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## A Qualitative Methodology for Studying Parent–Child Argumentation

This chapter provides a detailed exposé of the research methodology on which the investigation of parent–child argumentation during meal-time is based. In the first part, the conceptual tools adopted for the analysis of argumentative discussions between parents and children, i.e., the pragma-dialectical ideal model of a critical discussion and the Argumentum Model of Topics, are presented. Subsequently, the process of data gathering and the procedures for the transcription of oral data are discussed. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, ethical issues and practical problems in collecting parent–child conversations present throughout the study are considered.

### 2.1 Conceptual Tools for the Analysis of Parent–Child Argumentation

The conceptual tools adopted for the analysis of the argumentative discussions between parents and children are the pragma-dialectical ideal model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), integrated with the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2019).

**AQ1**



20 In what follows, these conceptual tools will be described analytically.  
21 Although some elucidations have already emerged throughout the pre-  
22 vious chapter, the nature of argumentation will now be comprehensively  
23 delineated.

### 24 2.1.1 The Pragma-Dialectical Ideal Model of a Critical 25 Discussion and the Reconstruction of the 26 Argumentative Discussions

27 The pragma-dialectical approach proposes the model of a critical dis-  
28 cussion as an ideal model of argumentation developing according to the  
29 standard of reasonableness. This model describes how argumentative **AQ2**  
30 discourse would be structured were such discourse to be solely aimed at  
31 resolving differences of opinion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004,  
32 p. 30). This model does not describe reality, but how argumentative dis-  
33 course would be structured were such discourse to be solely aimed at  
34 resolving differences of opinion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992,  
35 p. 35). The model of a critical discussion spells out four stages that are  
36 necessary for a dialectical resolution of differences of opinion, i.e., the  
37 resolution of a dispute by means of critically testing the standpoints at  
38 issue. The first step is the *confrontation stage*, in which it becomes clear  
39 that there is a standpoint that is not accepted because it runs up against  
40 doubt or contradiction. In the *opening stage*, the parties try to find out  
41 how much relevant common ground they share as to the discussion for-  
42 mat, background knowledge, values, to be able to determine whether  
43 their zone of agreement is sufficiently broad to conduct a fruitful discus-  
44 sion. In the proper *argumentation stage* of critical discussion, arguments  
45 in support of the standpoint(s) are advanced and critically tested. Finally,  
46 the *concluding stage* is the stage of a critical discussion in which the par-  
47 ties establish the result of an attempt to resolve a difference of opinion.

48 The ideal model of a critical discussion is assumed as a grid for the  
49 analysis, since it provides the criteria for the reconstruction of the  
50 argumentative discussions between parents and children. The analysis  
51 of parent–child discussions is limited to and focused on the study of  
52 *analytically relevant argumentative moves*, i.e., “those speech acts that, at



53 least potentially, play a role in the process of resolving a difference of  
54 opinion” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 73). The discussion,  
55 in fact, is considered as argumentative if the following two criteria are  
56 satisfied: (a) at least one standpoint put forth by a family member is  
57 questioned by one or more family members, and (b) at least one fam-  
58 ily member puts forward at least one argument either in favor of or  
59 against the standpoint being questioned. The findings of the analysis  
60 result in an *analytic overview*, which provides a reconstruction of the  
61 various components of an argumentative discussion. In an analytic over-  
62 view, “all ingredients of the discourse relevant to resolving a difference  
63 of opinion on the merits are thus identified and described in terms of  
64 well-defined analytical categories” (van Eemeren, 2011, pp. 142–143).  
65 For the reconstruction of an argumentative discussion, the following  
66 components must be identified: the difference of opinion in the con-  
67 frontation stage, the premises agreed upon in the opening stage, the  
68 arguments and criticisms advanced, implicitly or explicitly, during the  
69 argumentation stage, and the outcome of the discussion achieved in the  
70 concluding stage. The following example illustrates how the ideal model  
71 of a critical discussion is adopted to reconstruct in argumentative terms  
72 the discussion between a mother and her 7-year-old child, Paolo:

### 73 Excerpt 2.1

74 Swiss family II. Dinner 2. Family members: father (DAD, 38 years),  
75 mother (MOM, 36 years), Paolo (PAO, 7 years), Laura (LAU, 4 years  
76 and 5 months), and Elisa (ELI, 3 years and 2 months). All family mem-  
77 bers are seated at the table. DAD sits at the head of the table, MOM  
78 and PAO sit on the left-hand side of DAD, while LAU and ELI sit on  
79 their opposite side.

