

"But the vanilla is healthy!" Children's expression of arguments to justify their non-compliances in family conversation

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how children express their need to account for actions by using valid arguments in order to prevent the non-compliance of a rule within family conversation. Previous works have shown the relevance of parental requests towards children and the need to account for a violation or for incorrect verbal expressions. The present case study is based on the argumentative analysis of a corpus of data concerning a family, within a large set of recordings of 76 dinners, held by 23 Italian middle-class families selected on the grounds of similar criteria. We specifically focused on the observation of a family in which children are accounting for their actions to verbally justify the non-compliance of a rule indicated by a parent. Findings indicate that children express a variety of arguments to justify their non-compliances with a parental directive: in the case of young children (3-6 years old), their justifications can be considered as the beginning of argumentative reasoning skills. The results of this study bring further light on the actual knowledge of argumentative interactions and the interplay between the expression of justifications and the argumentative skills of children to account for their non-compliances within the family arena.

1. Introduction

I was learning something very interesting by listening to a sentence produced by a child of 2.5 years, Marianna, the daughter of two friends who were guests in my countryside home. The child was eating vanilla and chocolate ice-cream offered to her and, when the mother (an excellent scientist of child development and expert in health) entered the room, said: "But the vanilla is healthy!" avoiding any reference to chocolate and showing the need to account for her action by a valid argument, preventing possible comments against the mother's objection to commercial ice cream.

(Pontecorvo 2017: v-vi)

The question of how children (and even young children aged from 3 to 6 years) express their need to account for actions by using valid arguments to prevent the non-compliance of a rule within family conversation is at the core of this paper. Existing literature in the field has shown the relevance of parental requests towards children and the need to account for a violation or for incorrect verbal expressions (Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono 2007). These requests result almost absent within the middle-class family interactions observed by Ochs and Taylor (1992), in which young children living in Los Angeles obey very quickly to parental directives. Accordingly, it is peculiar that a request (e.g. of eating bread, not using spiked shoes, etc.) in Italian families plays the role of promoting the children's argumentation (Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono 2016). It is possible that the role of verbal opposition is

played by an attempt of not complying with the parental requests: when children do not want to obey with a directive, they can give justifications that are often the beginning of an argumentative sequence.

In this paper we refer to a case study, and we pay a specific attention to the argumentative processes that occur within mealtime interactions of a family when the displaying of justifications is a valid argument to contrast the non-compliance of a rule. In viewing talk and activities (Bazerman 1997) as the relevant units for the analysis of family interactions, we intend to shed light on situated frameworks that adults and children co-construct through their discourses during everyday exchanges. As argumentation has been treated as a form of interaction within the family context, characterized by a larger prevalence of intimacy and freedom (Blum-Kulka 1997; Bova and Arcidiacono 2015; Ochs and Shohet 2006; Pontecorvo and Fasulo 1999), we have chosen to focus on mealtime as a privileged moment to capture family members during natural exchanges (Ochs 2006; Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo 2009; Aronsson and Gottzén 2011; Bova and Arcidiacono 2013; Wiggins 2013).

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section, we will present studies about the non-compliance of rules and we will connect it to the justification as part of the argumentative process. Afterwards, we will present the methodological aspects of our research and the main results of the case study we have conducted within the family context. A discussion will follow and we will conclude the paper by presenting grounds for reflection about some relevant issues emerged through our observations.

2. Non-compliance with rules, justifications and argumentation

Several studies have highlighted how children first learn to argue with others through interactions with their parents (Hay and Ross 1982; Stein and Albro 2001; Tesla and Dunn 1992) and other siblings (Eisenberg 1992; Perlmann and Ross 1997; Ross et al. 2006). Later, when children enter school, they are offered many opportunities to engage in argumentative discussions and learn how to resolve disputes with their peers (Orsolini 1993; Mercer and Sams 2006).

Most scholars agree with the claim that the capacity to understand and produce arguments and counterarguments emerges early in development (e.g. Stein and Albro 2001; Mercier 2011). For example, Dunn and colleagues (Dunn and Munn 1987; Slomkowski and Dunn 1992) showed that in mother-child exchanges on differences of opinion over the “right” to perform specific actions, children justify their position by age four by arguing about the consequences of their actions. Children learn to engage in opposition with their parents by age five and become active participants in family conflicts. In a recent study, Köymen et al. (2020) showed that participating in discourse about reasons facilitates 3-year-old children’s counter-argumentation. Pontecorvo and Fasulo (1997) observed that in storytelling with their parents, children aged between 4- and 5-years use sophisticated argumentative skills by questioning the rules imposed by the adults. Hester and Hester (2010) showed that children aged seven years could use both context-bound and cultural resources to produce their arguments. Brumark (2008)

