

The interplay between parental argumentative strategies, children's reactions and topics of disagreement during family conversations

Abstract

This study aims to explore the interplay between parents' arguments, children's reactions and topics of disagreement during mealtime conversations. Within a data corpus constituted by 30 video-recorded meals of 10 Swiss and Italian families, a corpus of 132 argumentative discussions was selected for a qualitative analysis through the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation. Findings indicate that both parents and children assume argument schemes related to the object of the disagreement: when the contested standpoints refer to food, arguments are based on a symptomatic relation; when they refer to the behavior of children, parents base their argumentation on a causal and analogy relation, while the children's reaction is typically an expression of further doubt or a mere opposition without providing any argument. The results of this study bring further light on the actual knowledge of argumentative interactions and the interplay between topics of disagreement and the argumentative strategies adopted by family members.

Keywords: argumentation; family; parent-child interaction; disagreement

1. Introduction

Mealtime represents a crucial activity to investigate how parents and children interact and argue since it is a daily occasion that brings family members together (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2015; Fiese et al., 2006). Within the framework of family argumentation research (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2013a; Brumark, 2008; Pauletto, Aronsson & Arcidiacono, 2017; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007; Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1997; Pontecorvo & Pirchio, 2000), this study sets out to investigate the interplay between parents' arguments, children's reactions and topics of disagreement during mealtime conversations. More particularly, the purpose is to answer the following research questions: Which are the most frequent types of arguments used by parents and children in support of their standpoint? Which is the relationship between the contested standpoints and the types of arguments used by family members? These research questions will be answered by means of a qualitative analysis of argumentative discussions between parents and children. The analytical approach is based on the pragma-dialectical ideal model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) that proposes a definition of argumentation according to the standard of reasonableness: an argumentative discussion starts when the speaker advances his/her standpoint, and the listener casts doubts upon it or directly attacks the standpoint. Accordingly, confrontation, in which disagreement regarding a certain standpoint is externalized in a discursive exchange or anticipated by the speaker, is a necessary condition for an argumentative discussion to occur. In particular, to distinguish the different types of arguments advanced by parents and children, we will focus on the argument scheme on which each argument is based, e.g., the way in which the standpoint and the argument are linked together. Furthermore, the investigation of the contested standpoints between parents and children will allow us to provide a picture of the topics of disagreement in which a certain type of argument is used.

The paper is structured as follows: a concise review of the theoretical framework on family argumentative interactions will be presented to introduce the context of the study. Then, the methodology and the qualitative approach of analysis will be described. The results will be presented in Section 4, followed by a discussion of the main findings, as well as some reflections about limitations and potentialities of the study.

2. Arguments and reactions (counter-arguments) in family interactions

The relevance of argumentation in the family context has been well demonstrated by numerous studies highlighting the cognitive and educational advantages of reshaping interpersonal activities in terms of argumentative interactions (e.g., Arcidiacono & Bova, 2017, Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002; Schwarz et al., 2008). In particular, the investigation of the structure and the linguistic elements characterizing the argumentative discussions have revealed several characteristics of parent-child interactions. For example, Bova and Arcidiacono (2013b) have identified a specific type of invocation of authority - 'the authority of feelings' - used by parents in argumentative discussions related to a wide range of topics, mainly referred to the mealtime activity, but also

related to behaviours within the family context and outside. In their work, the authors show that the parents' authority can be an effective argumentative strategy when the nature of the relationship between the authoritative figure and the person to whom the argument is addressed is based on the certainty of positive feelings, rather than fear of punishment, and when 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. Other argumentative studies (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2014a; Brumark, 2006; Rundquist, 1992) have found that commenting ironically on the attitudes or behavior of children is an argumentative strategy typically adopted by parents to persuade children to withdraw or decrease the strength of their counter-standpoints.