%act: PAO indica alla mamma di voler prendere una gomma per  
cancellare il  
disegno e MOM fa cenno di no agitando l'indice della mano  
PAO indicates to his MOM he wants to take a rubber to erase a  
drawing and  
MOM says 'no' clearly by shaking her finger

1 \*MOM: no Paolo  
no Paolo



## 22 A. Bova

- 2 \*PAO: si:  
yes:
- 3 \*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*
- 4 \*PAO: no::  
no::  
5 \*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 cannot try, you must always trust what your*  
*parents tell you*
- 6 \*PAO: no:: non è vero!  
*no:: it is not true!*  
%act: PAO si alza da tavola e corre a prendere la gomma per  
cancellare  
*PAO gets up from the table and runs to take the rubber to*  
*erase*

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83 In this dialogue, there is a difference of opinion between the mother  
84 and her son, Paolo. The sequence starts when Paolo indicates to his  
85 mother that he wants to take a rubber to erase a drawing on a paper  
86 sheet. In line 1, the mother disagrees with Paolo (“no Paolo”). In line 2,  
87 the child does not put forth any argument in support of his standpoint,  
88 but he just shows his disagreement with his mother (“yes::”). This phase  
89 of the discussion corresponds to the confrontation stage, as there is the  
90 child’s standpoint (*I want to use the rubber to erase*) that meets with the  
91 mother’s refusal (*No, you cannot*). The opening stage, in which the two  
92 parties decide to try and solve the difference of opinion and explore  
93 whether there are premises to start a discussion, is largely implicit. As  
94 observed by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Snoeck Henkemans (2002,  
95 p. 26): “It is quite common for little time to be spent on the opening of a  
96 discussion. Discussion rules and other starting points are often taken for  
97 granted and do not require explicit mentioning.” At this point, in line 3,  
98 the mother puts forth an argument in support of her standpoint, making  
99 clear to her son the reason at the basis of her directive (“that rubber  
100 is for the drawing board and you cannot use it on other things”). In



101 line 4, the child does not advance any argument in support of his stand-  
102 point but just shows, again, his disagreement with his mother's directive  
103 ("no::"). In line 5, the mother advances another argument to convince  
104 her child to change his opinion. The second argument advanced by the  
105 mother is no longer related to the properties of the eraser but states a  
106 general rule that the child must follow in similar situations and that can  
107 be paraphrased as follows: "Your parents have more experience than you.  
108 Therefore, you always have to trust them and accept what they say." This  
109 second argument put forth by the mother, however, is not effective in  
110 convincing her child to change his opinion. According to Paolo, in line  
111 6, the general rule stated by his mother is not right and, accordingly, he  
112 does not have to accept it. The sequence that goes from line 3 to line  
113 6 represents the argumentation stage, as arguments in support of the  
114 standpoint are advanced by, at least, one of the two participants to the  
115 argumentative discussion. The concluding stage of the argumentative dis-  
116 cussion between the mother and her child, Paolo, concerns a nonverbal  
117 act—Paolo gets up from the table and runs to take the rubber to erase—  
118 which indicates that the child does not want to keep discussing this issue  
119 and thus does not accept the mother's standpoint.