has observed that children aged 7-10 years use arguments about the immediate context that require only one or two exchange to be resolved. According to Golder and Coirier (1996), children can produce and recognize a 'minimal argumentative structure' at about age 10. However, total mastery of the negotiation process, which involves acknowledging the opponent's view through the use of counterarguments, is not present before the ages of 15 to 16. Other studies have shown that the age at which children acquire argumentative skills comes even earlier. According to Stein and colleagues (Stein and Miller 1991, 1993; Stein and Trabasso 1982), children are already familiar with conflict interactions by age 2, can understand family disagreements by age 4, and demonstrate some of the argumentative competencies of older children and even adults by age 5. Altogether, the studies mentioned above indicate that children have a complex knowledge of arguments in social situations that are personally significant to them. Similar results were also found by Eisenberg and Garvey (1981), Howe and McWilliam (2001), and Arcidiacono and Bova (2015).

A privileged moment to examine the early children's capacity to understand and produce arguments is during family exchanges based on differences of opinion (Bova 2019a, 2019b). For example, this is the case in conversations when social rules are violated or unmet expectations (Gruber 2001). In the same vein, other studies have documented the children's capacity to use both context-bound and cultural resources to produce arguments during mealtime interactions (Arcidiacono, Pontecorvo and Greco Morasso 2009; Bova and Arcidiacono 2014; Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono 2014). Another relevant aspect is that these conversations open the possibility to discuss culturally specific issues. Previous studies have shown, for example, that Swedish parents are more concerned in providing behavioral rules for their children than Estonian and Finnish parents (De Geer et al. 2002; Tulviste et al. 2002), or that Israeli parents are primarily concerned with providing rules for their children on correct language use, such as meta-linguistic comments (Blum-Kulka 1993). These aspects reinforce the hypothesis that requests of accounts in Italian families could be culturally based on the idea of promoting justifications as the beginning of children's argumentation (Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono 2007).

In this paper, in agreement with other scholars (Johnson 2000; O'Keefe 1992), and as already stated in a previous study (Bova 2020), we consider the dialogic argumentation as a process and the single argument as a product, the former being implicit in the latter. An argument is thus included within a dialogic process of negotiation based on diverging views (Weigand 2001). Within family interactions, children and adults often advance arguments to convince the other party about a certain standpoint under discussion (Bova 2021). In particular, in argumentative sequences in which parents try to convince their children to respect some rules or when they try to justify their prescriptions or proscriptions, the children's reasoning and the relative discursive devices that occur can result as follows: "If you do not do X, the negative event Y will occur" and "If you do non-X, the negative event Z will occur" (Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono 2010: 24). In the present section, we have seen that, thus far, the already broad literature on this topic has shown the relevance of such situations as occasions of learning within

and through social interactions and in contributing to building or reinforcing the argumentative capacities of family members.

In the present study, we intend to further contribute to the field of family argumentative studies by focusing on the argumentative processes that occur within mealtime interactions when displaying justifications is a valid argument to contrast the non-compliance of a rule. The triggers of argumentative family interactions are often given by the need to have children comply with some more or less explicit parental prescriptions and having them not act some forbidden behaviors. In both cases, children mostly try to oppose parents by giving the verbal accounts they consider necessary or at least possible in the given setting (Sterponi 2003).

3. Method

3.1. Objective

As our case study specifically focuses on the observation of mealtime conversations of a family to analyze children's accounts and justifications, the research question we intend to answer is the following: How do children account for their actions to verbally justify the non-compliance of a rule indicated by a parent?

3.2. Data corpus

This case study relies on a large data corpus of 76 video-recorded separate family meals, held by 23 Italian middle class families living in four cities located in the North (Florence), Center (Rome) and South of Italy (Naples and Reggio Calabria). The origin of the participant families has not been considered as a variable in the research project. Families were selected on the grounds of the following criteria: presence of both parents and at least two children, of whom the younger is of preschool age (3-6 years old). All families were selected through personal acquaintances of the research team, following the snowball technique, by which the candidate families contacted helped the researchers to find others.

After an initial contact by phone, the researchers visited the families in their own homes and described the research plan to the parents. The families were informed that the study aimed to investigate interactions during mealtime, but nothing was said about the specific interest in argumentative discussions. All participants were approached by means of an information sheet outlining the general purpose of the study and providing information about requirements. All family members (both parents and children) gave us permission to video-record the mealtimes, provided the data would be used only for scientific purposes and privacy would be guarded. Families were assured that their anonymity would be maintained at all stages of the study, through the use of a single master sheet that contained the name of each participant and their identification number. 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 the researchers for clarification at any time. Participating families did not receive any financial reimbursement for their participation. The first videotaped dinner of each family was not used for the analyses, as it was considered the participants' first experience familiarizing themselves with the camera and the research setting. The families were given a copy of the video as a token of gratitude for their involvement.

