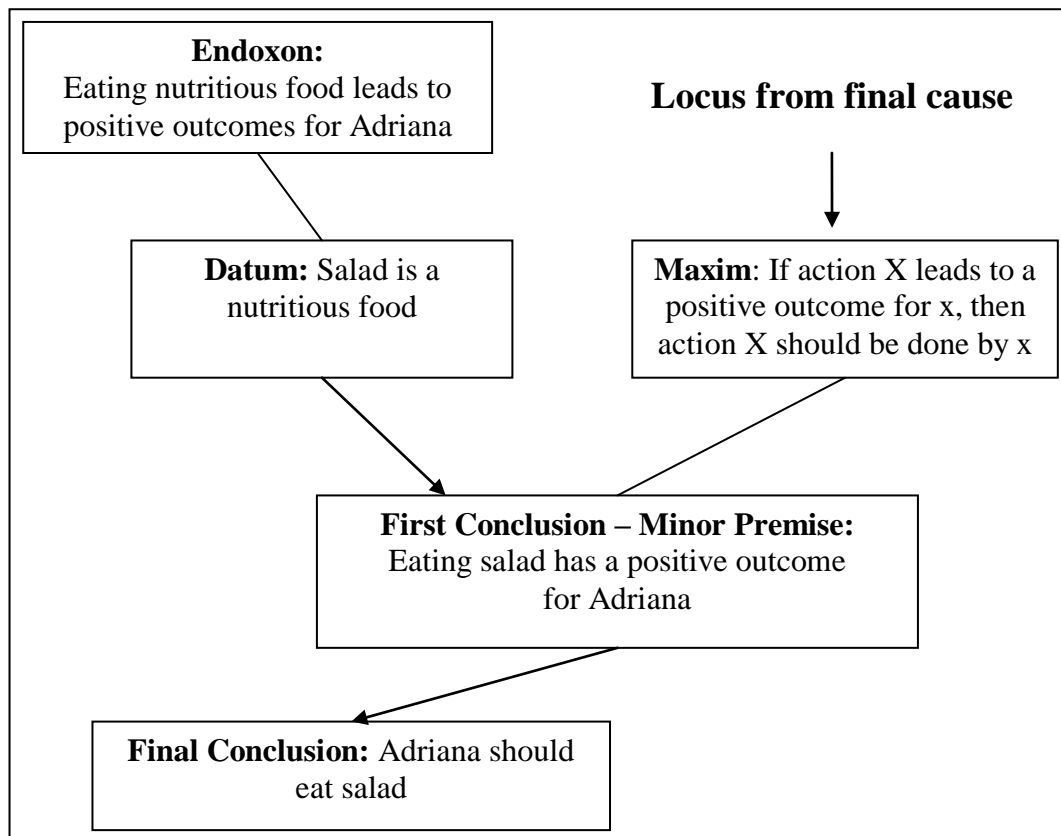
Figure 15: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (32)

Specified on the right-hand side of the diagram is the inferential principle, i.e. the maxim, on which the mother's argumentation is based: "If action X leads to a positive outcome for x, then action X should be done by x". This maxim is engendered from the locus from final cause. In order for this maxim to generate the final conclusion, which coincides with the standpoint to be supported, the following minor premise is needed: "Eating salad has a

positive outcome for Adriana". This leads to the conclusion that "Adriana should eat salad".

Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, a second line of reasoning is developed to support the former one. In this argument, the endoxon can be described as follows: "Eating nutritious food leads to positive outcomes for Adriana". The datum constituting the minor premise of the endoxical syllogism is that "Salad is a nutritious food". The datum, combined with the endoxon, produces the conclusion that "Eating salad has a positive outcome for Adriana".

In the following excerpt, we shall see how a father uses an *argument from quantity* with his 4-year-old son, Gabriele:

(33) **FAM_ITA_4_(3);** Dad (37); Gabriele (4,4)

       %sit: **GAB sta bevendo la Coca-cola**
                    GAB is drinking Coca-cola

1.   ***DAD:**   **basta Gabriele!**
                    that's enough, Gabriele!

       %act: GAB smette di bere
                    GAB stops drinking

→   ***DAD:**   **adesso ti do il riso.**
                    now I'll give you some rice

2.   ***GAB:**   **no, non lo voglio: ((sedendosi sulla sedia))**
                    I don't want anything else ((sitting on the chair))

3.   ***DAD:**   **il riso col sugo di pomodoro**
                    it's rice with tomato sauce

       %pau: **1.0. sec**

4.   ***GAB:**   **per favore, niente. [:!facendo cenni di negazione col capo]**
                    please no more [:! shaking his head in refusal]

5.   ***DAD:**   **no:: non hai mangiato abbastanza.**
                    no:: you haven't eaten enough

6.   ***GAB:**   **no:::**
                    no:::

       %act: **GAB si alza e corre in un'altra stanza**
                    GAB gets up and runs into another room

In this dialogue, the father tells his child that he has to eat a little more rice because, until that moment, he hasn't eaten enough. Figure 16 shows the reconstruction of the reasoning behind this argument:
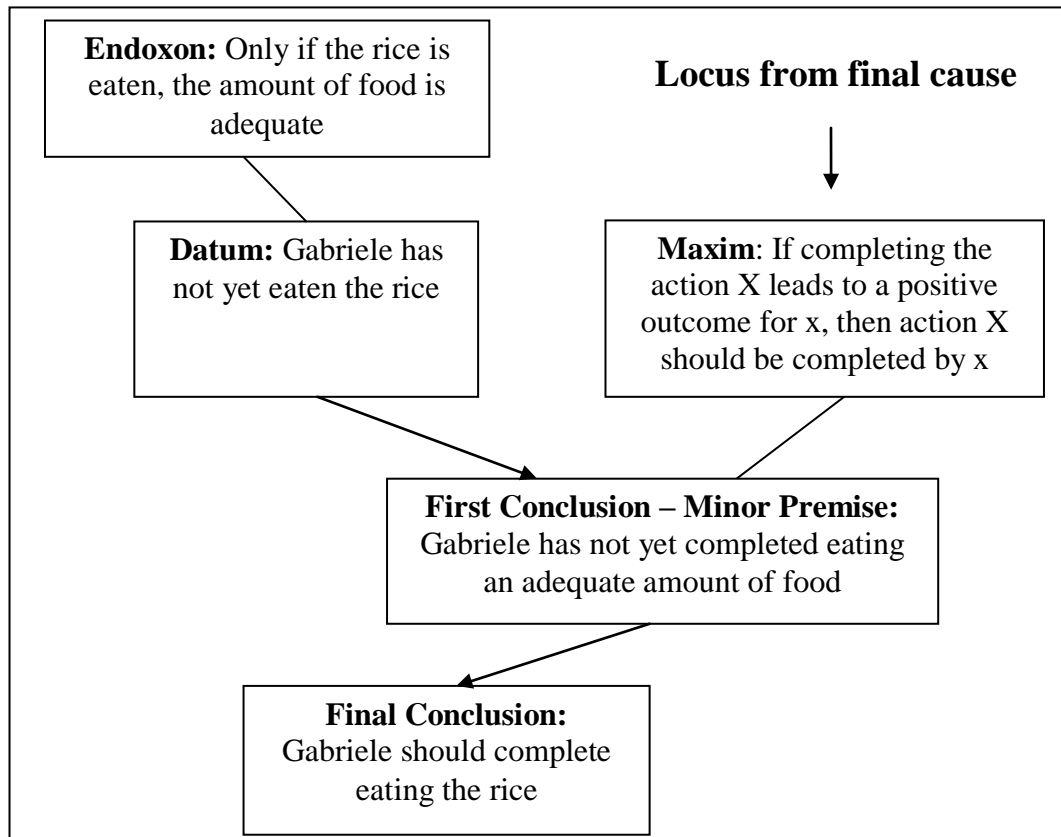
Figure 16: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (33)

In this example, it is interesting to notice that the inferential principle is engendered from the same locus of the previous example (locus from final cause), but from a different maxim: "If completing the action X leads to a positive outcome for x, then action X should be completed by x". The minor premise "Gabriele has not yet completed eating an adequate amount of food" leads to the conclusion that "Gabriele should complete eating the rice". Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, the endoxon can be described as follows:

"Only if the rice is eaten, the amount of food is adequate". The datum, "Gabriele has not yet eaten the rice", combined with the endoxon, produces the first conclusion that "Gabriele has not yet completed eating an adequate amount of food".

In this case, the argument put forward by the father does not succeed in convincing the child to eat the rice. Looking at the reconstruction of its inferential configuration, we see that the endoxon on which this argument is based is not a real endoxon. In fact, the child is not putting into doubt the datum (Gabriele has not yet eaten the rice), but the fact that only if the rice is eaten, the amount of food is adequate, namely, the endoxon. Therefore, the father's argument is based on a premise which is not shared by both parties but only by the father.

Arguments from quality and quantity are not only used by parents to convince their children to eat, but also to convince children *not* to eat, as in the following two examples:

(34) **FAM_SWISS_3_(3);** Dad (35); Giovanni (7,3)

1.   *DAD: **basta fagiolini, Giovanni**
                   stop eating the French beans, Giovanni

2.   *GIO: **no:: voglio ancora!**
                   no:: I want more!

3.   *DAD: **no! basta, ne hai mangiato già abbastanza**
                   no! you have already eaten enough French beans

(35) **FAM_SWISS_5_(2);** Mom (37); Francesco (9,3)

1.   *FRA: **posso avere un pezzo di prosciutto cotto?**
                   can I have a piece of ham?

2.   *DAD: **no Francesco.**
                   no, Francesco

3.   *FRA: **si::**
                   si::

```
4.      *DAD:       no, è troppo salato
                    no it's too salty
```

The argument from quality and quantity are also used together in the same discussion, being accompanied by other types of arguments. For example along with an argument by analogy, as in the following example:

```
(36) FAM_ITA_1_(3); Dad (38); Gabriele (5,4)

1.      *GAB:       papi: basta papi [: ceci]
                    Daddy: no more now [chickpeas]

2.      *DAD:       no:: no:: Gabriele, almeno un altro boccone
                    no:: no:: Gabriele, at least one more mouthful

3.      *GAB:       solo un altro boccone.
                    just one more mouthful

4.      *DAD:       poi sono pure buoni ((i ceci))
                    they are also good ((chickpeas))

5.      *GAB:       solo un boccone, e poi basta.
                    just one mouthful and that's all

6.      *DAD:       guarda, sono così buoni che anche se ho tutte le
                    bolle in bocca, io li sto mangiando con tanto dolore
                    look, they are so good: even if I have many bumps in my mouth and
                    feel so much pain I'm eating them

7.      *GAB:       mhmm:: ((sembra incuriosito))
                    mhmm:: ((he seems intrigued))

        %act:       GAB inizia a mangiare i ceci
                    GAB starts eating the chickpeas
```

In the corpus, when parents put forward arguments from quality and quantity, the parents often adapt their language to the child's level of understanding. The parents' choice of using a language that can be easily understood by children is a typical trait of the argumentative interactions between parents and children during mealtime. For example, if the parents' purpose is to feed their child, the food is described as "very good" or "nutritious", and its quantity is "too little". On the contrary, if the parents'

purpose is not to feed the child further, in terms of quality the food is described as "salty" or "not good", and in quantitative terms as "it's quite enough" or "it's too much". In this example, the father adapts his language to the child's level of understanding also in line 6, where he talks of "bumps in his mouth".

This finding shows that the dimension of adaptation to audience demand is particularly evident in the selection of stylistic devices by parents in this type of strategic maneuvers adopted with their children. This aspect is also confirmed in the other two types of strategic maneuvers most often adopted by parents with their children: the appeal to consistency, and expert opinion and authority of affective relationships.

6.1.2 Appeal to consistency

The second type of parental strategic maneuvering that emerged from the analysis is represented by a series of arguments that refer to the consistency with past behaviors. This type of argument can be described through the following question: "If you have explicitly or implicitly affirmed it in the past, why aren't you maintaining it now?". The next example illustrates this type of parental strategic maneuvering clearly. The protagonists of this dialogue are a mother and her daughter, Clara, aged 3 years and 10 months. The mother wants to give her some risotto, but Clara disagrees with her mother and does not want to eat it:

(37) **FAM_ITA_2_(2);** Mom (33); Dad (34); Clara (3,10)

1.   *MOM: **bimbe, la cena è pronta**
                     girls, dinner is ready

→   *MOM: **Clara, tu lo mangi il riso?**
                     Clara, do you want some rice?