These studies highlight the relevance of considering parents' and children's strategies they engage in argumentative discussions. In this sense, the interplay between arguments and reactions (in terms of counter-arguments) is particularly relevant in the frame of antagonistic situations between parents and children. Goodwin (2006), analysing a dispute between a father and his son, has shown how utterances opposing another position in an argument are constructed with a simultaneous orientation to (a) the detailed structure of the prior utterance being opposed and (b) the future trajectories of action projected by that utterance, which the current utterance attempts to counter and intercept. Examining the sequential analysis of directives used in conversation between parents and young children during mealtimes, Goodwin (2007) has shown how forms of arguments built of recycled positions differ in important ways from arguments where children are involved in accounting for their behavior with their parents. Situations where children shirk their responsibilities can lead to escalations of assertions of authority through threats or a parent's giving up in defeat. By way of contrast, where parents are persistent in pursuing their directives, often facilitated by situations where children and parents join in sustaining face-to-face access to one another, children learn to be accountable for their actions. Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo (2009), by analysing verbal disputes in the family context, have shown the role of the turn-by-turn details of conflict talk as situated interaction, the main aspects of the linguistic choices speakers make in designing and delivering their utterances, and the role of the contextual aspects such as the participants' social relationship, and age for the production and interpretation of talk.

Turning to children's argumentation, the capacity to understand and produce arguments emerges early in development (Anderson et al., 1997; Hester & Hester, 2010; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2010, 2014, 2016; Stein & Albro, 2001) and children are able to use both context-bound and cultural resources to produce their arguments. Slomkowski and Dunn (1992) have illustrated how children most often use self-oriented arguments, e.g., talking about themselves, while parents generally use other-oriented arguments; arguments that refer to children and not to themselves. Moreover, Dunn and her colleagues (Dunn, 1988; Dunn & Munn, 1987, Herrera & Dunn, 1997; Tesla & Dunn, 1992) have highlighted 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. This synthetic (and partial) section shows that studies on argumentative interactions among family members

during mealtimes have so far devoted much attention to investigate the argumentative strategies adopted by parents with their children and the argumentative skills of children when interacting with their parents. In this paper, we intend to go a step further within this research direction, thus providing a relevant contribution to the research strand on family argumentation. More particularly, we intend to focus on the interplay between parents' arguments, children's reactions and topics of disagreement in discussions related to parental rules and prescriptions at mealtimes. For this reason, this investigation will consider the argument schemes on which arguments are based and the most frequent types of contested standpoints between parents and children.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data corpus

The data corpus is composed of 30 video-recorded separate family meals (constituting about 20 hours of video data), constructed from two different sets of data, named sub-corpus 1 and sub-corpus 2¹. All participants are Italian-speaking and did not receive any financial support to take part in the study. The length of the recordings varies from 20 to 40 min. Sub-corpus 1 consists of 15 video-recorded meals in 5 middle to upper-middle-class Italian families² living in Rome. The criteria adopted in the selection of the Italian families were the following: the presence of both parents and at least two children, of whom the younger is 3 to 6 years old. Most parents at the time of data collection were in their late 30s ($M = 37.40$; $SD = 3.06$). All families in sub-corpus 1 had two children. Sub-corpus 2 consists of 15 video-recorded meals in 5 middle to upper-middle-class Swiss families with high socio-economic status, all residents in the Lugano area. The criteria adopted in the selection of the Swiss families mirror those adopted in the creation of sub-corpus 1. At the time of data collection, most parents were in their mid-30s ($M = 35.90$; $SD = 1.91$). Families had two or three children.

Detailed information on family constellations in sub-corpus 1 and sub-corpus 2 are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Length of recordings, participants, and average age of participants.

Sub-corpus	Italian	Swiss
Length of recordings in minutes	20-37	19-42
Mean length of recordings in minutes	32.41	35.12
Participants		
Mothers	5	5

¹ Although the data corpus on which the present study is based is constituted of families of two different nationalities, a cultural comparison aimed at singling out argumentative differences and commonalities between the two sub-corpora is not a goal of this study.

² Based on the parental answers to questionnaires about socio-economic status (SES) and personal details of family members that participants filled before the video-recordings.