For the present paper, we have selected a specific family as a case to observe, through the analysis of different dinnertime interactions of the same group of people, how children account for their actions to verbally justify the non-compliance of a rule indicated by a parent. In this sense, the situation has been identified as representative of how the justifications of young children, produced on different occasions, can be considered the beginning of argumentative reasoning skills.

3.3. Transcription procedures

All family meals were fully transcribed, adopting the CHILDES standard transcription system CHAT (MacWhinney 2000) and revised by two researchers until a high level of consent (agreement rate = 80%) has been reached. Verbal utterances and nonverbal expressions with a relevant communicative function to the meal activity were identified and described in the transcription. Information on the physical setting of the mealtime was also made for each family meal.

In this paper, data are presented both in the original Italian language and in the English translation. In all examples, all turns are numbered progressively within the discussion sequence, and family members are identified by role (for adults) and by name (for children). To ensure the anonymity of children, their names in this paper are pseudonyms.

3.4. Analytical approach

The pragma-dialectical model of critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004) and the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2019) represent the analytical approaches used to identify and analyze the argumentatively relevant moves and to reconstruct the inferential configuration of arguments systematically. These two models will be briefly introduced below.

3.4.1. The pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion

In the present study, the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004) is mainly used as a normative criterion for segmenting and selecting the sequences

that form the object of our analysis, since it provides the criteria for reconstructing all components of an argumentative dialogues between parents and children, including which points are at issue, which arguments are advanced, and which type of conclusions are reached argumentative. This model considers that argumentative speech acts are not performed in a social vacuum but between two or more parties who disagree and interact to resolve their disagreement. In this regard, the pragmatic conception of the argumentative moves as speech acts in dialogical exchanges is connected to other approaches to studying verbal communication, such as discursive social psychology tradition (Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter and Wetherell 1987). According to this approach, an argumentative discussion begins when the speaker advances a standpoint, and the listener doubts it or directly attacks it. Confrontation, in which disagreement regarding a standpoint is externalized in a discursive exchange or anticipated by the speaker, is necessary for an argumentative discussion to occur.

The pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion spells out four stages necessary for a dialectical resolution of differences of opinion. At the confrontation stage, it is established that there is a discussion around a certain issue; a standpoint is advanced and questioned. At the opening stage, the parties try and resolve the difference of opinion and explore whether there are premises to start a discussion. At the argumentation stage, the parties defend their standpoints, and one of them may elicit further argumentation if they have further doubts. At the concluding stage, it is established whether the doubt concerning the standpoint has been retracted or the difference of opinion has not been resolved.

3.4.2. The Argumentum Model of Topics

The analysis based on the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion is integrated with the Argumentum Model of Topics, henceforth AMT (Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2019). It is a model aiming at systematically reconstruct the inferential configuration of arguments, i.e. to illustrate the structure of reasoning that underlies the connection between a standpoint and its supporting arguments. According to AMT, to reconstruct an argument's inferential configuration it is necessary to find the implicit premises on which the argument is based. The two fundamental components to be distinguished in identifying the inferential relation binding the premises to the conclusion of argumentation are the procedural and the material components.

The procedural component develops along with three levels. The first level is the ontological relation – the locus – defined as “the source from which arguments are taken” (Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2010: 494). A locus is a conceptual place, not a physical one. It is a sort of mental space from which the argument is drawn. The second level of the procedural component is the inferential connections called maxims. Examples of maxims are the following: “If a certain goal is to be achieved, it is reasonable to activate a causal chain allowing to reach it” and “If something was the case for a circumstance of the same functional genus as X, this may be the case for X” (Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2010: 495-499). The third level of the procedural component, leading to the final conclusion, is a logical form, such as

the *modus ponens* or *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 logical form in an argument scheme. Different maxims may activate identical or different logical forms. For example, the maxim “If the cause is the case, the effect is too” activates the logical form of *modus ponens*, while the maxim “If the effect does not take place, the cause does not either” activates a *modus tollens*.

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 are accepted by the relevant public or by the opinion leaders of the relevant public (Rigotti 2006). The second level of the material component is the *datum*. It is typically explicit, representing the information that is made clear in the discussion. Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2019) stated that the *datum* broadly corresponds to the same concept in the Toulmin’s model (1958). In our opinion, the notion of *datum* also corresponds to the concept of ‘evidence’ as referred to in Stein and Miller (1993). The logical conjunction of the *endoxon* with the *datum* leads to the preliminary conclusion of the material component coinciding with the procedural component’s minor premise. The preliminary conclusion of the AMT model, in our opinion, corresponds to the concept of ‘warrant’ in the Toulmin’s model (1958), and to the concept of ‘explanation’ as referred to in Stein and Miller (1993). This point of intersection is crucial in the perspective of the AMT because 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: “Topics guarantee 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”.