120 The analytical overview of the discussion between the child, Paolo,  
121 and his mother is summarized below:

<i>Issue</i>	Can Paolo use the rubber to erase his drawing?
<i>Standpoints</i>	(PAO) I want to try (MOM) No, you cannot
<i>Arguments</i>	(MOM) (a) That rubber is for the drawing board and you cannot use it on other things (b) Trust me because I know what I am talking about [...] you must always trust what your parents tell you

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### 123 2.1.2 The Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) 124 and the Analysis of the Inferential 125 Configuration of Arguments

126 To analyze the reasoning behind the arguments put forward by parents  
127 and children, the analysis based on the pragma-dialectical ideal model of



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128 a critical discussion is integrated with the Argumentum Model of Topics  
129 (henceforth, AMT) (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2019). The AMT is an  
130 instrument to systematically reconstruct the inferential configuration  
131 of arguments, i.e., to illustrate the structure of reasoning that under-  
132 lies the connection between a standpoint and its supporting arguments.  
133 According to the AMT, to reconstruct the inferential configuration of  
134 an argument, it is necessary to find the implicit premises on which the  
135 argument is based. In particular, two fundamental components should  
136 be distinguished in identifying the inferential relation binding the prem-  
137 ises to the conclusion of an argumentation: a *procedural component*  
138 and a *material component*. The procedural component is based on the  
139 semantic-ontological structure, which generates the inferential connec-  
140 tion from which the logical form of the argument is derived. The mate-  
141 rial component integrates into the argument scheme the implicit and  
142 explicit premises bound to the contextual common ground.

143 The procedural component develops along three levels. The first level  
144 is the ontological relation, namely the *locus*,<sup>1</sup> which is defined as “the  
145 source from which arguments are taken” (Rigotti & Greco Morasso,  
146 2019, p. 210). The locus is not a physical place, but a conceptual one, a  
147 sort of mental space, from which the argument is drawn. Rigotti (2009)  
148 distinguishes three main categories of loci.<sup>2</sup> The first one is represented by  
149 syntagmatic loci. As Rigotti puts it (2009, p. 166): “We speak of syntag-  
150 matic loci to indicate all the classes of arguments that refer to aspects that  
151 are ontologically linked to the standpoint, either directly or indirectly.”  
152 Examples of syntagmatic loci are the following: locus from definition,  
153 loci from extensional implications (species and genus, whole and parts,  
154 quantifiers, proper and accident, place, time), loci from causes (locus  
155 from the formal cause, from the material cause, from final cause, from  
156 the efficient cause, and from instrumental cause), locus from implica-  
157 tions and concomitances, and locus from correlates. The second category  
158 of loci is represented by paradigmatic loci. According to Rigotti (2009,

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<sup>1</sup>As Rigotti (2008) remarks, contemporary argumentation theorist refers to the term *locus* through **AQ3** the notion of *argument scheme* (cf. Garssen, 2001, 2002; Walton, Reed, & Macagno, 2008).

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed description of the taxonomy of loci, see Rigotti (2009, pp. 166–168).



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159 pp. 166–167): “We speak of paradigmatic loci referring to classes formed  
160 by arguments that are based on paradigmatic relations, both of opposi-  
161 tion and of analogy (similarity).” Among the syntagmatic loci, the follow-  
162 ing ones can be enumerated: locus from opposition, locus from analogy  
163 (with the subcategories, of likeliness, difference, and isomorphism), locus  
164 from “all the more...” and “all the less...”, locus from alternatives, and  
165 locus from termination and setting up. Finally, the third category of loci  
166 is represented by complex loci, which are characterized “by being on the  
167 borderline between paradigmatic and syntagmatic loci” (Rigotti, 2009,  
168 p. 167). Included in this category are the locus from authority, locus from  
169 promising and warning, locus from conjugates, locus from derivate. The  
170 second level of the procedural component is the inferential connections  
171 called *maxims*. Examples of maxims are the following: “If a certain goal  
172 is to be achieved, it is reasonable to activate a causal chain allowing to  
173 reach it [...] If something was the case for a circumstance of the same  
174 functional genus as X, this may be the case X” (Rigotti & Greco Morasso,  
175 2010, pp. 495–499). The third level of the procedural component is a  
176 logical form, such as the modus ponens or the modus tollens, activated  
177 by the maxims. More specifically, provided that a certain ontological rela-  
178 tion is the case, any inferential connection or maxim generated by it acti-  
179 vates through its logical form in an argument scheme. Different maxims  
180 may activate identical or different logical forms. For example, the maxim  
181 “If the cause is the case, the effect is too” activates the logical form of  
182 modus ponens, while the maxim “If the effect does not take place, the  
183 cause does not either” activates a modus tollens.