Fathers	5	5
Adults, total	10	10
Son	6	6
Daughter	4	7
Children, total	10	13
Total participants	20	23
Average age of participants		
Mother	36,40 (SD 2,881)	34,80 (SD 1.643)
Father	38,40 (SD 3,209)	37,00 (SD 1.581)
Son	7,50 (SD 3,619)	5.83 (SD 1.835)
Daughter	4,00 (SD 1,414)	4.86 (SD 2.268)
First-born	9,00 (SD 2,00)	7.60 (SD .894)
	(4 sons; 1daughter)	(3 sons; 2 daughters)
Second-born	3,20 (SD .447)	4.40 (SD .548)
	(2 sons; 3 daughters)	(2 sons; 3 daughters)
Third-born	0	3 (SD .000)
		(1 son; 2 daughters)

3.2 Transcription procedures and data

As specified in a consent letter signed by the researchers and the parents, the participants provided the data would be used only for scientific purposes, and privacy would be guarded. The information packet also made clear that participants could choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

In a first phase, all family meals were fully transcribed by two researchers adopting the CHILDES standard transcription system CHAT (MacWhinney, 2000), with some modifications introduced to enhance readability (see the Appendix 1 for the conventions). The level of agreement between the two researchers, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .82. Afterward, the researchers reviewed together with the family members the transcriptions at their home. This procedure allows asking the family members to clarify passages that were unclear to researchers on account of the low level of recording sound and vague words and constructions. Information on the physical setting of the mealtimes, e.g., a description of the kitchen and of the dining table, was also made for each family meal. In the transcription of the conversations, this practice has proved very useful for understanding some passages that were unclear to researchers.

In this paper, the excerpts of data are presented in the English language. The translation of utterances has been conducted not word-by-word, but to represent what the speaker was saying in his/her mother language. In all examples, discursive turns are numbered progressively within the sequence, and family members are identified by role (for adults) and by name (for children). To ensure the anonymity of children, their names in the paper are pseudonyms.

3.3 Analytical approach

The pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation has been used to analyse the data. In a first phase, to identify the argumentative discussions related to parental rules and prescriptions³, and to select the contested standpoints and the arguments used by parents and children, the analysis will rely on the ideal model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992) (see § 3.3.1). In a second phase, to distinguish the different types of argument advanced by parents and children, we have considered the argument schemes on which arguments are based, namely the way in which a standpoint and an argument are linked. To this end, we refer to the classification of the different types of argument schemes as proposed by van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Snoeck Henkemans (2002) (see § 3.3.2).

3.3.1. Selection of the argumentative discussions and identification of the arguments

According to the model of a critical discussion, for the present study only the discussions that fulfill the following criteria have been selected for the analysis:

- a difference of opinion between parents and children arises around an issue related to parental rules and prescriptions, e.g., *Can the child use the rubber to erase the drawing?*
- at least one standpoint advanced by one of the two parents is questioned by one or more children, or vice versa, e.g., *Can the child use the rubber to erase the drawing?*
- at least one of the two parents put forward at least one argument either in favour of or against the standpoint being questioned, e.g., *that rubber is for the drawing board and you cannot use it on other things.*

In order to select the contested standpoints between parents and children, we specifically focus on the first stage of the ideal model of a critical discussion, e.g., the confrontation stage. The confrontation, in which a disagreement regarding a certain standpoint is externalized in a discursive exchange or anticipated by the speaker, is a necessary condition for an argumentative discussion to occur. To select the argument put forth by children with their parents, the analysis moves to the third stage of the ideal model of a critical discussion, e.g., the argumentation stage, when the interlocutors exchange arguments and critical reactions to convince the other party to accept or to retract his/her standpoint.

3.3.2. Criteria used for the identification of the argument schemes

According to the pragma-dialectical approach, there are three main categories of argument schemes describing the type of link between the argument(s) and the standpoint being defended:

- argumentation based on a *symptomatic relation*. It occurs when a standpoint is defended by citing in the argument a certain sign, symptom, or distinguishing mark of what is

³ This choice is connected to the fact that, during family mealtimes, in most cases the issues leading parents and children to engage in argumentative discussions are generated by standpoints based on parental rules and prescriptions.

claimed in the standpoint (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002: 97). The general argument scheme for a symptomatic relation is: *Y is true of X, because Z is true of X, and Z is symptomatic of Y*. For example: Mark has big hands (standpoint) because he is tall (argument). In this example, the fact that Mark belongs to the class of people who are tall is used as an argument in support of the standpoint that he has big hands.