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. Beyond the possibility of analyzing the process of reasoning underlying an argument, this aspect represents the main reason why we have chosen to use the AMT to analyze ordinary conversations such as family mealtime conversations.

3.5. Definition of argumentative situations and identification of arguments

The analyses presented in this paper are 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 and Grootendorst 2004: 73). Drawing on the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion, the dialogues between parents and children are considered as argumentative whether the following criteria are satisfied:

- (i) a difference of opinion between parents and children arises around a certain issue;
- (ii) at least one standpoint advanced by a parent is questioned by one or more children or vice versa;

- (iii) at least one family member puts forward at least one argument either in favor of or against the standpoint being questioned.

Only the discussions that fulfill the three criteria mentioned above were selected for analysis. After having singled out all the argumentative discussions (N = 127) within the corpus of data, we selected all the arguments related to an opposition to the parental rules and prescriptions (N = 31).

4. Results

The specific context of our study, namely the mealtime conversations, solicits rules of different types, among which the parental invitation to children to eat what is served for dinner is a frequent topic of discussion. In particular, we made several observations of situations in which children try to convince their parents to let them not to eat a food they do not like. In this sense, children engage themselves in argumentation aiming at defending a standpoint by advancing as an argument the food's qualitative characteristic (positive or negative).

The excerpts we present in this paper refer to the same group (an Italian family living in Rome), composed by the father (DAD, 37 years), the mother (MOM, 37 years), and two children: Samuele (SAM, 7 years and 11 months) and Adriana (ADR, 5 years and 4 months). The examples intend to show how both children account for the non-compliance of rules by advancing various justifications as an argument to sustain their positions (Bova 2019).

The first excerpt belongs to the family above mentioned: during the dinner, the dialogue between the mother and the young child focuses on the reason advanced by Adriana to convince the adult to change her opinion about the quality of the bread.

Excerpt 1

Dinner 2. Participants: father (DAD, 37 years), mother (MOM, 37 years), Samuele (SAM, 7 years and 11 months), and Adriana (ADR, 5 years and 4 months).

1. *MOM: Adriana, devi mangiare un po' di pane
Adriana, you have to eat a little of bread
2. *ADR: no:: no::
no:: no::
3. *MOM: ma è buono!
but it is good though!
4. *ADR: no:: è duro
no:: it is hard
5. *MOM: ma Adriana, è davvero buono::
but Adriana, it is really good::
6. *ADR: no, è duro non mi piace
no, it is hard I do not like it
7. *MOM: no::

- no::
8. *ADR: si, è duro
yes, it is hard
9. *MOM: perché fai così a mamma tua?
why are you doing that to mummy?
10. *ADR: no:: no::
no:: no::
11. *MOM: va bene, niente pane questa sera
well, no bread for this evening

The dinner is started from a few minutes, and the mother is serving the main course to all family members. DAD sits at the head of the meal table, MOM and SAM sit on the right-hand side of DAD, while ADR sits on their opposite side.

In line 1, the mother's utterance is a request addressed to Adriana: she must eat a little of bread. The child disagrees with her mother (line 2 "no:: no::"). In argumentative terms, these two lines represent the confrontation stage of the ideal model of a critical discussion, as the mother's standpoint meets with the child's opposition. In line 3, it seems that the mother puts up an argument for renegotiation, marked by an adversative connective ("but Adriana, it is really good:"). The argument advanced by the mother in support of her standpoint is based on the quality of the bread, aiming at emphasizing the good taste of the food. The argument used by Adriana in reaction to her mother's request also refers to a quality of the food: Adriana replies to his mother that the bread is not good but, instead, it is hard (line 4). While the argument advanced by the mother highlights a positive property of the bread and supports the conversational flow by securing the interaction's continuation, Adriana, by saying "hard", indicates a negative property of the bread. It is interesting to notice that, in the course of the verbal exchange, the child is addressed by name in line 5 (and in other cases as well). The lengthening at the end of the utterance ("good:") turns the utterance into a kind of request, conveying a certain emotional stance. In line 9, the statement of the mother is an implicit reproach advanced to the position taken by the child: although Adriana has been invited to eat the bread, she is advancing arguments to justify the non-compliance of the parental request.