184 The procedural component is not sufficient for a proper reconstruc-  
185 tion of the inferential configuration of an argument. According to  
186 Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2010, p. 498): “argument schemes claim to  
187 account for the relation between real arguments used in real-life discus-  
188 sions and real standpoints they support [...] the validity of the maxim  
189 is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the soundness of an argu-  
190 mentative move: another level of premises must be taken into account.”  
191 In the AMT, this second level of premises is represented in the material  
192 component, which includes two different classes of context-bound prem-  
193 ises. The first level coincides with the Aristotelian notion of *endoxon*, i.e.,  
194 general principles, values, and assumptions that typically belong to the



195 specific context, and which are accepted by the relevant public or by the  
196 opinion leaders of the relevant public. The second level of the material  
197 component is the *datum*, basically coinciding with punctual informa-  
198 tion and facts regarding the specific situation at hand, and broadly corre-  
199 sponding to the same concept as in Toulmin's model (1958). The datum  
200 is typically explicit, representing the information which is made clear in  
201 the discussion. The logical conjunction of the endoxon with the datum  
202 leads to the *preliminary conclusion* of the material component coincid-  
203 ing with the *minor premise* of the procedural component. This point of  
204 intersection is crucial in the perspective of the AMT because it represents  
205 the junction between the material and the procedural starting points and  
206 shows how different types of premises are combined in real argumen-  
207 tation. As Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009, p. 52) maintain: "Topics  
208 guarantee the inferential consistency of the procedure, but, if the proce-  
209 dure is not combined with an endoxon, it remains a mere logical mecha-  
210 nism with no hold whatsoever on the public."

211 The Y-structure, so-called because its form looks like the letter Y,  
212 in Fig. 2.1, is the graphical tool adapted for representing the AMT's  
213 reconstruction.<sup>3</sup>

214 Represented in the Y-structure illustrated above is the analysis of the  
215 inferential configuration of an argument advanced by a mother dur-  
216 ing a discussion with her 5-year-old son, Leonardo. The analysis of the  
217 inferential configuration of this argument through the AMT will be  
218 presented in a later section (4.1.3). For now, I will only describe how  
219 the AMT is applied to reconstruct the reasoning behind an argument.  
220 In this example, the child wants to play with the lemon that is on the  
221 meal table. The mother disagrees with her son, since she needs the  
222 lemon to prepare the salad. The argument put forward by the mother is  
223 the following: "Because, Leonardo, your dad wants to eat a good salad  
224 today." Specified on the right-hand side of the diagram is the inferen-  
225 tial principle, i.e., the maxim, on which the mother's argumentation  
226 is based: "If a means admits alternative uses, it is reasonable to reserve  
227 it for the use bringing to the most important purpose." This maxim

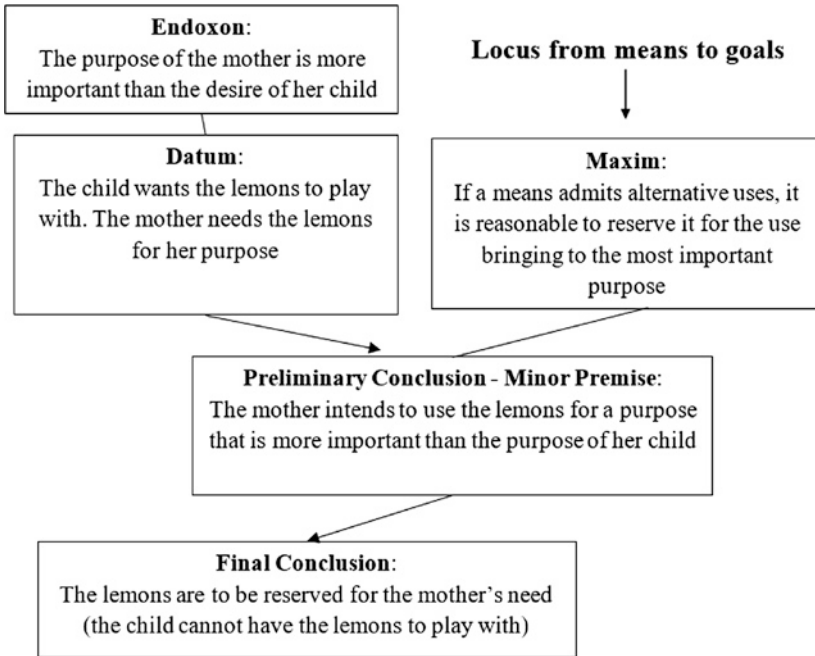
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<sup>3</sup>Instances of applications of the AMT can be found, for example, in Bigi (2012), Bova (2015a, 2015b), Bova and Arcidiacono (2013), and Greco Morasso (2012).