- argumentation based on a *causal relation*. It occurs when a standpoint is defended by making a causal connection between the arguments and the standpoint (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002: 100). The general argument scheme for a causal relation is: *Y is true of X, because Z is true of X, and Z leads to Y*. For example: Mark is always tired (standpoint) because he doesn't drink coffee (argument). In this example, the fact that Mark belongs to the class of people who don't drink coffee is used as an argument in support of the standpoint that he is always tired.
- argumentation based on a *relation of analogy*. It occurs when a standpoint is defended by showing that something referred to in the standpoint is similar to something that is cited in the argument (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002: 102). The general argument scheme for the relation of analogy is: *Y is true of X, because Y is true of Z, and Z is comparable to X*. For example: Mark and his father have many passions in common. I am sure that Mark will participate to the New York marathon (standpoint) because I saw on Facebook many pictures of his father running that marathon (argument). In this example, the fact that Mark and his father share the same passions is used as an argument in support of the standpoint that he will do something that his father already did in the past.

4. Results

The entire corpus was composed of $N = 132$ argumentative discussions between parents and children relating to parental rules and prescriptions. In the corpus, the parents advanced at least one argument (in several cases more than only one argument) in support of their rules and prescriptions in $N = 125$ instances for a total number of $N = 186$ arguments. Children, instead, advanced at least one argument (in few cases more than only one argument) to refute the parental rules and prescriptions only in $N = 58$ instances, for a total number of $N = 74$ arguments. In the presentation of the results, we will account for different cases to show how arguments and reactions match the argumentative schemes presented above.

4.1. Contested standpoints

Through an inductive approach and a synoptic analysis of the selected discussions (Arcidiacono, 2015), four main categories of contested standpoints between parents and children have been

identified. The first two categories include contested standpoints that refer to food, while the other two categories include contested standpoints related to the behavior of children.

The first category includes all the contested standpoints that refer to the *taste of food* (e.g., the risotto is delicious, the cheese is not good). The second category of contested standpoints between parents and children is also related to food and includes all the contested standpoints that refer to the *portion size relative to appetite* (e.g., you have to eat more pasta, you have to finish eating the potatoes). Slightly less frequent than the contested standpoints that refer to the taste of food, they are however the second most frequent type of contested standpoints between parents and children. The third category includes all the contested standpoints between parents and children that refer to the *behavior of children within the family context* (e.g., you cannot play with your toys on the dining table). The fourth category includes all the contested standpoints between parents and children that refer to the *behavior of children outside the family context* (e.g., you do not have to talk back to your teacher). Compared to the previous categories of contested standpoints, this type of contested standpoints is much the less frequent.

After the identification of these categories, we have examined single sequences of argumentative discussions. Excerpts concerning the analysis of the arguments advanced by parents and children in discussions related to each of the four main categories of contested standpoints will be presented in the following parts of the paper.

4.2. Arguments referring to food

As stated in the previous section, the large part of the contested standpoints between parents and children refer to the food ($N = 87$). In the 47 instances in which the contested standpoints refer to the taste of food, the parents advance a total number of 70 arguments. In such cases, the children's types of reactions are the following: immediate acceptance of parents' argumentation in 5 instances, expression of further doubts in 21 instances, opposition without providing arguments in 14 instances, and advancement of an argument in 30 instances. In the 40 instances in which the contested standpoints are referred to the portion size relative to appetite, the parents advance a total number of 59 arguments. In such cases, the children's types of reactions are the following: immediate acceptance of parents' argumentation in 7 instances, expression of further doubt in 13 instances, opposition without providing arguments in 11 instances, and in 28 instances they advance an argument.