Two different arguments (good vs hard) are used to highlight a specific property of the food served during the meal with the aim to convince the other party that their view is wrong. Therefore, what distinguishes the mother's and child's argumentation is an opposite judgment regarding the quality of food (see, Bova and Arcidiacono 2014; Laurier and Wiggins 2011). Within the framework of the ideal model of a critical discussion, the discussion from line 3 to line 8 represents the argumentation stage. In line 9, the mother tries to imagine why Adriana might have refused, but her attempt is ignored even though she possibly could have produced a space for accounting the reasons for the child's refusal. In this case, the argument of quality put forth by Adriana is effective in convincing her mother to let her not to eat the bread. In fact, the mother closes the sequence with the discourse marker "well" (line 11)

and she does not put her position up for negotiation, rendering her statement beyond dispute. This is the concluding stage of the argumentative discussion in which the young child has provided a counter-argument about the quality of food by repeating her stance.

The analytical overview of the argumentative discussion between Adriana and her mother is summarized below:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Issue</i> | | Should Adriana eat a little of bread? |
| <i>Standpoints</i> | (ADR) | No, I do not want to. |
| | (MOM) | Yes, you must |
| <i>Argument</i> | (ADR) | The bread is hard |

In the analysis of the selected argumentative discussion, we now focus on the reconstruction of the inferential configuration of the argument of quality advanced by the young child, in line 4: “The bread is hard”. The AMT’s reconstruction is illustrated in Figure 1.

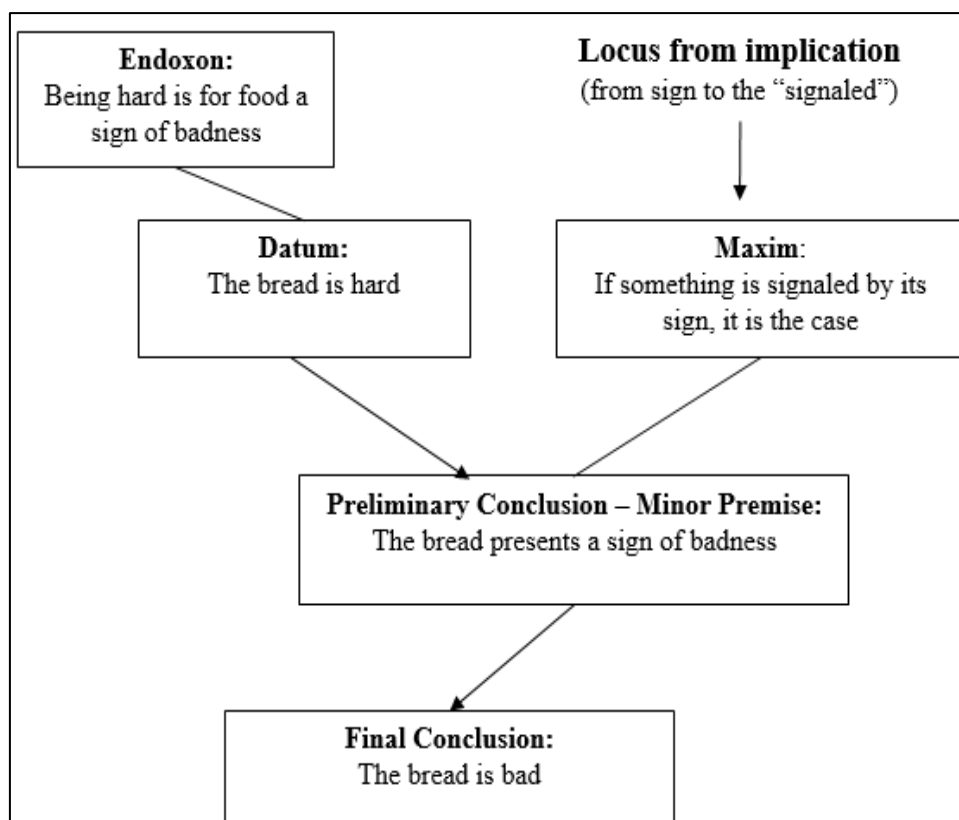


Figure 1. AMT-based reconstruction of the argument advanced by Adriana: “The bread is hard”

The maxim on which this argument is based is one of the maxims generated from the locus from implication, in one of its subcategories, from sign to the signaled: “If something is signaled by its sign, it is the case”. The reasoning follows with the minor premise of the topical syllogism, “The bread presents a sign of badness”, which combined with the maxim leads to the following final conclusion:

"The bread is bad". Looking at the left-hand side of the diagram, the endoxon can be described as follows: "Being hard is for food a sign of badness". The datum "The bread is hard", combined with this endoxon, produces the preliminary conclusion that "The bread presents a sign of badness". The AMT reconstruction shows that the mother and her daughter fully share the datum ("The bread is hard") but have a different opinion regarding the preliminary conclusion ("The bread presents a sign of badness"), since for the mother this is not a sign of bad quality, instead for the daughter it is.