→   *MOM: **risottino giallo con le polpettine?**
                     yellow risottino with meatballs?

```
2.      *CLA:       no:: non lo voglio il risotto.
                    no:: I don't want the risotto

3.      *MOM:       c'è lo zafferano!
                    it's made with saffron!

4.      *CLA:       e che cos'è?
                    and what is that?

5.      *DAD:       è una polvere gialla
                    it's a yellow powder

6.      *MOM:       quand'eri piccola ti piaceva
                    when you were a baby you used to like it

→       *MOM:       ti piaceva tantissimo!
                    you used to like it very much!

        %act:       DAD avvicina a CLA una forchettata di riso
                    DAD moves towards CLA with a fork full of rice

7.      *DAD:       assaggia
                    try it

8.      *CLA:       brucia!
                    it's hot!

→       *CLA:       ma è buono
                    but it is good

        %pau:       2.0. sec

        %act:       CLA continua a mangiare il risotto guardando la
                    televisione
                    CLA continues eating the rice while watching television
```

In this sequence, I want to focus on the argument put forward by the mother in line 6 (*when you were a baby you used to like it*). This argument permits the mother to make clear to her daughter that what she is going to eat is not something unknown, a dish to be wary of and to avoid, but rather a dish she has already eaten in the past and used to like very much. Referring to an action which Clara did in the past and emphasizing how good that event was for her (*you used to like it very much*), the mother tries to convince her young daughter to be consistent with the same behavior she had in the past now in the present.

The reconstruction of the inferential configuration of this argument (Fig. 17) permits us to make this point more clearly:
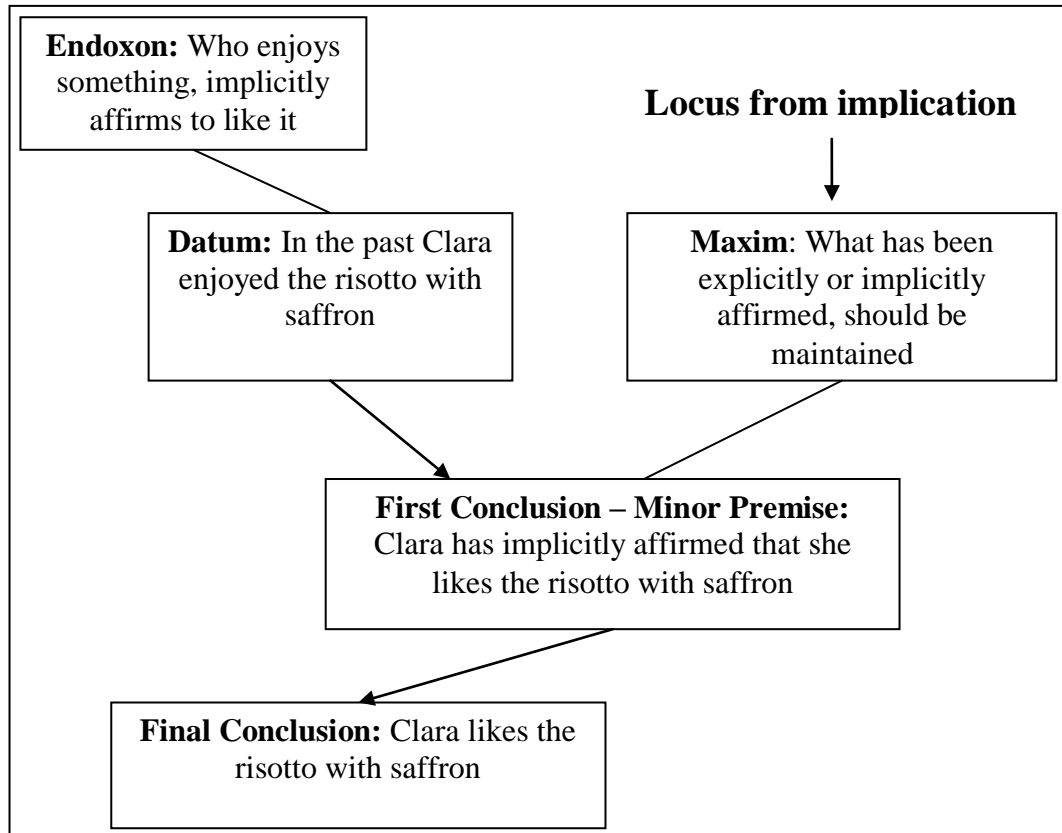
Figure 17: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (37)

The maxim "What has been explicitly or implicitly affirmed, should be maintained" is one of the maxims generated from the locus from implication. The minor premise "Clara has implicitly affirmed that she likes the risotto with saffron" combined with the maxim produce the final conclusion that "Clara likes the risotto with saffron". In this case, the endoxon shared by Clara and her mother can be described as follows: "Who enjoys something, implicitly affirms to like it". The datum, "In the past Clara enjoyed the risotto with saffron", combined with the endoxon, produce the first conclusion that "Clara has implicitly affirmed that she likes the risotto with saffron".

In the discussion between Clara and her mother, it is interesting to observe how the three aspects of strategic maneuvering come into play in the mother's argumentation. The mother introduces the argument saying: "When you were a child," even though Clara, to whom the argument is addressed, is still a child as she is only aged 3 years and 10 months. In doing so, the mother, seems to want Clara to understand that in that moment and in that context she is not a baby or a toddler, as she was before, but a member of the family with the same duties as the other members of the family. As a consequence, the Clara's behavior will not be judged as the behavior of a very young child, but as that of an "older" family member.

In the mother's argument, the choice from the topical potential and the selection of the presentational devices are adapted to the person to whom the argument is addressed, namely, the child, Clara. This type of strategic maneuver by the mother, aimed at challenging the child to conform with her past behavior, proves to be effective in convincing Clara to accept her mother's standpoint. In the corpus, I found several other examples of this type of argument by parents. Some of them are, for example, the following:

(38)

"Ne hai mangiati tanti ((funghi)) l'altra sera"
"You ate a lot of mushrooms last night".

"Ne mangi tanti di solito ((tortellini))"
"You usually eat a lot of tortellini".

Another type of appeal for consistency by parents refers not to what the child explicitly or implicitly affirmed in the past, but to what the child did *not* affirm in the past. The next short dialogue between a father and his 10-year-old son, Marco, is a clear example of this type of argument:

(39) **FAM_ITA_5_(1);** Dad (42); Marco (10,6)

1.   ***DAD:**   **lo vuoi il limone?**
                              do you want a lemon?

2.   ***MAR:**   **no::**
                              no::

3.   ***DAD:**   **ma è buono**
                              but it's tasty

4.   ***MAR:**   **a me non piace.**
                              I don't like it

5.   ***DAD:**   **ma lo hai mai provato?**
                              have you ever tried it?

6.   ***MAR:**   **no, ma non mi piace**
                              no, but I don't like it

7.   ***DAD:**   **ma come fai a dire che non ti piace, se non lo hai mai provato?**
                              but how can you say that you don't like it if you've never tried it?

→   ***DAD:**   **provalo almeno!**
                              try it at least!

8.   ***MAR:**   **no: no:**
                              no: no:

9.   ***DAD:**   **ah:: come vuoi.**
                              ah:: do what you want

In this sequence there is a difference of opinion between the father and the child, Marco. The father wants Marco to try the lemon but Marco does not want to try it. Even though the child has never eaten a lemon, he affirms that he does not like it, and he appears pretty sure of his standpoint. In this sequence, I want to focus on the father's argument in line 7, when he asks Marco: "How can you say that you don't like it if you've never tried it?". The reconstruction of the inferential configuration of this argument is illustrated in Figure 18:
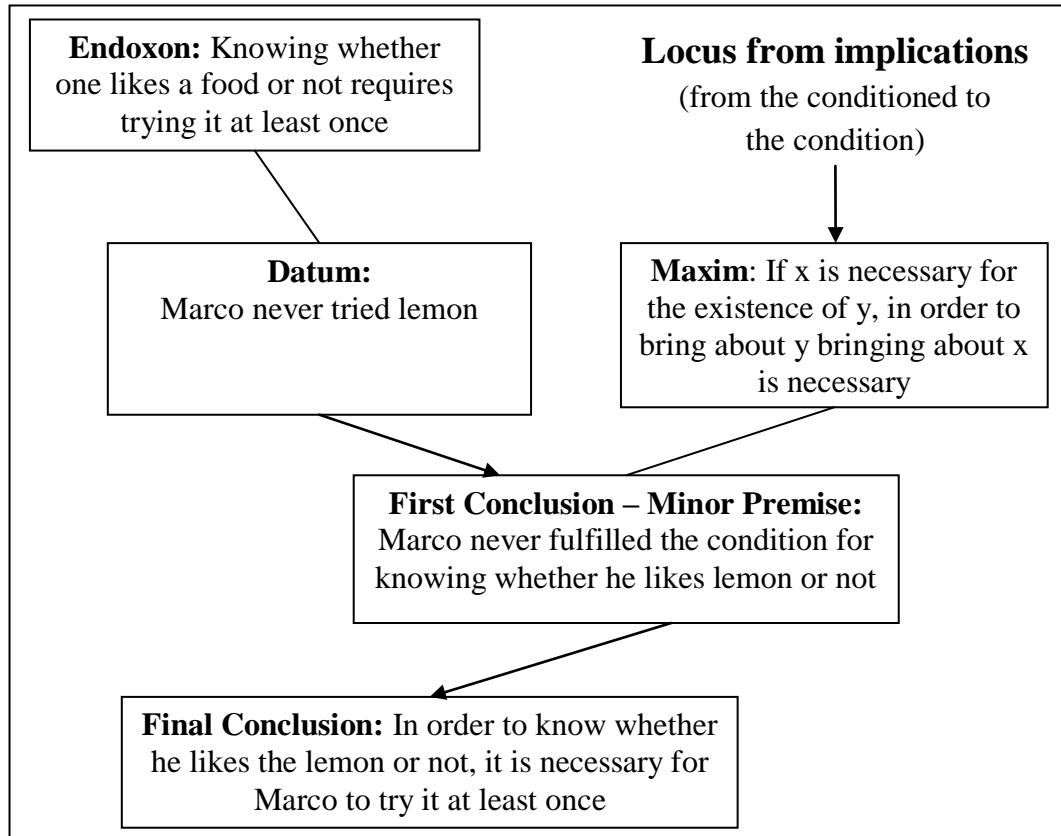
```
┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  ┌──────────────────────────┐        Locus from implications                │
│  │ Endoxon: Knowing whether │         (from the conditioned to               │
│  │ one likes a food or not  │           the condition)                       │
│  │ requires trying it at    │                  │                             │
│  │ least once               │                  ▼                             │
│  └──────────────────────────┘                                               │
│        ┌────────────────────┐    ┌────────────────────────────┐            │
│        │ Datum:             │    │ Maxim: If x is necessary    │            │
│        │ Marco never tried  │    │ for the existence of y, in  │            │
│        │ lemon              │    │ order to bring about y      │            │
│        └────────────────────┘    │ bringing about x is         │            │
│                                   │ necessary                   │            │
│                                   └────────────────────────────┘            │
└───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 18: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (39)

In this example, the maxim on which the father's argument is based is the following: "If x is necessary for the existence of y, in order to bring about y bringing about x is necessary". This is one of the maxims engendered from the locus from implications in one of its particular subcategories, from the conditioned to the condition. The reasoning follows with an inferential structure: "Marco never fulfilled the condition for knowing whether he likes lemon or not" (minor premise), which leads to the final conclusion, "In order to know whether he likes the lemon or not, it is necessary for Marco to try it at least once". Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, in this argument the endoxon can be described as follows: "Knowing whether one likes a food or not requires trying it at least once". The datum, "Marco never tried lemon", combined with

the endoxon produces the first conclusion that "Marco never fulfilled the condition for knowing whether he likes lemon or not".

What emerges from the AMT's reconstruction is that the father does not aim to highlight aspects of the child's behavior that are considered as wrong behaviors, rather it aims to teach the child that before taking a stance he must be informed about what he is going to judge. In this case, the argument put forward by the father with Marco has not been effective in convincing the child to change his stance. The reason of this can be found looking at the datum of this argument, which can be considered as wrong or, at least, as not complete. In fact, we can suppose that even if the child had never tried a lemon, he had in some way some knowledge and expectations of this food not tasting good.

To conclude, the arguments that make an appeal to consistency aim at showing children how our past actions are important to justify our present actions. In particular, these arguments seem motivated by a desire by parents to teach their children not only proper behaviors related to food or table-manners, but they also aim at teaching their children the importance of justifying their opinions by means of reasonable and consistent arguments.

6.1.3 Expert opinion and authority of affective relationships

The third type of strategic maneuvering adopted by parents in argumentative discussions with their children consists of a set of arguments which are based on differences in roles, age, skills, and competences between parents and children. One of these arguments is the so-called argument *from expert opinion*[40] (cf. *epistemic authority* in Walton, 1997). The following

---

[40] Walton (1997, pp. 77-78) distinguishes two types of authority; *epistemic* and *deontic* authority. "The *epistemic* authority is a relationship between two individuals where one is an expert in a

dialogue, already seen in §4.3, between a mother and her 4-year-old son, Alessandro, offers a clear illustration of the use of this type of argument:

```
(40) FAM_SWISS_4_(1); Mom (34); Alessandro (4,6)
```

	%act:	**ALE indica alla mamma di voler prendere una gomma per cancellare il disegno e MOM fa cenno di no agitando l'indice della mano**
		ALE tells his Mom he wants to take a rubber to erase a drawing and MOM says no clearly by shaking her finger
1.	*MOM:	**no Alessandro!**
		no Alessandro!
2.	*ALE:	**si::**
		yes::
3.	*MOM:	**no!**
		no!
→	*MOM:	**quella gomma serve per la lavagnetta,**
		that rubber is for the drawing board
→	*MOM:	**non si usa su altre cose.**
		you cannot use it on other things
[...]		
7	*MOM:	**ci siamo fino a qua Alessandro?**
		have you got it, Alessandro?
→	*MOM:	**per le penne e le matite, puoi usare la gomma da cancellare**
		for erasing pen and pencil marks you can use the rubber
8.	*ALE:	**però::**
		but::
9.	*MOM:	**cosa c'è?**
		what?
10.	*ALE:	**io voglio provare, però**
		but I want to try it

field of knowledge in such a manner that his pronouncements in this field carry a special weight of presumption for the other individual that is greater than the say-so of a layperson in that field. The epistemic type of authority, when used or appealed to in argument, is essentially an appeal to expertise, or to expert opinion. By contrast, the *deontic* type of authority is a right to exercise command or to influence, especially concerning rulings on what should be done in certain types of situations, based on an invested office, or an official or recognized position of power".

11.	*MOM:	**no tesoro.**
		no sweetheart
12.	*ALE:	**no::**
		no::
13.	*MOM:	**no tesoro, fidati che so quello che ti dico.**
		no sweetheart, trust me because I know what I am talking about
→	*MOM:	**qualche volta puoi provare,**
		sometimes, you can try
→	*MOM:	**altre volte non si prova ci si fida di quello che dicono i genitori**
		other times you can't try and you must trust what your parents tell you

The sequence starts when Alessandro tells his mother that he wants to take a rubber to erase a drawing on the blackboard. The mother disagrees with Alessandro and, in line 3, she makes clear to her son what her opinion is based on. The child is not convinced by his mother's argument and, in line 10, he replies that he wants to try to use the eraser. At this point, in line 13, the mother uses an argument that is no longer related to the properties of the eraser, but states a general rule that the child needs to follow in similar situations, which we can paraphrase as follows: Your parents have more experience than you. Therefore, you have to trust them and to accept what they say.

In the corpus, I found that parents use argument from expert opinion with their children not only referring to themselves, but also when the expert is a third person, as in the following dialogue – already seen in §5.1 – between a mother and her 5-year-old son, Filippo:

(41) **FAM_SWISS_2_(2)**; Mom (34); Filippo (5,1)

1.	*MOM:	**Filippo, devi mangiare un poco di questo formaggio**
		Filippo, you must eat a little of this cheese
2.	*FIL:	**no.**
		no
3.	*MOM:	**si, perché solo il pane non è abbastanza**
		yes, because bread alone is not enough

```
4.      *FIL:       no, non voglio il formaggio
                    no, I do not want cheese

5.      *MOM:       questo è quello che ha comprato il nonno però:: è
                    delizioso!
                    this is the one Grandpa bought, though:: it is delicious!

6.      *FIL:       davvero?
                    really?

7.      *MOM:       si, l'ha comprato il nonno!
                    yes, Grandpa bought it!

8.      *FIL:       mhm:: ((sembra pensieroso))
                    mhm:: ((he seems thoughtful))

9.      *MOM:       è delizioso!
                    it is delicious!

        %act:       MOM mette un pezzo di formaggio nel piatto di FIL
                    MOM puts a piece of cheese in FIL's plate
```

The sequence starts with the mother telling her son that he needs to eat a little cheese along with his bread. The child initially disagrees with the mother's prescription: he does not want to eat the cheese. In line 3, the mother advances an argument to support her standpoint, while the child does not provide a counterargument to defend his position, answering instead by reasserting his original stance. In line 5, the mother says that it was the cheese his grandfather bought, repeating this argument in line 7. The reasoning behind this argument is illustrated below, in Figure 19:
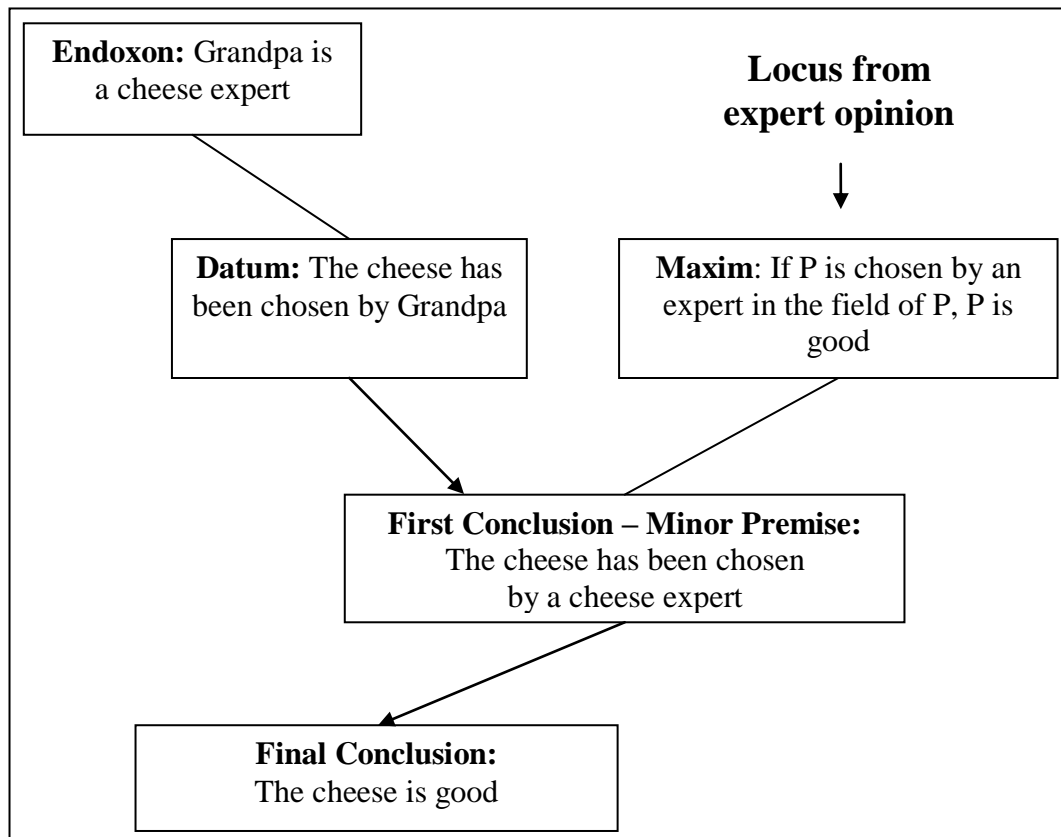
Figure 19: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (41)

On the right-hand side of the diagram the maxim on which the mother's argument is based is specified: "If P is chosen by an expert in the field of P, P is good". This is one of the maxims engendered from the locus from expert opinion. The minor premise (datum) of the topical syllogism is that "The cheese has been chosen by a cheese expert", which combined with the maxim brings to the following final conclusion: "The cheese is good". Looking at the endoxical dimension of the diagram, in this argument the endoxon is as follows: "Grandpa is a cheese expert". The minor premise of the endoxical dimension (The cheese has been chosen by Grandpa) combined with the endoxon, produces the conclusion that "The cheese has been chosen by a cheese expert".

In this example, it is interesting to observe that the person who represents

the expert is not one of the two parents but the grandfather. Of course, we cannot know if the grandfather is really an expert regarding the quality of cheese, but what matters here is that in the child's eyes his grandfather is certainly an outstanding expert, probably in many other fields as well!

This example discussed above allows to move to another significant aspect I want to focus on my analysis: the importance of the specific nature of the interpersonal relationship between parents and children and how it relates to the concept of authority[41]. The following dialogue between a mother and her 5-year-old son, Gabriele – already seen in §5.3 – will allow to make this point clear:

(42) **FAM_ITA_1_(2);** Mom (34); Gabriele (5,4)

1   ***GAB:**   **mamma:: guarda!**
Mom:: look!

→   ***GAB:**   **guarda cosa sto facendo con il limone**
look what I'm doing with the lemon

→   ***GAB:**   **sto cancellando!**
I'm rubbing out!

→   ***GAB:**   **sto cancellando questo colore!**
I'm rubbing out the color!

     %sit: **MAM prende dei limoni e si china di fronte a GAB di modo che il suo viso risulti all'altezza di quello di GAB**
MOM takes the lemon and bends down in front of GAB so that her face is level with his

     %sit: **MAM posa alcuni limoni sul tavolo**
MOM places the lemon on the table

2   ***GAB:**   **dai:: dammelo**
give it to me

3   ***MOM:**   **eh?**
eh?

---

[41] The last part of this section is largely based on a paper published in *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* (Bova & Arcidiacono, forthcoming). I am grateful to the editor, Wolfgang Wagner and to Wiley for permission to reproduce large portions of that text.

```
4        *GAB:        posso avere questo limone?
                      can I have this lemon?

5        *MOM:        no:: no:: no:: no::
                      no:: no:: no:: no::

6        *GAB:        perché no?
                      why not?

7        *MOM:        perché no? perché Gabriele, mamma ha bisogno dei
                      limoni.
                      why not? because Gabriele, Mom needs the lemons

8        *GAB:        perché mamma?
                      why Mom?

9        *MOM:        perché, Gabriele, tuo papà vuole mangiare una
                      buona insalata oggi [:! con un tono di voce basso e
                      dolce]
                      because, Gabriele, your Dad wants to eat a good salad today [:!  with a low
                      and sweet tone of voice]

10       *GAB:        ah:: va bene mamma
                      ah:: ok Mom
```

The sequence starts when Gabriele tells his mother that he is erasing the colour from a drawing by using a lemon. The mother clearly disagrees with this kind of use of the lemon by Gabriele, and decides to take it and put it on the table. At this point, a difference of opinion arises between Gabriele and his mother, because he wants to have one of the lemons that are on the table to play with (*give it to me*), while the mother states that he cannot play with the lemon (*no, no, no, no*). Gabriele, in line 6, asks his mother the reason for her forbidding it. The mother, in line 7, answers that she needs the lemons, without providing any justification for her need. As we can observe from Gabriele's answer, in line 8, the mother's need is not sufficient to convince the child to accept her refusal and to change his opinion. In fact, he keeps asking his mother the reason why he cannot have the lemon:

```
6.       *GAB:        why not?
7.       *MOM:        why not? because Gabriele, Mom needs the lemons
8.       *GAB:        why Mom?
```

In her second argument, the mother says to the child, in a low and sweet tone of voice, that she needs the lemons because Dad wants to eat a good salad (*Dad wants*). At this point, Gabriele accepts the argument put forward by his mother and marks the concluding stage of this discussion.

The reconstruction of the inferential configuration of the two arguments put forward by the mother (lines 7 and 9) allows us to highlight the specific nature of the relation between authority and the type of relationship between parents and children. The first argument put forward by the mother to convince Gabriele to accept her standpoint is: "Mom needs the lemons" (see Figure 20):
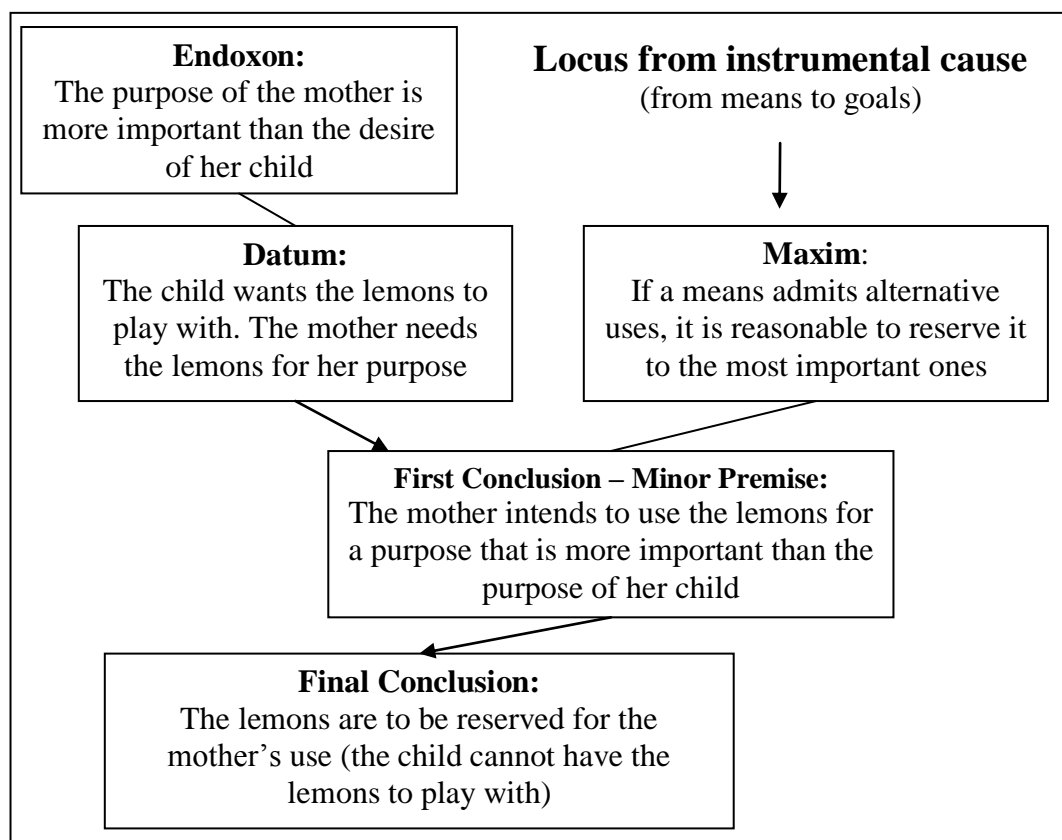

Endoxon:
The purpose of the mother is more important than the desire of her child

Locus from instrumental cause
(from means to goals)

Datum:
The child wants the lemons to play with. The mother needs the lemons for her purpose

Maxim:
If a means admits alternative uses, it is reasonable to reserve it to the most important ones

First Conclusion – Minor Premise:
The mother intends to use the lemons for a purpose that is more important than the purpose of her child

Final Conclusion:
The lemons are to be reserved for the mother's use (the child cannot have the lemons to play with)

Figure 20: **AMT-based reconstruction of the first argument put forward by the mother (example 42)**

The maxim "If a means admits alternative uses, it is reasonable to reserve it to the most important ones" is engendered from the locus from instrumental cause in one of its particular subcategories, from means to goals. In this case, the minor premise of the topical syllogism, "The mother intends to use the lemons for a purpose that is more important than the purpose of her child", brings the maxim to generate the following final conclusion: "The lemons are to be reserved for the mother's use (the child cannot have the lemons to play with)". The endoxon concerns the common knowledge about the hierarchy of needs within the family: "The purpose of the mother is more important than the desire of her child". The datum ("The child wants the lemons to play with. The mother needs the lemons for her purpose") combined with the endoxon produce the first conclusion that "The mother intends to use the lemons for a purpose that is more important than the purpose of her child)".

The first argument put forward by the mother (Mom needs the lemons) is not sufficient to convince Gabriele to accept his mother's refusal and change his opinion. By asking "why?" a second time, Gabriele puts into doubt the endoxon, because he wants to know why his mother's purpose is more important than his desire to play with the lemons. This argument used by the mother appears to be incomplete, or at least open to different interpretations. She is saying that she needs the lemons, but the reasons why are not stated. In fact, she bases her argument only on the authority she holds as a mother, but without providing any justification for her standpoint. This is not enough to convince Gabriele to accept such a prescription. Why? What is behind Gabriele's request?

Consider now the second argument put forward by the mother: "Dad wants to eat a good salad today". Figure 21 shows the reconstruction of the reasoning behind this argument:
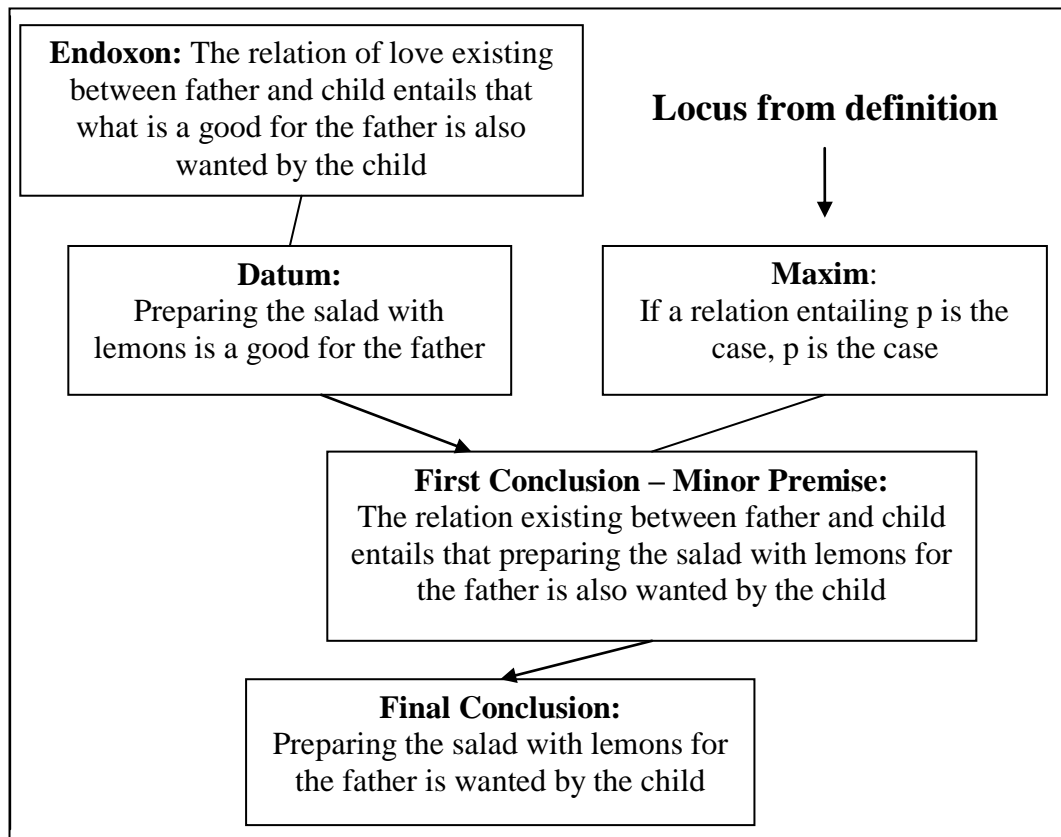
Figure 21: **AMT-based reconstruction of the second argument put forward by the mother (example 42)**

This argument is based on a maxim engendered from the locus from definition ("If a relation entailing p is the case, p is the case"). The reasoning follows with the minor premise of the topical component, "The relation existing between father and child entails that preparing the salad with lemons for the father is also wanted by the child", which leads to the final conclusion that "Preparing the salad with lemons for the father is wanted by the child ". The endoxon of this argument is different from the endoxon of the previous argument. In this case, the endoxon concerns the common knowledge about the father-son relationship and its implications: "The relation of love existing between father and child entails that what is a good for the father is also wanted

by the child". The datum constituting the minor premise of the endoxical syllogism is that "Preparing the salad with lemons is a good for the father". This leads to the conclusion that "The relation existing between father and child entails that preparing the salad with lemons for the father is also wanted by the child".

It is interesting to note that the child puts into doubt the premise of the first argument advanced by his mother, i.e. the endoxon ("The purpose of the mother is more important than the desire of her child"), while the premise on which the second argument put forward by the mother is fully shared between mother and child ("The relation of love existing between father and child entails that what is a good for the father is also wanted by the child"). Moreover, in the case of the second argument, the mother does not base her argumentative strategy on the fear of the father's power and authority. If that were the case, she would have said something like: "Watch out or I'll tell Dad". Instead, she uses a low and sweet tone of voice to emphasize the fact that she is not cross with him.

In her second argument, the mother bases her argumentation on the nature of the father-son relationship and on the feelings that are the basis of this relationship ("The relation of love existing between father and child entails that what is a good for the father is also wanted by the child"). It is an invocation of the parents' authority based on the certainty of positive feelings, rather than on the fear of punishment. Yet, another significant aspect is the particular nature of authority that this type of argument brings to light: authority resides not *with* people but *between* people, the way they relate to each other. The second argument is thus based on what I would call *authority of affective relationships*. It is also relevant to point out that in the second argument the mother spells out to her son the reasons behind the ban. She tells the child that she needs to use the lemons to prepare a good salad for Dad, namely, to fulfill a wish of his (beloved) father ("Preparing the salad with lemons is a good for the father"). At this point,

Gabriele, not too unwillingly, accepts the prescription, showing that not displeasing his father is, in his eyes, worth more than playing with the lemons.

The mother's behavior represents a specific form of strategic maneuvering grounded in the nature of the relationships between father and son. In particular, the invocation of the authority of affective relationships by parents with their children seems to be effective when both of the following two conditions are met:

1) *The nature of the relationship between the person who represents the authority (often, but not always, the parents) and the person to whom the argument is addressed (the child) is based on the certainty of positive feelings, rather than on fear of punishment*. In particular, we should take into account the right emotion (admiration, fear, surprise, sorrow) that moves the behavior of the child in that specific situation in a certain direction.

2) *The reasons behind a prescription are not to be hidden from the child's eyes, but are to be known and shared by parents and children*. For example, the dialogue between Gabriele and his mother shows that the child accepts the mother's ban only once he discovers the underlying reason. Previously, when the mother did not clarify the reasons for her ban, the child continued to demand to know why he could not play with the lemons.

The meeting of these two conditions can be described as a perfect match of reason and emotion.

To conclude, in this section we have seen two types of parental strategic maneuvers, the expert opinion and what I called authority of affective

relationships. Although these two types of strategic maneuver are not always easy to distinguish from one another, I want to conclude this section by trying to provide a definition that distinguishes them: in the argument from expert opinion, what the expert *says* or *does* becomes the argument, while in the argument of authority of affective relationships, it is the nature of the relationship between parent and child that represents the authority itself.

6.2 Prevailing strategic maneuvers adopted by children

The analysis of the prevailing strategic maneuvers adopted by children has brought to light how the arguments advanced by children in argumentative discussions with their parents can be ascribed to two main categories. In what follows, I shall discuss the findings of the analysis in detail.

6.2.1 An opposite view on quality and quantity

Similarly to what was observed in regard to parents, in order to defend their standpoints children often advance arguments which refer to the concepts of quality (positive or negative) and quantity (too much or too little). These arguments are very often used by children when the discussion they engage in is related to food, as in the following example:

(43) **FAM_SWISS_2_(1);** Mom (34); Filippo (5,1)

```
1.      *MOM:       vuoi un po' di risotto?
                    do you want a little risotto?

2.      *FIL:       no:: no::
                    no:: no::
```

```
3.      *MOM:       ma è buono!
                    it's good though!

4.      *FIL:       no:: è un po' strano
                    no:: it's a little strange

5.      *MOM:       ma Filippo, è davvero morbido::
                    but Filippo, it's really soft

6.      *FIL:       no, è strano non mi piace
                    no, it's strange I don't like it

7.      *MOM:       no::
                    no::

8.      *FIL:       si, è strano
                    yes, it's strange

        %act:       MOM assaggia il risotto
                    MOM tastes the risotto

9.      *MOM:       si, effettivamente non è tanto buono
                    yes, actually it's not very good

10.     *FIL:       è strano!
                    it's strange!