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**Fig. 2.1** The Y-structure representing the AMT's reconstruction of an argument advanced by a mother during a discussion with her 5-year-old son, Leonardo

228 is engendered from the locus from means to goals. For this maxim to  
229 generate the final conclusion, which coincides with the standpoint to  
230 be supported, the following minor premise of the topical component  
231 is needed: "The mother intends to use the lemons for a purpose that is  
232 more important than the purpose of her child." This leads to the final  
233 conclusion that "The lemons are to be reserved for the mother's need  
234 (the child cannot have the lemons to play with)." The topical compo-  
235 nent is only one part of the inferential configuration of the argument.  
236 The fact that "The mother intends to use the lemons for a purpose that  
237 is more important than the purpose of her child" needs further justifi-  
238 cation. Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, a second line of  
239 reasoning (material component) is developed to support the former one.  
240 Unlike the maxim, this is not an inferential rule but a factual statement  
241 that must be backed by contextual knowledge. The endoxon shared by



242 Leonardo and his mother concerns the common knowledge about the  
243 order of priority within the family context: “The purpose of the mother  
244 is more important than the desire of her child.” The datum constituting  
245 the minor premise of the endoxical syllogism is that “The child wants  
246 the lemons to play with. The mother needs the lemons for her purpose.”  
247 This leads to the preliminary conclusion of the endoxical syllogism,  
248 which coincides with the minor premise of the topical component,  
249 that “The mother intends to use the lemons for a purpose that is more  
250 important than the purpose of her child.”

251 Despite its particular concern for the inferential aspects of argumen-  
252 tation, the AMT, de facto, accounts not only for the logical aspects of  
253 the development of argumentation but also for its embeddedness in the  
254 parties’ relationship. Beyond the possibility of analyzing the process of  
255 reasoning underlying an argument, this aspect represents the main rea-  
256 son why I have chosen to use the AMT to analyze parent–child argu-  
257 mentative discussions.

## 258 2.2 Corpus of Data

259 The study presented in this volume takes as its empirical base a qua-  
260 si-homogeneous corpus constructed from two different sets of data,  
261 named *sub-corpus 1* and *sub-corpus 2*. Sub-corpus 1 consists of 15 video  
262 recordings and related transcriptions of mealtime conversations in  
263 five Italian families collected in the city of Rome (Italy).<sup>4</sup> Sub-corpus  
264 2, created in the city of Lugano<sup>5</sup> (Switzerland), consists of 15 video  
265 recordings and related transcriptions of mealtime conversations in five  
266 Swiss families. Despite the data corpus on which the present study is  
267 based is constituted of families of two different nationalities, a cultural

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<sup>4</sup>I want to thank Clotilde Pontecorvo and her colleagues at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Italy, for allowing that a part of the broad corpus of video-recordings of family mealtime conversations in Italian families could be used as part of the data corpus of the present study.

<sup>5</sup>Lugano is the largest city in the southernmost canton of Switzerland, the canton of Ticino. Switzerland has four national languages: French, German, Italian, and Romansh. The canton of Ticino is the only canton in Switzerland where the sole official language is Italian.



268 comparison aimed at singling out differences and similarities between  
269 the two sub-corpora from an argumentative point of view is not a goal  
270 of this study. The criteria adopted in the selection of the Swiss families  
271 mirror the criteria adopted in the creation of sub-corpus 1: the pres-  
272 ence of both parents and at least two children, of whom the younger is  
273 of preschool age (3-year-old to 6-year-old). All participants are Italian-  
274 speaking. Participating families did not receive any financial reimburse-  
275 ment for their participation in the study.