Looking at the types of arguments used by parents and children, the findings of this study indicate that when the contested standpoints refer to the food, both parents and children in most cases defend their standpoint by citing in the argument a certain sign, symptom, or distinguishing mark of what is claimed in the standpoint. The arguments advanced by both parents and children are therefore based on the same argument scheme, i.e., on a symptomatic relation. The excerpts 1 and 2 illustrate these types of arguments advanced by parents and children.

Excerpt 1. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 35 years), mother (MOM, 33 years), Giovanni (GIO, 7 years 3 months), Carlo (CAR, 4 years 8 months), Alessia (ALE, 3 years 4 months). All family members are seated at the table. Dinner is almost over.

- 1 *MOM: good ((the food)) tonight, isn't it? ((talking to DAD))
2 *DAD: really good!
 %act: MOM looks towards GIO
3 *MOM: good grief, Giovanni has hardly eaten anything tonight ((talking to DAD))
4 *MOM: Giovanni, you must eat the meatballs.
5 *GIO: no:: I don't want them ((the meatballs))
6 *MOM: look how crisp they are!
7 *GIO: no:: they are hard!
 %act: MOM tastes the meatballs
8 *MOM: yes, actually they are not very good
 %act: MOM looks towards DAD
 %pau: 1.5. sec
9 *MOM: do you want a little chicken cutlet?
10 *GIO: yes::! [=! smiling]

At the beginning of the exchange, the mother is looking for a positive evaluation of the food she had prepared for dinner (line). However, although the father agreed with her, in line 3 the mother expresses her concern because the son has not eaten anything during the meal. According to the good (really good, in the father's words) quality of the food, this is in contrast with the parents' appreciation at the beginning of the sequence. The mother is also concerned by the fact that Giovanni needs to eat something: for this reason, she proposes to him the meatballs, although the child immediately disagrees (line 5: "no:: I don't want them"). At this point, the exchange represents a confrontation, since two opposite standpoints are advanced by the parties: on the one hand, the mother hopes that the son would eat the meatballs; on the contrary, Giovanni does not want to eat. As the parties decided to engage in arguing about their standpoints, the mother emphasizes the good taste of the food (line 6), coherently to what has been previously attested by both parents: again, this is an attempt to put forward an argument in support of her standpoint. The argument used by Giovanni in reaction to the mother's claim also refers to the taste of the food: in his opinion, the meatballs are not crisp but, rather, they are hard. While his mother had put to the fore a positive property of the meatballs, by qualifying as "hard" the meatballs Giovanni is indicating a negative property of the food.

In this example, the arguments advanced both by the mother and by the child aim to show specific properties of the food. The connection of each argument to the standpoint under discussion ("Giovanni must eat the meatballs") is the symptomatic link between the crispiness and the eat-worthiness of the food. Accordingly, the mother uses an argument scheme based on a *symptomatic relation*, and the child matches that form in his argument as well (Y is true of X, because Z is true of X, and Z is symptomatic of Y). What distinguishes mother's and child's argumentation is that they support opposite standpoints by mentioning different properties

(crispiness/hardness) of the meatballs. In this case, the argument put forth by the child results effective in convincing the mother to taste the meatballs she prepared. In line 8, the mother changes her initial evaluation: she agrees that the food is not very good and assumes that Giovanni should get some other food than the hard meatballs.

In the following excerpt, the contested standpoint between a mother and her 7-year-old son Luca refers to the portion size of food relative to the child's appetite.

Excerpt 2. Italian family. Participants: father (DAD, 41 years), mother (MOM, 38 years), Luca (LUC, 7 years 2 months), Luisa (LUI, 3 years 10 months). All family members are seated at the table. The dinner is started from about 15 minutes. All family members are eating the risotto.