11.     *MOM:       sarà il formaggio,
                    maybe because of the cheese

→       *MOM:       si è un po' strano.
                    yes it's a little strange
```

In this dialogue, there is a difference of opinion between the mother and her 5-year-old son, Filippo. The mother wants Filippo to eat the risotto, but the child does not want to eat it. After listening to the argument advanced by his mother (*it's good though)*, Filippo justifies his stance by advancing an argument based on the quality of the risotto: *it's a little strange*. The mother, in line 5, puts forward another argument based on the quality of the risotto (*it's really soft*), but Filippo keeps saying that the risotto is strange (line 6). At this point, the mother is convinced that she should taste the "strange" risotto herself. After doing so, she agrees that the risotto is indeed a little strange (line 9).

In this example, the argument advanced by the child (*the risotto is a little strange*) produces the effect of convincing the mother to taste the risotto she has

prepared herself. The use of the adjective "strange" makes clear to the mother that the taste of the risotto is not good. After having tasted the risotto herself, she also agrees with her son that the risotto is not good. Figure 22 shows the reconstruction of the inferential configuration of this argument:
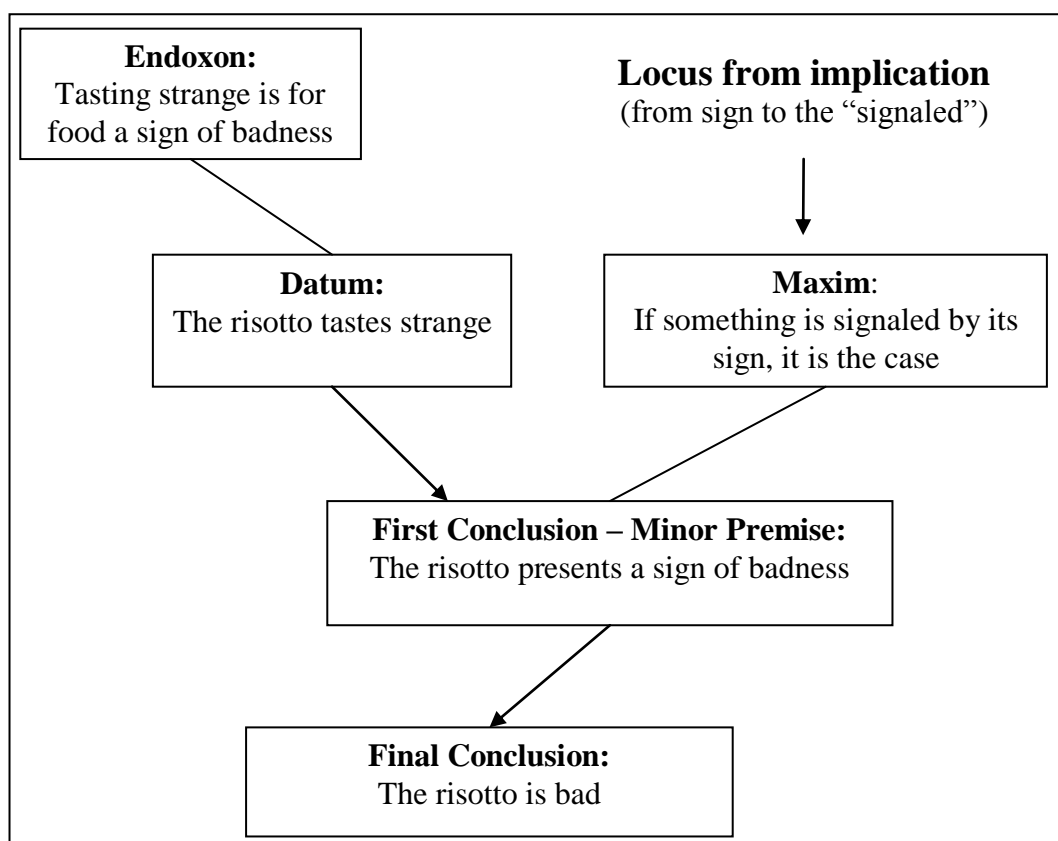

Figure 22: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (43)

The maxim on which the child's argument is based is: "If something is signaled by its sign, it is the case". This maxim is generated from the locus from implication in one of its subcategories, from sign to the "signaled". The reasoning follows with the minor premise, "The risotto presents a sign of badness", which leads to the following final conclusion: "The risotto is bad". Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, the endoxon can be described as

follows: "Tasting strange is for food a sign of badness". The datum, "The risotto tastes strange", combined with this endoxon, produces the first conclusion that "The risotto presents a sign of badness".

The AMT reconstruction shows that the mother and her son have a different opinion regarding the datum (*the risotto is strange*), whereas they fully share the endoxon (*tasting strange is for food a sign of badness*). It is also interesting to notice that parents and children applied a different locus in the case of the arguments from quality. In fact, the following example shows that also the locus from means to goals is applied when children advance arguments from quantity:

(44) **FAM_SWISS_1_(2);** Dad (38); Paolo (7)

Figure 23: Dad and Paolo (on the left side) seated at the table

| 1. | *PAO: | questo poco ((di pasta)) lo posso lasciare? [:!
sollevando leggermente il suo piatto per mostrarne
meglio il contenuto]
can I leave this little bit ((of pasta))? [:! slightly lifting his plate to |

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show DAD exactly how much is left

2.	***DAD:**	**no.**
		no
	%act:	**LUC si gira e prende sul ripiano la bottiglia dell'acqua**
		LUC turns and takes a bottle of water from the work top
3.	***PAO:**	**è troppo!**
		it's too much!
4.	***DAD:**	**non ne hai mangiato niente, Paolo**
		you've hardly eaten anything Paolo
	%pau:	**2.0. sec**

In this sequence, there is a difference of opinion between the father and his 7-year-old son, Paolo. The father wants Paolo to eat the pasta, but the child replies that the amount of pasta on his plate was too much. The father disagrees with Paolo, because, for him, that amount of pasta was not too much. The reconstruction of the inferential configuration (Fig. 24) shows that the type of reasoning behind this argument is similar to that of the parents when they advance arguments from quantity:
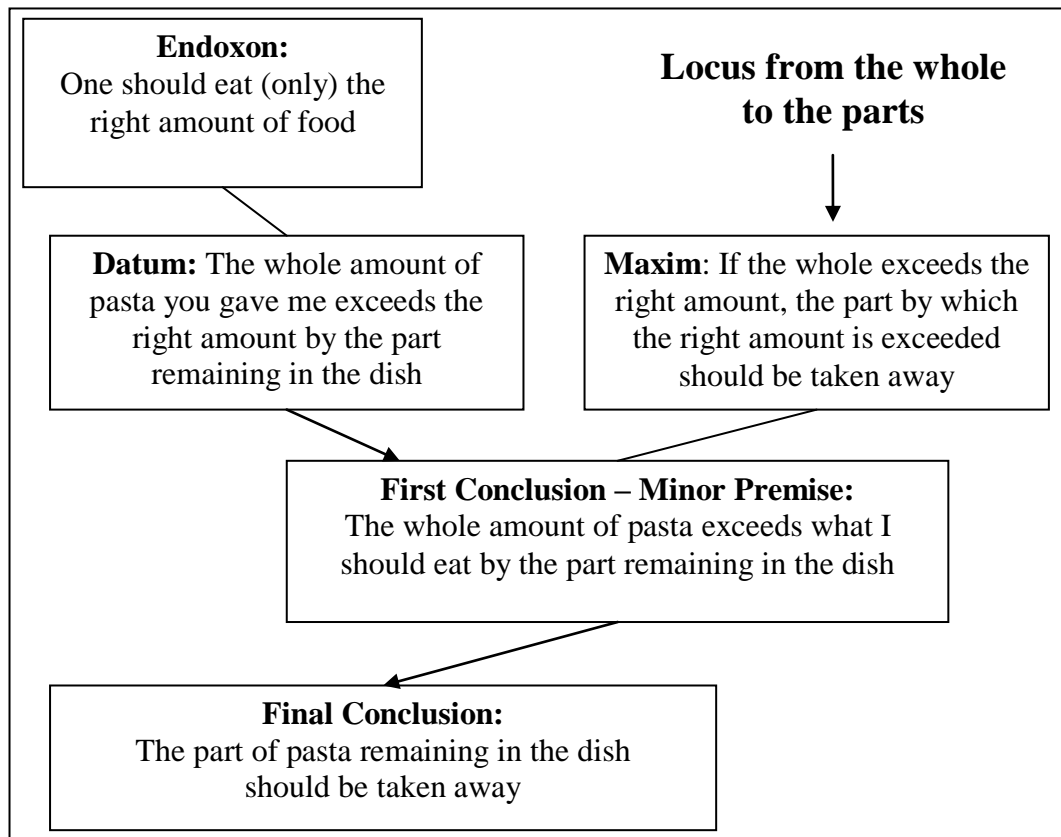
Figure 24: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (44)

The maxim on which the argument put forward by the child is based is "If the whole exceeds the right amount, the part by which the right amount is exceeded should be taken away". In this case, the maxim engendered from the locus from the whole to the parts. The minor premise, "The whole amount of pasta exceeds what I should eat by the part remaining in the dish", leads to the final conclusion: "The part of pasta remaining in the dish should be taken away". Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, the endoxon is: "One should eat (only) the right amount of food". The datum, "The whole amount of pasta you gave me exceeds the right amount by the part remaining in the dish", combined with the endoxon produce the first conclusion that "The whole amount of pasta exceeds what I should eat by the part remaining in the dish".

In this example, both parents and children put forward arguments based on the quality (positive or negative) and quantity (too little or too much) of food, trying to convince the other that their view on the quality or on the quantity of food is wrong. Noteworthy, although parents and children have opposite goals, they often adopt the same type of strategic maneuver. In fact, when the issues parents and children engage in revolve around food, their strategic maneuvers are aimed at convincing the other party to change their view of the quality or the quantity of the food. In this case, what distinguishes parents' and children's argumentation is a different view regarding the *datum*, which, in this case, coincides with their opinion on the quality or quantity of food.

In the corpus, other examples of arguments from quality and quantity put forward by children include:

(45)

"mamma, io non lo voglio il pane, è duro!"
"Mom, I don't want the bread, it's hard!"

"voglio più fagiolini, ne ho mangiati pochi"
"I want more French beans, I have only eaten a few"

"a me non piace lo spezzatino, brucia!"
"I don't like the stew, it's spicy!"

6.2.2 Argument from *adult-expert* opinion

The argument from expert opinion is the second type of strategic maneuvering most frequently used by children. This type of children's strategic maneuvering can be described through the following statement: "The adult X told me Y, therefore Y is true". In our corpus, in fact, when children advanced arguments involving support of expert opinion to their parents, the expert, in the child's eyes, always proved to be an adult, such as a teacher, a grandfather, an

uncle, or a friend of the father. For this reason, I called this type of strategic maneuvering argument from *adult-expert* opinion.

The following example is a good illustration of the use of this type of argument. A mother and her 7-year-old son, Giovanni, are discussing an issue related to homework, when the mother says to her child that he needs to read his school books aloud:

(46) **FAM_SWISS_3_(2);** Mom (33); Giovanni (7,3)

1.   ***MOM:**   **devi leggere ad alta voce ((i libri di scuola))**
                    you have to read them aloud ((the school books))

2.   ***GIO:**   **è sbagliato.**
                    it's wrong

3.   ***MOM:**   **no! devi leggere ad alta voce**
                    no:: you must read aloud

4.   ***GIO:**   **no:: me l'ha detto la maestra che devo leggere in silenzio**
                    no:: the teacher told me that I have to read silently

5.   ***MOM:**   **quando te l'ha detto?**
                    when did she tell you this?

6.   ***GIO:**   **a scuola**
                    at school

7.   ***MOM:**   **va bene, ma quando te l'ha detto?**
                    well, but when did she tell you?

8.   ***GIO:**   **l'altra volta**
                    last time

    %act: **MOM guarda GIO con un'espressione perplessa**
                    MOM looks at GIO with a puzzled expression

In this dialogue, the mother wants Giovanni to read his school books aloud (line 1), but the child says to his mother that reading aloud is wrong (line 2). The mother does not advance any argument to defend her standpoint, thus avoiding assuming the burden of proof, and only repeats her stated standpoint. At this point, in line 4, Giovanni assumes the burden of proof and puts forward an argument in support of his standpoint: "The teacher told me that I have to

read silently". Interestingly, Giovanni succeeds in convincing his mother of the validity of his standpoint by saying to his mother that an expert in the field of reading education told him how to read properly. The expert in this field, Giovanni is saying, is the teacher rather than his mother. The reconstruction of the inferential configuration of this argument (Fig. 25) makes this point clearer:
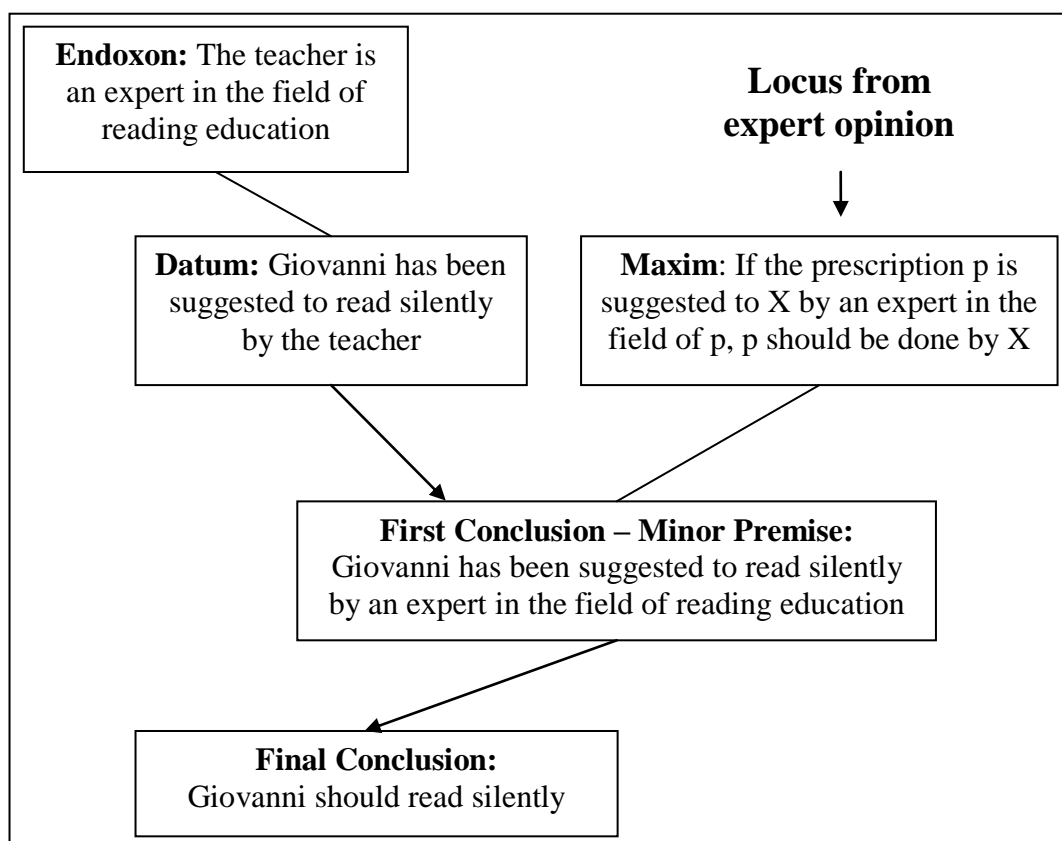

Figure 25: AMT-based reconstruction the example (46)

This argument is based on a maxim which is engendered from the locus from expert opinion (If the prescription p is suggested to X by an expert in the field of p, p should be done by X). The minor premise, "Giovanni has been suggested to read aloud by an expert in the field of reading education", brings to the conclusion that "Giovanni should read aloud". Looking at the endoxical

syllogism of the diagram, the endoxon is the following: "The teacher is an expert in the field of reading education". The datum, "Giovanni has been suggested to read aloud by the teacher", combined with the endoxon lead to the first conclusion that "Giovanni has been suggested to read aloud by an expert in the field of reading education".

The strategic maneuver by Giovanni proves to be effective as he succeeds in convincing his mother that he has to read his school books aloud. Note that in this case we can reasonably guess that the child already knew that the mother considers the teacher as an expert in the field of reading education, and decided to advance this argument. Therefore, in this case, in the choice from the topical potential the child has taken into account the audience to whom the argument is addressed. As far as the selection of the presentational devices is concerned, the child introduces his argument by saying to his mother, in line 2, that her opinion was "wrong". The use of this adjective gives even more strength to the argument advanced by the child afterward. In fact, if an expert in the field states the opposite of what we say, our statement must necessarily be wrong.

Another significant aspect regarding this type of strategic maneuvering involves the level of knowledge that the child has of the adult who represents the expert. In most cases, the expert is an adult who is well-known by the child, such as one of the two parents, a grandfather, a grandmother, or a teacher. However, a good knowledge of the adult by the child does not seem to be a necessary condition in order to refer to him/her as a source of expert opinion. In fact, in the corpus I observed that the expert could also be an adult who does not play a significant role in the child's life. A good knowledge of the adult by the child does not seem to be, in fact, a necessary condition in order to refer to an adult as a source of expert opinion. This aspect is clearly illustrated in the following excerpt, where the opinion of a father's friend is considered to be the opinion of an expert by the child. However, in this example – where a father and his 9 year-

old son, Samuele, discuss the type of soccer shoes Samuele needs to wear in a small indoor stadium – the effectiveness of the argument put forward by the child is not the same as the previous example where the expert was the teacher.

(47) **FAM_ITA_4_(2);** Dad (37); Samuele (9,11)

1.   ***DAD:**   **dove giocate domani?**
                   where will you play tomorrow?

2.   ***SAM:**   **al Palazzetto, è al chiuso**
                   at the sports hall it's indoors

3.   ***DAD:**   **allora non puoi metterti le scarpe con i tacchetti**
                   then you cannot use the soccer shoes with studs

4.   ***SAM:**   **si che posso!**
                   yes, I can!

5.   ***DAD:**   **no! al Palazzetto puoi solo giocare con le scarpe senza tacchetti**
                   no! at the sports hall you can only play with soccer shoes without studs

6.   ***SAM:**   **si che posso! me l'ha detto il papa di Tito che posso**
                   yes I can! Tito's Dad told me that I can

7.   ***DAD:**   **no:: non puoi, ma Rudi ((il papà di Tito)) non capisce niente di calcio!**
                   no:: you can't but Rudi ((Tito's Dad)) doesn't understand anything about soccer!

In this dialogue, a difference of opinion arises between the father and Samuele. The child tells his father that he can play in the hall with the soccer shoes with studs but, according to his father, Samuele cannot use that type of shoes to play in the hall. In the analysis of this argumentative discussion, I will focus on the argument put forward by Samuele in line 6 (*Tito's Dad told me that I can*). As in the previous example, this is an argument referring to expert opinion. The reconstruction of its inferential configuration (Fig. 26) allows us to understand why the argument advanced by Samuele did not succeed in convincing his father:
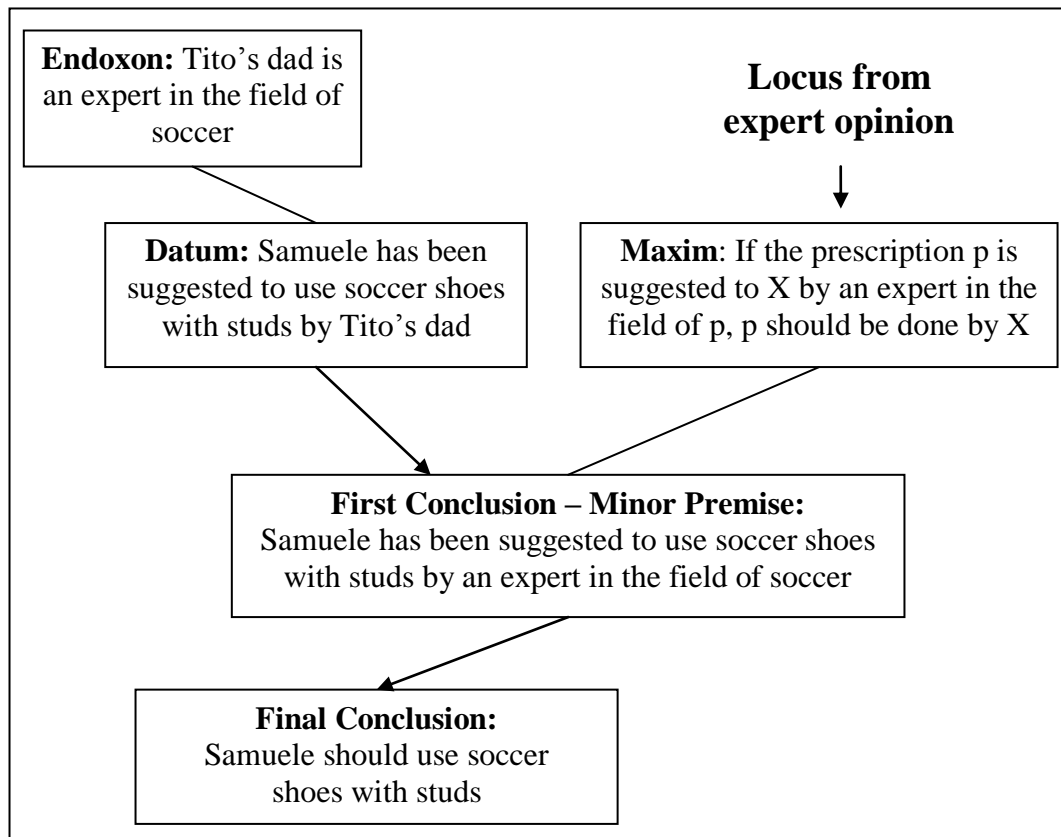
Figure 26: AMT-based reconstruction of the example (47)

The argument put forward by Samuele is based on the following maxim: "If prescription p is suggested to X by an expert in the field of p, p should be done by X". This comes right after the minor premise, "Samuele has been suggested to use soccer shoes with studs by an expert in the field of soccer", that brings to the final conclusion that "Samuele should use soccer shoes with studs". Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, the endoxon is as follows: "Tommaso's Dad is an expert in the field of soccer". The datum, "Samuele has been recommended to use soccer shoes with studs by Tommaso's Dad", combined with the endoxon leading to the conclusion that "Samuele has been suggested to use soccer shoes with studs by an expert in the field of soccer".

The AMT-reconstruction shows that this argument is based on the same maxim as the argument analyzed in the previous example (*locus from expert opinion*). In fact, the child refers to what an adult (Tommaso's Dad) told him as a source of expert opinion to convince his father to accept his standpoint. However, in the previous example Giovanni's argument was effective in convincing his mother to change her stance, while Samuele's argument is not effective in convincing his father to change his opinion. One may ask why this has occurred. In order to answer this question, we need to look at the endoxon of both arguments. In the previous argument, the endoxon (*The teacher is an expert in the field of reading education*) was fully shared by mother and child, while in this last case the father does not agree with the endoxon on which the child's argument is based. The father, in fact, does not consider Tommaso's Dad to be an expert in the field of soccer.

Referring to an adult as a source of expert opinion, the child adapts his argumentation to his interlocutor, i.e. the parent, who is also an adult. Children seem to believe that, in argumentative discussions with their parents, the reference to an opinion of an adult as a source of expert opinion is stronger than the reference to an opinion of another child. In pragma-dialectical terms, we could say that in this type of strategic maneuvering the choice of the topical potential and the selection of presentational devices by the child are adapted to the demand of the audience, i.e. the parent. However, the actual effectiveness of the argument from adult-expert opinion depends on how the premises (*endoxon*) on which the argument is based are shared by parents and children. In fact, in the corpus, this argument proved to be effective only when the parent believed that the adult to whom the child was referring was really an expert.

To conclude, in this section we have seen that children's strategic maneuvers can be ascribed to two main categories: quality and quantity, and expert opinion. These findings indicate that children advance fewer arguments

than their parents, and that they often put forward the same type of argument used previously in the discussion by their parents. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that in the corpus when children put forward arguments from expert opinion, the expert, in the child's eyes, always proved to be an adult.

In the next section, I shall present the last step of analysis, in which we shall see how parents and children conclude the argumentative discussions once engaged.

6.3 *Dialectical conclusions of the argumentative discussion*

In the corpus, I observed different types of conclusions. The most frequent types are dialectical conclusions, i.e. one of the two parties accept or refuse the standpoint of the other party, reaching in this way the concluding stage of their argumentative discussions.

6.3.1 The child accepts the parent's standpoint

The most frequent type of conclusion observed in the corpus is that the child accepts the parent's standpoint. Often, in fact, the children accepted the parents' standpoint through a clear and explicit verbal expression, as in the following sequence:

(48) **FAM_ITA_1_(2);** Mom (34); Gabriele (5,4)

1   *GAB: **mamma:: guarda!**
                    Mom:: look!

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→	*GAB:	guarda cosa sto facendo con il limone
		look what I'm doing with the lemon

→	*GAB:	sto cancellando!
		I'm rubbing out!

→	*GAB:	sto cancellando questo colore!
		I'm rubbing out the color!

	%sit:	MAM prende dei limoni e si china di fronte a GAB di modo che il suo viso risulti all'altezza di quello di GAB
		MOM takes the lemon and bends down in front of GAB so that her face is level with his

	%sit:	MAM posa alcuni limoni sul tavolo
		MOM places the lemon on the table

2	*GAB:	dai:: dammelo
		give it to me

3	*MOM:	eh?
		eh?

4	*GAB:	posso avere questo limone?
		can I have this lemon?

5	*MOM:	no:: no:: no:: no::
		no:: no:: no:: no::
6	*GAB:	perché no?
		why not?

7	*MOM:	perché no? perché Gabriele, mamma ha bisogno dei limoni.
		why not? because Gabriele, Mom needs the lemons

8	*GAB:	perché mamma?
		why Mom?

9	*MOM:	perché, Gabriele, tuo papà vuole mangiare una buona insalata oggi [:! con un tono di voce basso e dolce]
		because, Gabriele, your Dad wants to eat a good salad today [:! with a low and sweet tone of voice]

10	*GAB:	ah:: va bene mamma
		ah:: ok Mom

The children also showed acceptance of the parent's standpoint by implementing the behavior demanded by the parent, but not providing, at time, a clear and explicit verbal acceptance of the parent's standpoint. The following excerpt offers an illustration of this dynamics:

(49) **FAM_SWISS_2_(2);** Mom (34); Filippo (5,1)

1.   *MOM: **Filippo, devi mangiare un poco di questo formaggio**
                   Filippo, you must eat a little of this cheese

2.   *FIL: **no!**
                   no!

3.   *MOM: **si! perché solo il pane non è abbastanza.**
                   Yes! because the bread alone is not enough

4.   *FIL: **no, non voglio il formaggio**
                   no, I do not want the cheese

5.   *MOM: **questo è quello che ha comprato il nonno però::**
                   è delizioso.
                   this is the one Grandpa bought, though:: it is delicious

6.   *FIL: **davvero?**
                   really?

7.   *MOM: **si, lo ha comprato il nonno**
                   yes, Grandpa bought it

8.   *FIL: **mhm:: [: sembra pensieroso]**
                   mhm:: [: he seems thoughtful]
9.   *MOM: **è delizioso.**
                   it is delicious

       %act: **MOM mette un pezzo di formaggio nel piatto di FIL**
                   che inizia a mangiare il formaggio
                   MOM puts a piece of cheese in FIL's plate who starts eating the cheese

In this example, the mother tries to convince her five-year-old son, Filippo, to eat the cheese. The child, in conclusion, shows acceptance that he should eat the cheese without advancing an explicit verbal expression of acceptance of the mother's standpoint. In this case, the choice of continuing to object to the parental rule or ban appears to be more demanding and therefore less convenient than accepting the parent's standpoint. Note that the differences in roles, age, and competences between parents and children certainly play an important role and must be carefully considered. In fact, even though challenging the parents' standpoint can be feasible for the children, it is not always possible in reality as they are the parent who decides the extent to which their standpoint is discussable.

6.3.2 The parent accepts the child's standpoint

The second type of conclusion most frequently observed in the corpus is that the parent accepts the child's standpoint. Although this type of conclusion is less frequent than the previous one, it is important to highlight how the children, through their arguments, can convince the parents to accept their standpoint. The next example offers a clear illustration of how a child convinces his mother that the quality of the dish is not good:

(50) **FAM_SWISS_2_(1)**; Mom (34); Filippo (5,1)

1.	*MOM:	**vuoi un po' di risotto?** *do you want a little risotto?*
2.	*FIL:	**no:: no::** *no:: no::*
3.	*MOM:	**ma è buono!** *it's good though!*
4.	*FIL:	**no:: è un po' strano** *no:: it's a little strange*
5.	*MOM:	**ma Filippo, è davvero morbido::** *but Filippo, it's really soft*
6.	*FIL:	**no, è strano non mi piace** *no, it's strange I don't like it*
7.	*MOM:	**no::** *no::*
8.	*FIL:	**si, è strano** *yes, it's strange*
	%act:	**MOM assaggia il risotto** *MOM tastes the risotto*
9.	*MOM:	**si, effettivamente non è tanto buono** *yes, actually it's not very good*
10.	*FIL:	**è strano!** *it's strange!*
11.	*MOM:	**sarà il formaggio,** *maybe because of the cheese*

→   ***MOM:**   **si è un po' strano.**
                    yes it's a little strange

In this dialogue – already discussed in §6.2.1 – the mother wants Filippo to eat the risotto, but he refuses to eat it. After an argument advanced by his mother (*it's good though*), the child justifies his refusal by advancing an argument based on the quality of the risotto: *it's a little strange*. The mother, in line 5, puts forward another argument based on the quality of the risotto (*it's really soft*), but, in line 6, Filippo keeps saying that the risotto is strange. At this point, the mother is sufficiently convinced by the child's argument to taste the "strange" risotto herself and, after doing so, she realizes that the risotto is actually a little strange.

In the corpus, I observed that the parent accepted the child's standpoint only when the issue in a debate between parents and children relates to food. I did not find, instead, any case where the children succeeded in convincing the parents to accept their standpoint in discussions related to teaching the correct table-manners and how to behave in social interactions outside the family. These findings indicate that the issues related to food can at times be discussable, whereas when the issues are related to teaching table manners and how to behave in social interactions outside the family, e.g. in the school context, the parents are not amenable to changing their standpoint.

6.4 Non-dialectical conclusions of the argumentative discussion

The conclusion of an argumentative discussion between parents and children in an everyday activity such as family mealtime is a phase characterized

from complex dynamics. In fact, we have seen that the institutional aim of this type of activity does not impose family members to reach a clear conclusion of their argumentative discussions (§4.2). Parents do not sit at the table with the aim of convincing their children about the validity of their opinions, and vice versa. At least, this is not their initial goal. Although in most cases the parent or the child convinces the other party of their standpoint, I also observed in the corpus a number of cases in which the argumentative discussions did not reach a conclusion. For example, when the parents shifted the focus of the conversation or when a long silence (pause of at least three seconds) indicated that neither the parent nor the child wanted to continue the discussion. In the next sections, I shall examine these two types of non-dialectical conclusions in detail.

6.4.1 The parent shifts the focus of the conversation

The third type of conclusion most frequently encountered in the corpus is not really a conclusion, but rather an interruption of the argumentative discussion. At times, the parents avoided continuing the argumentative discussion with their children by shifting the focus of the conversation. In this way, they avoid facing an argumentative discussion with them. In the corpus, I observed that parents shift the focus of the conversation either when they consider the issue not appropriate for discussion during mealtime or when they want their children to focus on eating rather than talking. This finding indicates once again that it is the parent who actually decides whether or not to conclude the discussion.

In the next dialogue, there is a difference of opinion between a mother and her eight-year-old son, Stefano. The child wants to play with the computer during mealtime, but the mother shifts the focus of the conversation that she and her son were having and, in doing so, interrupts the discussion before it reaches

its conclusion. As a result, the issue of playing with the computer will not be addressed any further over dinner.

(51) **FAM_SWISS_4_(2)**; Mom (34); Stefano (8,5)

1.　　***STE:**　　**mamma, posso andare a giocare al computer?**
　　　　　　　　Mom can I go to play with the computer?

2.　　***MOM:**　　**no.**
　　　　　　　　no

3.　　***STE:**　　**perché?**
　　　　　　　　why?

4.　　***MOM:**　　**adesso stiamo mangiando**