### 276 **2.2.1 Sub-corpus 1 Italian Families:** 277 **Sample Characteristics**

278 Included in sub-corpus 1, based on the parental answers to question-  
279 naires about socioeconomic status (SES) and personal details of family  
280 members that participants filled before the video recordings, were five  
281 middle- to upper-middle-class Italian families, all residents of Rome.  
282 Most parents at the time of data collection were in their late 30s.  
283 Fathers were slightly older than mothers. All families in sub-corpus 1  
284 had two children. To ensure the anonymity of participants, all names in  
285 this volume are pseudonyms. Detailed information on family constella-  
286 tions in sub-corpus 1 are presented in Table 2.1.

### 287 **2.2.2 Sub-corpus 2 Swiss Families: Recruitment** 288 **of the Families and Sample Characteristics**

289 The Swiss families were selected through the *snowball technique* (also  
290 known as *chain referral sampling*) (Goodman, 1961; Heckathorn, 1997,  
291 2002), by which the candidate families contacted helped the research-  
292 ers to find others. The process of selection was carried out in the city  
293 of Lugano, and all families in this study expressed a keen interest in  
294 participating. After an initial contact by phone, the researchers visited  
295 the families in their own homes and I described to parents the research  
296 plan. The families were informed that this study aimed to investigate  
297 the style of their mealtime conversations, but nothing was said about  
298 the specific interest in argumentative discussions. As specified in a



**Table 2.1** Sub-corpus 1—Italian families

Family group	Italian (sub-corpus 1)
Length of recordings in minutes	20–37
Mean length of recordings in minutes	32.41
<b>Participants</b>	
<b>FAM_1</b>	<b>FAM_4</b>
Mom: Ester (38 years)	Mom: Flavia (34 years)
Dad: Paolo (38 years)	Dad: Sergio (38 years)
Child 1: Silverio (8 years)	Child 1: Gabriele (8 years and 5 months)
Child 2: Gabriele (5 years and 4 months)	Child 2: Daniele (5 years and 4 months)
<b>FAM_2</b>	<b>FAM_5</b>
Mom: Marta (33 years)	Mom: Paola (40 years)
Dad: Gianfranco (34 years)	Dad: Fabrizio (42 years)
Child 1: Giorgia (6 years and 6 months)	Child 1: Marco (8 years and 6 months)
Child 2: Clara (3 years and 10 months)	Child 2: Leonardo (5 years and 7 months)
<b>FAM_3</b>	
Mom: Sara (37 years)	
Dad: Matteo (37 years)	
Child 1: Samuele (7 years and 11 months)	
Child 2: Adriana (5 years and 4 months)	
Mothers	5
Fathers	5
Adults, total	10
Sons	7
Daughters	3
Children, total	10
Children aged from 3 to 6	5
Older siblings	5
Total participants	20

release letter signed by the researchers 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. 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, based on the parental answers to questionnaires about SES and personal details of family members that participants filled before the video recordings,

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**Table 2.2** Sub-corpus 2—Swiss families

Family group	Italian (sub-corpus 2)
Length of recordings in minutes	19–42
Mean length of recordings in minutes	35.12
<b>Participants</b>	
<b>FAM_1</b>	<b>FAM_4</b>
Mom: Luisa (38 years)	Mom: Cristina (34 years)
Dad: Marco (41 years)	Dad: Massimo (36 years)
Child 1: Luca (6 years and 8 months)	Child 1: Stefano (8 years and 5 months)
Child 2: Luisa (3 years and 11 months)	Child 2: Alessandro (4 years and 6 months)
<b>FAM_2</b>	<b>FAM_5</b>
Mom: Maria (36 years)	Mom: Chiara (37 years)
Dad: Giuseppe (38 years)	Dad: Andrea (37 years)
Child 1: Paolo (7 years)	Child 1: Francesco (6 years and 3 months)
Child 2: Laura (4 years and 5 months)	Child 2: Michele (4 years and 2 months)
Child 3: Elisa (3 years and 2 months)	
<b>FAM_3</b>	
Mom: Sara (34 years)	
Dad: Carlo (39 years)	
Child 1: Manuela (7 years and 4 months)	
Child 2: Filippo (5 years and 1 month)	
Child 3: Carlo (3 years and 1 month)	
Mothers	5
Fathers	5
Adults, total	10
Sons	8
Daughters	4
Children, total	12
Children aged from 3 to 6	7
Older siblings	5
Total participants	22