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| | %sit: | LUC is eating the risotto |
| 1. | *LUC: | that's enough, I don't want more ((risotto)) |
| | %act: | LUC stops eating the risotto |
| 2. | *MOM: | come on, you didn't eat enough yet |
| 3. | *LUC: | but if I ate one kilo ((of risotto)) |
| 4. | *MOM: | come on:: you have not finished yet |
| 5. | *LUC: | no:: no:: |
| | %act: | LUC gets up and runs into another room |

The excerpt focuses on the moment in which Luca tells his mother that he does not want to eat more risotto (line 1). The mother disagrees, stating that the size of the portion that Luca ate was not enough. The child, instead, in line 3 aligns with the argument of the size of the portion, saying that he has already eaten a lot ("one kilo"). We can reasonably suppose that, according to the child, one kilo of risotto represents more than the right/usual amount that it is supposed to be eaten.

Like the previous example, the child's argumentation is based on a *symptomatic relation*: the fact that he ate "one kilo" of risotto is presented as a sign that he already ate a big amount. In this case, the relation between the argument and the standpoint is, therefore, one of concomitance, and eating a big amount of food is a sign that for sure the right amount of food has already been eaten. Unlike the previous example, where the argument advanced by the child was effective in convincing the mother to change her opinion, in this case, the argument put forth by Luca does not bring to a similar outcome. The mother still wants Luca to finish eating the risotto (line 4), without a possibility of compromise between the two participants. The withdrawal as a closing possibility (Vuchinich, 1990) of the verbal exchange around the risotto can be considered, in this case, as a sign that participants became too upset to continue the discussion.

4.3. Arguments referring to the behavior of children

In the corpus of data, about a third of the contested standpoints between parents and children are referred to the behavior of children within and outside the family context (N= 45). In the 31

instances in which the contested standpoints are referred to the behavior of children within the family context – especially related to proper table manners – parents advance a total number of 38 arguments. In such cases, the children's types of reactions are the following: immediate acceptance of parents' argumentation in 4 instances, expression of further doubt in 10 instances, opposition without providing arguments in 15 instances, and in 9 instances they advance an argument. In the 14 instances in which the contested standpoints are referred to the behavior of children outside the family context – especially related to the behavior in the school context with their teachers and peers – the parents advance a total number of 19 arguments. In such cases, the children's types of reactions are the following: immediate acceptance of parents' argumentation in 1 instances, expression of further doubt in 3 instances, opposition without providing arguments in 8 instances, and advancement of an argument in 7 instances.

Interestingly, compared to the argumentative discussions in which the contested standpoints refer to food, when the contested standpoints refer to their behavior children refute more often to advance any argument in support of their standpoint or advancing a further doubt. Looking at the types of argument used by parents and children, when the contested standpoints refer to the behaviour of children in most cases the parents refer to argument schemes such as the symptomatic relation, the causal relation and the relation of analogy, while the children still base their arguments in most cases on a symptomatic relation (see the following excerpts).

In the following excerpt, the contested standpoint between a mother and her 7-year-old daughter, Michela, refers to the behavior of the child at home.

Excerpt 3. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 38 years), mother (MOM, 35 years), Michela (MIC, 7 years 8 months), Antonio (ANT, 5 years 1 months). All family members are seated at the table. The dinner is started from about 10 minutes, and all family members are eating the meat with the only exception of Michela.

1. *MOM: Michela, sit up with your back straight and your shoulders back
- *MOM: don't bend forward
2. *MIC: no.
3. *MOM: because you'll get a severe back pain
4. *MIC: really?
5. *MOM: yes, sure!
- %act: MIC sits up on the chair with her back straight

The excerpt concerns an exchange between the mother and Michela about the proper way to be seated. Lines 1 and 2 represent the confrontation stage between the participants because the mother's standpoint (Michela has to sit on the chair correctly) has been met by the child's refusal. In line 3, the mother advances an argument to support her standpoint: getting bend forward and not with the back straight is the cause that can lead to getting severe back pain. Here, the mother defends the standpoint by making a *causal relation* between the argument and the standpoint. In this case, the relation between the argumentation and the standpoint is, therefore, a causal one

such that the standpoint, given the argument, ought to be accepted on the grounds of this connection (Y is true of X, because Z is true of X, and Z leads to Y). In line 4, Michela asks her mother to confirm the truthfulness of her previous statement, as the mother promptly does (line 5). In this case, the argument put forward by the mother appears to be effective in convincing her daughter to retract her standpoint. Michela, in fact, sits up on the chair with her back straight.