　　　　　　　　we're eating now

→　　***MOM:**　　**quando si mangia, non si gioca al computer**
　　　　　　　　during mealtime you cannot play with the computer

5.　　***STE:**　　**perché no?**
　　　　　　　　why not?

6.　　***MOM:**　　**ma oggi a scuola non avevate il compito in classe di matematica?**
　　　　　　　　but today at school you had the Math test didn't you?

7.　　***STE:**　　**si!**
　　　　　　　　yes!

→　　***STE:**　　**era difficile::**
　　　　　　　　it was difficult::

8.　　***MOM:**　　**davvero?**
　　　　　　　　really?

9.　　***STE:**　　**si!**
　　　　　　　　yes

10.　　***MOM:**　　**su che cosa era?**
　　　　　　　　what was it about?

[…]

6.4.2 A long silence as an indicator of conclusion

The fourth type of conclusion observed is when one of the two parties remains silent for a time, at least three seconds, after that the other party has advanced at least one argument in support of his/her standpoint. After such a long silence, a new discussion on a different topic is started by one of the family members. A clear example of this type of conclusion is illustrated in the following dialogue between a mother and his seven-year-old son, Paolo:

(52) **FAM_SWISS_1_(3)**; Mom (36); Dad (38), Paolo (7); Laura (4,5)

	%sit:	PAO si avvicina a DAD e gli dice qualcosa parlandogli nell'orecchio *PAO goes towards DAD and whispers something in his ear*
1.	*MOM:	non si dicono le cose all'orecchio, Paolo *Paolo, you cannot whisper things in people's ears*
2.	*PAO:	perché? *why?*
3.	*MOM:	dobbiamo ascoltarla tutti. *because everyone must hear it*
4.	*PAO:	no:: *no::*
5.	*MOM:	non si parla all'orecchio. *you can't whisper in the ear*
	%act:	MOM and DAD sorridono *MOM and DAD smile*
	%pau:	3.5 sec
6.	*LAU:	ancora insalata *more salad*
7.	*MOM:	amore vuoi un altro po' d'insalata? *darling do you want a little more salad?*
8.	*LAU:	si: *yes:*

In this dialogue, there is a difference of opinion between a mother and her son Paolo. The mother, in line 1, says to the child that he cannot whisper in

his father's ear, but Paolo, in line 2, disagrees with his mother. In line 3, the mother puts forward an argument in support of her standpoint. The child shows, in line 4, that he still disagrees with his mother, who, in line 5, restates her standpoint. The long silence after the mother's statement indicates that the discussion between her and Paolo is concluded. After this long silence, the family members start a new discussion on a different topic.

In the corpus, this type of conclusion can be observed less frequently than the previous three types, as children often ask questions on the same issue and, accordingly, the parents had to continue the discussion. This finding brings to light once again the important role that children play in stimulating their parents to reason with them and to justify their rules and prescriptions.

7.   Conclusive remarks

This study aimed to identify the function of argumentation between parents and children during mealtime. To attain this purpose, this dissertation was organized in two parts: the first considers the theoretical and methodological starting points of the research; the other presents the empirical analysis of the argumentative discussions between parents and children that I have carried out. The theoretical and methodological parts of the dissertation are discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, while the empirical analysis is in Chapter 4, 5, and 6.

In Chapter 2, I have highlighted which aspects of the existing literature on family discourse can contribute to enhancing the pertinence of my research. In Chapter 3, after first explaining why I opt for a qualitative research method, I discussed in detail the data corpus of my research, the gathering of data and the transcription of the family conversations, and the way in which the analysis of the argumentative discussions could be conducted. Furthermore, in this chapter I have also discussed the theoretical framework that the present study is based on: the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, in its standard (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) and extended version (van Eemeren, 2010), and the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2010). Then, in Chapter 4 I described in detail the main features characterizing the activity of family mealtime and how these features can affect how parents and children make strategic choices in their argumentative discussions.

Finally, relying on a communicative-argumentative methodology (see §3.1), a qualitative analysis of a corpus composed of 48 argumentative discussions was carried out. The first phase of analysis, presented in Chapter 5, investigated the initial phase of argumentative discussions. More precisely, I examined the type of issues discussed by parents and children and the way in

which they both contribute to the inception and development of an argumentative discussion. In order to select the analytically relevant moves and to reconstruct the various components of an argumentative discussion, in this first phase the analysis is based on the standard version of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation and, in particular, the ideal model of a critical discussion. The second phase of analysis, presented in Chapter 6, was devoted to investigating the prevailing strategic maneuvers adopted by parents and children and the types of conclusion of the argumentative discussions. To this end, I based my work on the extended version of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation and the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT). In particular, I referred to the extended version of pragma-dialectics to analyze the family members' strategic maneuvering, and to the AMT to reconstruct the inferential configuration of the arguments advanced by parents and children.

In this final chapter, I shall first provide an overview of the results of the research presented in this dissertation (§7.1). I shall then answer the main research question: "What function does argumentation between parents and children have during mealtime?" (§7.2). Finally, I shall indicate directions for further research (§7.3).

7.1   Overview of the main results

The analysis presented in the previous chapters allows to draw a comprehensive picture of the argumentative discussions between parents and children during mealtime, from the reasons triggering their inception and development to the different types of conclusions.

The findings show that the argumentative discussions revolve around two general types of issues: *parental prescriptions* and *children's requests*. The main

difference between these two general types of issues relates to who – the parent or the child – initially proposed the contentious standpoint: parental prescriptions are initially triggered by a standpoints advanced by parents, whereas the second type of issue is triggered by a request initially advanced by children. The parental prescriptions concern activities largely related to mealtime, such as having to eat a certain food or adopting proper table-manners. They also relate to the children's behavior in social interactions with strangers and peers, primarily in the school context with teachers and schoolmates. Similar to what was found by Dunn and Munn (1987), the issues triggered by children's requests refer to a wide range of topics, from issues closely related to mealtime, to issues more generally related to children's daily life.

The results of the analysis indicate that the initial phase of the argumentative discussion was characterized by typical dynamics. On the one hand, parents, more often than children, assumed the burden of proof during argumentative discussions, while children often evaded the burden of proof, as they were not always expected to provide reasons to support their standpoints. This dynamics is strictly connected with the type of issues discussed by parents and children. In fact, although challenging the parent's standpoint can be feasible for the child, in reality this was not always possible, because it is the parent who decides to what extent his/her standpoints are discussable. In the corpus, the issues related to food could at times be discussable, whereas when the issues were related to teaching table manners and how to behave in social interactions outside the family, e.g. in the school context, the parents were not amenable to changing their standpoint.

On the other hand, children assume a role of active antagonist, because they often impose the burden of proof on their parents by putting into doubt their prescriptions. Similar results were also found by Pontecorvo and Fasulo (1997). Through their questioning, the children observed invited their parents to disclose

the reasons behind their prescriptions and to gather the information they want to know. As a consequence, because of the children's questions the parents needed to advance arguments in support of their own standpoint. In line with previous studies (van Eemeren, Houtlosser, & Snoeck Henkemans, 2007; Snoeck Henkemans, 1999, 2001), I have also observed that the children's Why-questions is a linguistic indicator of the beginning of an argumentative discussion.

These typical dynamics characterizing the initial phase of the argumentative discussion reveal that argumentation between parents and young children is a co-constructed activity[42] (Doise & Mugny, 1984; Perret-Clermont, 1980) in which children, despite differences in competences and skills (see Felton & Kuhn, 2001; Mercer, 2000; Stein & Albro, 2001; Stein & Miller, 1993), play a role which is equally fundamental to that of their parents. Their presence and involvement in family conversations favors the beginning of argumentative discussions and represents a *stimulus factor*, inducing parents to reason with their children.

Next, the analysis of the strategic maneuvers most frequently adopted by parents and children has revealed that the types of arguments advanced by parents can be ascribed to three main categories, *quality and quantity*, *appeal to consistency*, and *expert opinion* and what I called *authority of affective relationships*, while the arguments advanced by children pertain to two main categories, *quality and quantity*, and *adult-expert opinion*.

The most frequent type of strategic maneuvering adopted by parents with their children refers to the concepts of quality (positive or negative) and quantity (too much or too little). In particular, the arguments from quality and quantity were often used by parents when the issue they engage in relates to food. Similar

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[42] The notion of co-construction referred to in the present study was developed by neo-Piagetian psychologists in the late 1970s and early 1980s to describe processes in which more than one person is involved in the construction of new knowledge.

results can be found in recent studies by Wiggins and her colleagues (Laurier & Wiggins, 2011; Wiggins, 2002, 2012; Wiggins & Potter, 2003). The second type of strategic maneuvering most frequently adopted by parents refers to the consistency with past behaviors. Often, in fact, the parents asked their children to conform to their previous behavior, as the past actions are important to justify the present actions. A third type of strategic maneuvering used by parents concerns a set of arguments which are based on differences in roles, age, skills, and competences between parents and children. In this type of strategic maneuvering is the use of two specific arguments by parents: the argument from expert opinion and what I called argument of authority of affective relationships. The difference between these two arguments is that in the case of the argument from expert opinion, what the expert *says* or *does* becomes the argument, while in the case of the argument of authority of affective relationships, it is the nature of the relationship between parent and child that represents the authority itself.

Similarly to what was observed in regard to parents, the children in defending their standpoints often advanced arguments of quality and quantity. Such arguments were most frequently used by children in discussions with their parents when the issue relates to food. The second type of strategic maneuvering frequently adopted by children can be described in the following statement: "The adult X told me Y, therefore Y is true". In the corpus, in fact, when children advanced arguments involving support of expert opinion to their parents, the expert, in the child's eyes, always proved to be an adult, such as a teacher, a grandfather, an uncle, or a friend of the father. It is interesting to observe that children mostly used other-oriented arguments, namely, arguments in which they refer to someone else. This finding does not coincide with the ones from Slomkowski and Dunn (1992), who argue that children mostly use self-oriented arguments in the discussions with their parents.