This example shows how parents and young children put forward arguments trying to convince the other that their view on the quality of food is wrong. Accordingly, although parents and children have opposite goals, they often use the same type of argument. What distinguishes the parents' and children's argumentation is a different view regarding the preliminary conclusion, which, in this case, coincides with their opinion on the quality of food. In line with previous studies (Arcidiacono and Bova 2015; Bova and Arcidiacono 2014, 2018; Wiggins 2004; Wiggins and Potter 2003), the children's capacity to justify a standpoint and to advance a counter-argument during mealtime conversations appears to be mostly activity-dependent, i.e. related to the activity of mealtime.

Another type of argument often used by children in argumentative discussions with their parents is the argument from expert opinion. Its definition coincides precisely with the notion of epistemic authority: "a relationship between two individuals where one is an expert in a 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 is essentially an appeal to expertise, or to expert opinion" (Walton 1997: 77-78). Interestingly, in the corpus, when children refer to a third person as a source of expert opinion, the expert always proves to be an adult such as a teacher, a grandparent, or a friend of the parents, and not another child. The argument from expert opinion used by children during argumentative discussions with their parents can be described, accordingly, through the following statement: "The expert X told me Y; therefore, Y is true".

A significant aspect characterizing the argument from expert opinion concerns the level of knowledge that the child has of the adult who represents the expert. In the corpus, in most cases, the expert is an adult who is well-known by the child. However, the knowledge of the adult by the child does not seem a necessary condition to refer to him/her as a source of expert opinion. The following excerpt shows a case where the opinion of a friend's father is considered, by Samuele, like the opinion of an expert.

Excerpt 2

Dinner 2. Participants: father (DAD, 37 years), mother (MOM, 37 years), Samuele (SAM, 7 years and 11 months), and Adriana (ADR, 5 years and 4 months).

1. *DAD: dove giocate domani?
 where are you playing tomorrow?
2. *SAM: al palazzetto, è al chiuso

- at the sports hall, it's indoor*
3. *DAD: allora non puoi metterti le scarpe con i tacchetti
then you cannot use the soccer shoes with cleats
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 cleats
6. *SAM: si che posso! me l'ha detto il papa di Tommaso ((un amico)) che posso
yes I can! Tommaso's ((a friend)) Dad told me that I can
7. *DAD: no:: non puoi, ma Rudi ((il papà di Tommaso)) non capisce niente di calcio!
no:: you can't, but Rudi ((Tommaso's Dad)) doesn't understand anything about soccer!

In this exchange, a difference of opinion arises between Samuele and his father. In line 1, the father asks Samuele where he has to play soccer the day after. The child answers that he has to play soccer at the sports hall, which is an indoor structure. The, the father specifies that in such a place he cannot use soccer shoes with cleats (line 3). However, Samuele disagrees with his father (line 4, “yes, I can!”) and the father repeats one more time his standpoint, by making it even more explicit: “No! at the sports hall you can only play with soccer shoes without cleats” (line 5). Within the framework of the model of a critical discussion, this phase represents the confrontation stage, since the father’s standpoint (“No, you cannot use the soccer shoes with cleats”) meets the child’s contradiction (“Yes, I can”). As far as the opening stage is concerned, it is mostly implicit. In line 6, the child opts not to evade the burden of proof and puts forward an argument from expert opinion to support his standpoint (“Tommaso’s Dad told me that I can”). Interestingly, as Samuel is invoking another father as authority, he is denying his own father sole authority. The interactive effect of such a kind of argument on the epistemic order is the reaction of his father: he does not evade the burden of proof and, in line 7, advances an argument in defense of his standpoint (“no:: you can’t but Rudi doesn’t understand anything about soccer!”). In doing so, the father is disqualifying the other adult, highlighting the impossibility to consider him as an authority because is not at all competent with respect to the topic of discussion. Lines 6 and 7 represent the argumentation stage of the ideal model of a critical discussion. The concluding stage, in which the child and the father establish the result of the attempt to resolve the difference of opinion, is mostly implicit. The father and the child stop discussing this issue and move to discuss another topic. In doing so, the child shows his unwillingness to keep defending his standpoint.