In the following excerpt, instead, the contested standpoint between a mother and her 7-year-old son, Marco, refers to the behavior of the child in the school context.

Excerpt 4. Italian family. Participants: father (DAD, 42 years), mother (MOM, 40 years), Marco (MAR, 7 years 2 months), Leonardo (LEO, 3 years 9 month). All the children are seated at the table. MOM is standing and is serving dinner. DAD is seated on the couch watching TV.

- %act: dinner is just started. Mom serves the food to children, DAD instead is still seated on the couch watching TV
1. *MAR: mom
2. *MOM: what Marco?
3. *MAR: I think that the teacher Laura ((the math's teacher)) will give us a lot of homework to do during the holidays ((referring to the Christmas holidays))
4. *MOM: no:: no:
- *MOM: I don't think so
5. *MAR: I do though!
6. *MOM: no:: I don't think so.
- *MOM: if teacher Maria ((the Italian's teacher)) didn't do it, teacher Laura wouldn't do either
7. *MAR: let's hope so! [! smiling]
- %sit: MOM smiles too
- %sit: MOM is serving the food to MAR

While family members are waiting for the father, Marco (line 3) advances a standpoint about the fact that the math's teacher, Laura, will give to all students of his class a lot of homework for Christmas holidays. After the mother's disagreement (line 4), Marco does not provide any argument in support of his standpoint. On the contrary, the mother advances an argument to convince the son to change his idea: in line 6 she says that, if the Italian teacher did not give them homework, neither will the math's teacher. The reasoning proposed by the mother presumes that teachers of the same class will behave similarly. The relation between the argumentation and the standpoint is, therefore, one of *analogy*. The standpoint is sustained by the fact that something referred to in the standpoint is similar to something that is cited in the argument: on the grounds of this resemblance, the standpoint should be accepted (Y is true of X, because Y is true of Z, and Z is comparable to X). In this case, the argument put forward by the mother appears to be effective in convincing her son to change his opinion (cf. line 7: "let's hope so!"), and they conclude this discussion smiling to each other.

5. Discussion

The present paper has intended to contribute to investigating the interplay between parents' arguments, children's reactions and topics of disagreement during mealtime interactions. As already observed by Blum-Kulka (1997) in her cross-cultural study on family dinner conversations, argumentative discussions are not primarily aimed at resolving verbal conflicts among family members, but they essentially appear to be an instrument that enables parents to transmit, and children to learn, values and models about how to behave in a culturally appropriate way. Mealtimes appear as activity settings and opportunity spaces where family members intentionally and unintentionally express their feelings and expectations. Although the purposes for which parents may engage in an argumentative discussion with their children may be various, argumentation always requires arguments in support of the standpoint. The results of this study indicate that the topics of disagreement for which parents and children engaged in argumentative discussions mainly refer to disagreements related to the food. In particular, the taste of food served during the meal and the portion size of food that has to be (or not to be) eaten by children are the two main topics of disagreement on which parents and children engage in argumentative discussions. During the meal, in fact, it is typical to observe parents trying to convince their children that the food is good and therefore deserves to be eaten. Similarly, it is also typical to observe parents putting forth arguments to convince their children to eat more. The fact that the contested standpoints related to food are the most frequent in the argumentative discussions between parents and children at mealtimes is in line with what has been observed in other studies on family discourse, in which discussions are typically food-bounded (Arcidiacono & Bova, 2015; Bova & Arcidiacono, 2014b; Ochs, Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1996; Wiggins, 2013). Less frequently, about a third of the times, the topics of disagreement between parents and children are related to the behavior of children.