The results of the second phase of analysis highlighted that the parents' strategic maneuvers seem motivated by a desire to teach their children to justify their opinions by means of the use of reasonable arguments. Similar results were also observed by Pontecorvo and her colleagues (Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007, 2010; Pontecorvo & Pirchio, 2000; Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002). On the other hand, we have seen that children advance fewer arguments than their parents, and when they put forward arguments in support of their standpoint they often advanced the same type of argument used previously in the discussion by their parents.

Finally, as far as the types of conclusion are concerned, four different types were most frequently observed (Table 10).

Table 10: Types of conclusion of the argumentative discussions

Dialectical conclusions	Non-dialectical conclusions
The child accepts the parent's standpoint	The parent shifts the focus of the ongoing conversation
The parent accepts the child's standpoint	After a long silence (pause of at least three seconds) of both, parents and children change topic of discussion

The first two types are dialectical conclusions, in which one of the two parties accepts or rejects the others' standpoint. Therefore, in these two types of conclusions the parent and the child reach the concluding stage of their argumentative discussion. The most frequent type of conclusion is that *the child accepts the parent's standpoint*, while the second type is that *the parent accepts the child's standpoint*. Interestingly, this second type of conclusion occurred when parents and children debated issues related to food. I did not find, instead, any case where the child succeeded in convincing the parent to accept a

standpoint in discussions where the issue was related to proper table-manners and, in particular, to rules on how to behave in interactions outside the family. This finding does not coincide with previous works on the same topic. For example, Vuchinich (1987, 1990) found that most of the conflicts during family dinnertime conversations ended with no resolution. This difference can be explained by the fact that Vuchinich does not focus his analysis on the argumentative discussions, but, instead, on verbal conflicts among family members. A verbal conflict takes place when there is a difference of opinion between two (or more) parties, while an argumentative discussion when there is a difference of opinion between two (or more) parties and at least one of the two parties puts forward an argument in support of his/her standpoint. Therefore, in the argumentative discussion at least one of the parties has shown the interest in resolving the difference of opinion in his/her own favour. In the verbal conflict, instead, not always at least one of the parties shows the willingness to resolve the difference of opinion. For this reason, it is more likely to observe the conclusion of a conversation with no resolution in a verbal conflict than in an argumentative discussion. It would be interesting to see whether in the corpus studied by Vuchinich there are also some argumentative discussions and, if this is the case, to compare the frequency of the conclusions with no resolution of the argumentative discussions with that of the verbal conflicts.

In some cases, however, the argumentative discussions did not reach the concluding stage. For example, this happened when *the parent shifts the focus of the conversation*. In such a case, it is not a real conclusion but rather an interruption of the discussion. This type of non-dialectical conclusion indicates that it was above all the parent who decided whether to conclude or not an argumentative discussion with the child. Another type of non-dialectical conclusion is that *after a long silence (pause of at least three seconds) of both, parents and children change topic of discussion*. I observed this type of

conclusion less frequently than the previous three types. Often, in fact, the children asked other questions on the same issue and, accordingly, the parents had to continue the discussion.

7.2   *The educational function of argumentation between parents and children*

The work conducted so far allows to provide an articulate answer to the main research question: "What function does argumentation between parents and children have during mealtime?". The results of this research indicate that the function of argumentative interactions between parents and children during mealtime is fundamentally educational. In particular, by means of argumentation, two distinct, but strictly related, educational targets are achieved.

First, argumentation is an instrument that enables parents to transmit, and children to learn values and models about how to behave in a culturally appropriate way. The parents' standpoints are often prescriptive in nature, and most of the issues parents and children engage in refer to the activity of mealtime, such as having to eat a certain food or adopting proper table-manners. However, the parents argue with their children to teach them how to behave appropriately not only at the meal-table, but also in all situations in which their children are in contact with other people outside the family context. In particular, the school context and the children's behavior with their peers (e.g. schoolmates) represent the issues parents are most concerned about. Through argumentation, therefore, the parents observed educate their children to behave according to the models and values considered as appropriate within their family and by the community. Argumentatively speaking, the role of children is not less important than the role of their parents. Through their continuous questioning, in

fact, children show their desire to find out the – often implicit – reasons on which their parents' standpoints are based. Therefore, while the parents play the role of "educators" during argumentative discussions, the children play the not less important role of – a concept first introduced by Piaget (1945) – *active learners*.

The second educational target is promoting the children's inclination to justify their desires in a reasonable manner. This target is not connected to the type of issues discussed by parents and children and is somehow present in all argumentative discussions. In fact, in every argumentative discussion, we can perceive the parents' willingness to teach their children that it is possible to achieve a goal only if they are able to convince others that their goals, beliefs, values, ideas and desires are based on reasonable arguments and are therefore worthy of consideration.

By engaging in argumentative discussions with their parents children learn how to argue. While the first educational target is behavioral in nature, because parents want to teach their children how to behave in a culturally appropriate way, the second is cognitive in nature, because it is through argumentative interactions with their parents that children first learn a reasonable (i.e. argumentative) way of thinking.

7.3   *Directions for further research*

This study is based on a corpus constituted of transcribed conversations of 30 family mealtimes. A corpus of this dimension does not allow for a generalization of the results obtained. However, this should not lead us to believe that the results obtained in the present research are not relevant from an argumentative point of view.

Using a qualitative method of analysis has enabled in-depth analyses of every aspect of an argumentative discussion that a quantitative method of analysis would not have allowed. The choice of a different method of analysis, without first having made this type of investigation, would have been a methodological mistake. It would have been like starting to build a house from the roof and not, as we should do, from the foundations. In my vision, the present research is the starting point of a research programme which should be continued in the years to come. In particular, to complete the work started with this research, future research on argumentation in the family should be focused on three so far unexplored issues (Figure 27).
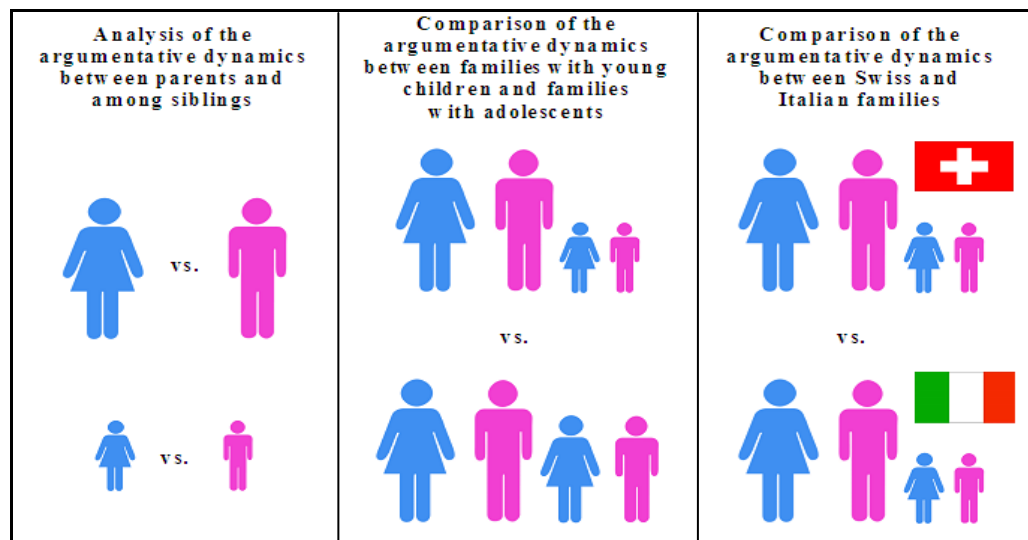
Figure 27: Three directions for future research

First, this research has been centred on the argumentative discussions between parents and children, while the husband-wife dyad and the siblings have not been investigated. The investigation of the argumentative discussions between parents and among siblings would not only give a more comprehensive picture of the argumentative dynamics among all family members, but would

allow to better focusing on the specific aspects of adult and children argumentative interactions within the family context.

Second, the nature of the interactions between parents and children evolves and changes during the development. The results of this research have shown that the function of argumentative interactions between parents and young children is fundamentally educational. A comparison of the argumentative dynamics between families with young children (3-11 year-old) and families with adolescents (12-18 year-old) would enable a comprehensive evaluation of how argumentation comes into play along all the developmental phases of children in the family context.

Third, despite the participants to the research are Italian (sub-corpus 1) and Swiss families (sub-corpus 2), a cultural comparison was not a goal of this study. The reason underlying this choice is that this study has not been thought as cross-cultural research. But, in a further research on argumentation in the family, it would be interesting, basing on wider corpora, to make a comparison of the argumentative dynamics between Swiss and Italian families, because such an investigation would allow to verify whether and how some argumentative dynamics in the family context can be considered distinctive of a specific culture.

Appendices

Appendix A

Family mealtime argumentation. A study of the argumentative discussions in families with young children

Information sheet

My research project is title *Family mealtime argumentation. A study of the argumentative discussions in families with young children*. As the title suggests, this project will investigate conversations and, more in detail, argumentative discussions during mealtimes in families with young children.

The interactions during mealtimes will be video and audio recorded. The recordings will be in first instance be transcribed and analyzed. These recordings will not be shown to the general public, but short excerpts maybe used for educational purposes.

Information on each family will be recorded using an anonymous identifying number only. If you have concerns about your anonymity being maintained, then you may ask your faces to be blurred. Individual information and data obtained are not accessible to third parties outside our research group.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. I assume that all children will want to participate. But if you do not want some of your children to participate, please make it clear in the consent form (in attachment to this letter).

You may retain this information sheet for reference. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have before completing the consent form (which will be stored separately from the anonymous information you provide for the research project.

Should you agree, in principle, to participate in the study, I would be happy to come and talk with you about what the study might entail. Please contact me if you require further information about the project, or to have any questions answered.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. I look forward to your involvement and thank you for your support.

Your with best wishes,

Antonio Bova

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Appendix B

Family mealtime argumentation. A study of the argumentative discussions in families with young children

Consent form

I _____ consent to Antonio Bova carrying out the following:

1. recording (audio and video) family mealtimes on approximately 4 occasions over a four week period; and

2. transcribing and analyzing the recordings of our mealtime interactions;

3. using short recorded excerpts for educational purposes.

I have received an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study and of the opportunity to ask further questions and with the assurance that the rights to privacy and confidentiality of all the members of my family will be respected at all times.

I acknowledge and accept that Antonio Bova can use the findings and transcripts of interactions can be distributed on the basis that my identity and the identity of my family will remain confidential.

Signed:

Date

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