The reconstruction of the argumentative discussion between the child and his father is summarized below:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------|---|
| <i>Issue</i> | | Can Samuele play soccer at the sports hall wearing shoes with cleats? |
| <i>Standpoints</i> | (SAM) | Yes, I can use the soccer shoes with cleats |

| | | |
|------------------|-------|---|
| | (DAD) | No, you cannot use the soccer shoes with cleats |
| <i>Arguments</i> | (SAM) | Tommaso’s Dad told me that I can |
| | (DAD) | Tommaso’s Dad does not understand anything about soccer |

In the analysis of this argumentative discussion, we focus on the argument from expert opinion advanced by the child in line 6: “Tommaso’s Dad told me that I can”. The reconstruction of its inferential configuration is illustrated in Figure 2.

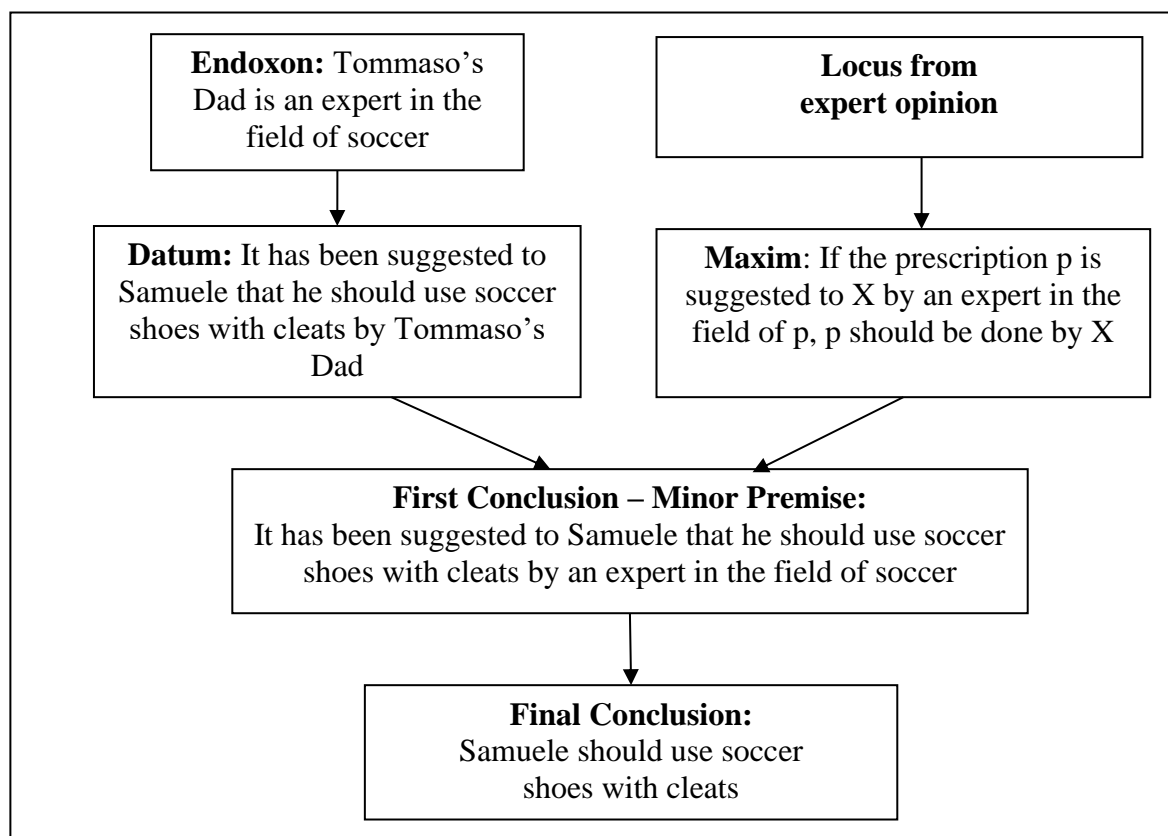


Figure 2. AMT-based reconstruction of the argument advanced by Samuele: “Tommaso’s Dad told me that I can”

The reconstruction of the inferential configuration of the argument from expert opinion advanced by Samuele brings to light that the argument is based on a maxim engendered from the locus from expert opinion: “If prescription p is suggested to X by an expert in the field of p, p should be done by X”. The reasoning follows with the minor premise of the topical syllogism (“It has been suggested to Samuele that he should use soccer shoes with cleats by an expert in the field of soccer”) which, combined with the maxim, leads to the following final conclusion (“Samuele should use soccer shoes with cleats”). Looking at the left-hand side of the figure 2, the endoxon can be described as follows: “Tommaso’s Dad is an expert in the field of soccer”. The datum (“It has been suggested to Samuele that he should use soccer shoes with cleats by Tommaso’s Dad”) combined with this endoxon produces the preliminary conclusion (“It has been suggested to Samuele that he should use soccer shoes with cleats by an expert in the field of soccer”).