Turning to the types of arguments advanced by parents and children, the differences in age, roles, and competencies between them certainly affect their argumentative interactions (Arcidiacono, 2011; Arcidiacono & Bova, 2013; Bova, 2015; Kuhn, 1991; Stein & Miller, 1993; Felton & Kuhn, 2001). For instance, it is not surprising that parents advance more arguments than their children. However, the results of the present study highlight an interesting aspect, so far not described by the relevant literature: in the analyses of the argument schemes on which the arguments advanced by parents and children were based, children match the form of reasoning offered by their parents only in some types of contested standpoints, not in others. In fact, when the contested standpoints refer to food (e.g., discussions about the taste of food or portion size relative to appetite), parents and children base their arguments on the same argument scheme, on a symptomatic relation. On the other hand, when the contested standpoints refer to the behavior of children, parents and children often base their arguments on different argument schemes: in such cases, parents base their argumentation not only on a symptomatic relation but also on a causal relation and on a relation of analogy; children, in large part, still base their arguments on a symptomatic relation. Moreover, when the contested standpoints refer to their behavior, children often refute to advance any argument in support of their standpoint, since their reaction is an

expression of further doubt or a mere opposition without providing any argument. More frequently, instead, children refuse to advance any argument in defense of their standpoint.

Overall, the results of the present study show that the forms of argument schemes most often advanced by parents and children are based on a symptomatic relation, i.e., citing in the argument a certain sign, symptom, or distinguishing mark of what is claimed in the standpoint. The reason underlying this aspect might rely on the parents' attempt to adapt their language to the child's level of understanding. Interestingly, the arguments' analysis indicates a clear difference of argumentative capacities between parents and children. This difference is not only based on the higher number of arguments advanced by parents compared to the children, but also on the greater parental capacity to adopt a different form of reasoning in support of argumentation. However, we are not claiming that children do not possess the necessary competencies to engage fruitfully in argumentative discussions with their parents. In fact, we have observed that children in some instances can put forth effective counter-arguments to convince their parents to change their standpoints. This aspect is particularly relevant in terms of children's abilities to engage in argumentative exchanges and to act in a rational way during the confrontation with adults.

6. Conclusion

Looking at the topics of disagreement between parents and children, family argumentative discussions appear as occasions enabling parents to transmit, and children to learn, models about how to behave in appropriate ways. Family argumentative interactions should be viewed as a bidirectional process of mutual apprenticeship in which parents affect children and are simultaneously affected by them (Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1999; Pontecorvo, Fasulo & Sterponi, 2001). In fact, by engaging in argumentative discussions, parents accept the commitment to clarify to their children the reasons on which rules and prescriptions are based, while children can become more aware of being full-fledged active participants of their family. Accordingly, for the reasons mentioned above, parents can play a key role in eliciting argumentative discussions and children can take the role of active learners.

We intend to conclude by considering some methodological aspects: the idiographic methodology adopted in this work has allowed the analysis of discursive sequences between parents and children in a multiparty setting of interactions. However, we are conscious that many challenges derive from the research design adopted for the present study. On the one hand, we have chosen the pragma-dialectical approach as the analytical tool to investigate parents-children disagreement at mealtime because we are convinced that the model particularly fits our study since it provides specific criteria to identify and select argumentative discussions, as well as the arguments advanced by the participants. In particular, the focus on the notion of argument scheme become crucial, since it permits to bring to light the type of reasoning on which the argument used by participants are based. On the other hand, in our attempt to investigate the interplay between parents' arguments, children's reactions and topics of disagreement during family interactions, we recognize that looking at mealtime conversations does not automatically

solve the problem of obtaining optimal family interaction data. Nevertheless, mealtime conversations appear as highly informative sources for the study of argumentation within the family context and constitute an invaluable source for analysing the dynamics of parents-children interactions within an emic perspective.

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Appendix 1: Symbols of transcription

*	indicates the speaker's turn
[...]	not-transcribed segment of talking
(())	segments added by the transcriber to clarify some elements of the situation
[=!]	segments added by the transcriber to indicate some paralinguistic features
%act:	description of speaker's actions
%sit:	description of the situation/setting
,	continuing intonation
.	falling intonation
:	prolonging of sounds
?	rising intonation
!	exclamatory intonation
→	maintaining the turn of talking by the speaker
%pau:	pause

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