were five middle- to upper-middle-class Swiss families, all residents of Lugano. At the time of data collection, most parents were in their mid-30s. Fathers were slightly older than mothers. Families had two or three children. To ensure the anonymity of participants, all names in this volume are pseudonyms. Detailed information on family constellations in sub-corpus 2 is presented in Table 2.2.



## 2.3 Data Collection and Procedures for the Transcription of Oral Data

To minimize researcher interference, family members were told to act as normally as possible, and the recordings were made by the families themselves. However, even though the family members were told to act as they normally do without the video camera, and despite their seeming indifference toward the video camera, the intrusion in their life routine that the participation in the study involved cannot be denied. In the following sections, we will discuss practical problems faced in collecting parent–child mealtime conversations.

The equipment was delivered to the family and the researchers 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 to ensure maximum durability of the data.

In a first phase, family meals were fully transcribed adopting the CHILDES standard transcription system CHAT (MacWhinney, 2000), with some modifications introduced to enhance readability, and revised by two researchers until a high level of consent (agreement rate = 90%) has been 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, the researchers reviewed together with the family members all the transcriptions at their home.



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345 This procedure made it possible to ask the family members to clar-  
346 ify passages that were unclear in the eyes of the researchers because of  
347 the low level of recording sound and vague words and constructions.  
348 Information on the physical setting of the mealtime, i.e., a description  
349 of the kitchen and of the dining table, was also made for each family  
350 meal. In the transcription of the conversations, this practice has proved  
351 very useful for understanding some passages that, at first sight, appeared  
352 unclear. The direct experience of the entire process of corpus construc-  
353 tion, including the recording of the interaction (construction of pri-  
354 mary data), and the transcription (construction of secondary data), has  
355 allowed both the application of the availability principle, i.e., “the analy-  
356 tical task of recording (and, in the same way, of digitising, anonymiz-  
357 ing transcribing, annotating, etc.) is to provide for the availability of  
358 relevant details-which indeed makes the analysis possible” (Mondada,  
359 2006, p. 55), and a fuller experiential understanding of the specific  
360 situations.

361 In all examples, all turns are numbered progressively within the dis-  
362 cussion, and family members are identified by role (for adults) and by  
363 name (for children). Italian data are presented in the original, using  
364 Times New Roman font, whereas the English translation is added below  
365 using *Times New Roman Italic font*. The transcript follows CHAT in  
366 using the following conventions:

- \* Indicates the speaker's turn
- [...] Not-transcribed segment of talking
- (0) Segments added by the transcriber to clarify some elements of the situation
- [=!] Segments added by the transcriber to indicate some paralinguistic features
- xxx Inaudible utterance(s)
- %act: Description of the speaker's actions
- %sit: Description of the situation/setting

367  
368 Several deviations from CHAT were introduced. First, punctuation  
369 symbols, as employed by Schiffrin (1994) and Blum-Kulka (1997), were  
370 used to indicate intonation contours:



, Continuing intonation  
· Falling intonation  
: Prolonging of sounds  
? Rising intonation  
! Exclamatory intonation

371

372 Second, additional symbols were added:

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

373

## 374 2.4 Ethical Issues and Practical Problems 375 in Collecting Parent–Child Mealtime 376 Conversations

377 Collecting parent–child mealtime interactions poses several chal-  
378 lenges because respecting the privacy of the participants is one of  
379 the most important issues in research (Berg & Lune, 2012; Salkind,  
380 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The ethical framework that guided  
381 this study included informed consent from the participants, ano-  
382 nymity, and confidentiality. All participants were approached by  
383 means of an information sheet outlining in clear language the gen-  
384 eral purpose of the study and providing information about how the  
385 video data would be used. Consent letters were written in accordance  
386 with Swiss Psychological Society (SPS) and American Psychological  
387 Association (APA) guidelines, specifically the format outlined in the  
388 fifth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological  
389 Association* (APA, 2009). As specified in a release letter signed by the  
390 researchers and the parents, families gave us permission to video-re-  
391 cord their mealtimes, provided the data would be used only for scien-  
392 tific purposes and privacy would be guarded. Moreover, in line with  
393 the ethical framework guiding the research, the families were assured  
394 that their anonymity would be maintained at all stages of the study.





395 Anonymity was maintained across studies by means of the use of a  
396 single master sheet which contained the name of each participant and  
397 their participant number. All names in this volume are pseudonyms.  
398 Transcriptions, video-recorded material, and information on the fami-  
399 lies were treated in the strictest confidence and seen only by researchers.  
400 Segments of video-recorded data were used for research purposes only.  
401 The package also made clear to participants that they could choose to  
402 withdraw from the study at any time and that any concerns they had  
403 about the ethics of the study could be referred to the researchers for  
404 clarification at any time.

405 Other challenges in collecting parent–child mealtime conversations  
406 refer to practical problems associated with recording quality and diffi-  
407 culty of transcription. Multiparty interactions are more difficult to tran-  
408 scribe than monologues and dyadic interactions. As observed by Pan,  
409 Perlmann, and Snow (2000), the time invested in transcribing 30 min-  
410 utes of mealtime conversations can be often much longer than the time  
411 involved in transcribing a dyadic interaction of similar length. Problems  
412 facing transcribers include discriminating among family members, espe-  
413 cially if there is more than one child; the frequent impossibility of deter-  
414 mining who the addressees are; and situations in which children move  
415 from the meal-table or do not participate in the conversation. Other  
416 challenges have to do with ensuring that the taped mealtime is as nat-  
417 ural as possible and with the research design adopted for the study. For  
418 example, even though the family members were told to act as they nor-  
419 mally do, the fact of being video-recorded provoked, at times, a shift of  
420 family members' attention toward the video camera, like in the follow-  
421 ing conversation:

## 422 **Excerpt 2.2**

423 Swiss family II. Dinner 1. Family members: father (DAD, 38 years),  
424 mother (MOM, 36 years), Paolo (PAO, 7 years), Laura (LAU, 4 years  
425 and 5 months), and Elisa (ELI, 3 years and 2 months). All family mem-  
426 bers are seated at the table. DAD sits at the head of the table. MOM  
427 and PAO sit on the left-hand side of DAD, while LAU and ELI sit on  
428 their opposite side.



## 36 A. Bova

- 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 is 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: sì: hai ragione  
*yes: you're right*

429

430 Because of their desire to give a good impression of themselves in  
431 front of the camera, parents and children during the video recording  
432 of their meals might not be inclined to behave as they normally do.  
433 This is indeed unavoidable, and the researcher has no control over it.  
434 Such a bias is present in all types of research which deal with people  
435 and respect the basic ethical principle of informed consent of partic-  
436 ipants. The only thing the researcher can do in these cases is to be  
437 aware of the problem and to consider it in the analysis and the discus-  
438 sion of the results. In the creation of sub-corpus 2, the video record-  
439 ings were made by the families themselves because the presence of the  
440 researcher during mealtime could encourage even more the tendency  
441 of families toward social desirability than being on their own.

442 Further challenges derive from the advantages and disadvantages of  
443 the research design adopted for the study of mealtime conversations.  
444 On the one hand, the limited number of recordings ( $N = 30$ ) favored  
445 a more careful analysis but did not allow certain quantifications, such  
446 as the correlation between categories. A larger database would proba-  
447 bly permit more quantitatively reliable data for certain statistical rela-  
448 tionships. On the other hand, careful studies of a small number of  
449 conversations in a natural setting may give rise to a more penetrating  
450 and “data-close” analysis of the argumentative dynamics among family  
451 members. Using mealtime conversations does not automatically solve



452 the problem of obtaining optimal family interaction data. No data  
453 are perfect. Nevertheless, mealtime conversations are a highly inform-  
454 ative source for the study of parent–child argumentation, and gener-  
455 ally, they are an invaluable source for studying the dynamics of family  
456 interactions.

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