The AMT-reconstruction shows that the child refers to what an adult told him to convince his father to accept his standpoint. However, Samuele's argument is not effective in convincing his father to change opinion. One may ask why this has occurred. In order to answer this question, we need to look at the endoxon. In the example, the father does not agree with the endoxon on which the argument put forward by Samuele is based ("Tommaso's Dad is an expert in the field of soccer"). Unlike his son, Samuele's father does not consider Tommaso's Dad to be an expert in the field of soccer. Although Samuele did this effort, still the father was not convinced because he did not agree with the implicit endoxon. Looking at this argumentative choice made by Samuele, it is reasonable to assume that for him the reference to the opinion of an adult is a stronger argument than the reference to the view of another child. However, the actual effectiveness of the argument from expert opinion depends on the extent to which the premises (endoxa) the argument is based on are shared by parents and children.

The third type of argument most often used by children in argumentative discussions with their parents refers to the consistency with past behaviors. The appeal to this argument by children can be described through the following question: "If you have explicitly or implicitly affirmed it in the past, then why do not you maintain it now?" The next excerpt shows the use of this type of argument during another dinner of the same family. The discussion involves Samuele and his mother.

Excerpt 3

Dinner 3. Participants: father (DAD, 37 years), mother (MOM, 37 years), Samuele (SAM, 7 years and 11 months), and Adriana (ADR, 5 years and 4 months).

1. *MOM: adesso, mangia un po' di frutta ((rivolgendosi a SAM))
now, eat a little of fruit ((talking to SAM))
2. *SAM: no::
no::
3. *MOM: si, Samuele
yes, Samuele
- *MOM: prima di alzarti da tavola devi mangiare anche la frutta
before leaving the meal table, you have to eat also the fruit
4. *SAM: no:: non voglio:
no:: I do not want to:
5. *MOM: ho detto di si. Samuele
I said yes. Samuele
6. *SAM: ma se prima anche tu hai detto che non la vuoi la frutta!
but if before you also said that you do not want the fruit!
7. *MOM: si, ma solo questa sera!
yes, but only this evening!
8. *SAM: anche io solo questa sera
only this evening also for me
9. *MOM: eh: fai come vuoi.
eh:: do what you want.

The dinner is going to its conclusion, and the mother, in lines 1 and 3, wants to give Samuele some fruit (“now, eat a little of fruit”, and “yes, Samuele”). The child disagrees with his mother and, in lines 2 and 4, clarifies that he does not want to eat the fruit (“no:” and “no: I do not want to:”). In line 5, the mother does not advance any argument in support of her opinion, but she only reaffirms, one more time, her initial standpoint. According to the ideal model of a critical discussion, lines 1 to 5 represent the confrontation stage. As already observed in previous studies (Busch 2012; Hepburn and Potter 2011), when the adults try to settle or end a dispute with their children quickly, their attempt may resolve only in a temporary settlement or even it may contribute to the continuation of dispute, rather than to its cessation. This is what happens following the mother’s intervention, because the child reacts by advancing an argument in support of his refusal to accept the mother’s directive.

In the sequence, we focus on the appeal to consistency argument advanced by Samuele in line 6: “but if before you also said that you do not want the fruit!” By referring to an action that the mother did in the past, the child asks her to behave in a consistent way, i.e. to be in line with the same behavior she had in the past. The reasoning used by the child to justify his refusal to eat the fruit is based on the logical form “as X, so Y”, i.e. given the consistency of the first element, the second element is then justified. It is noteworthy to observe that by sustaining his argumentative reasoning, the child uses the adversative connective “but” (line 6). This is probably because he wants to underline the contradiction between the previous mother’s behavior (previously during the meal, she said that she does not want to eat the fruit that evening) and her non-consistent reaction (she wants that her son eats the fruit) to the son’s refusal. In this case, the child’s argument shows to be effective in convincing the mother to change her standpoint. In fact, in the concluding stage the mother authorizes Samuele to do what he wants, i.e. he does not have to eat the fruit. Finally, the child expresses his rejection and justifies his stance by referring to his own will.

The analytical overview of the discussion between Samuele and his mother is summarized below:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------|---|
| <i>Issue</i> | | Should Samuele eat a little of fruit? |
| <i>Standpoints</i> | (SAM) | No, I do not want to. |
| | (MOM) | Yes, you must |
| <i>Argument</i> | (SAM) | But if before you also said that you do not want the fruit! |

In the analysis of this argumentative discussion, we now focus on the reconstruction of the inferential configuration of the appeal to consistency argument advanced by Samuele in line 6: “But if before you also said that you do not want the fruit!” The AMT’s reconstruction is illustrated in Figure 3:

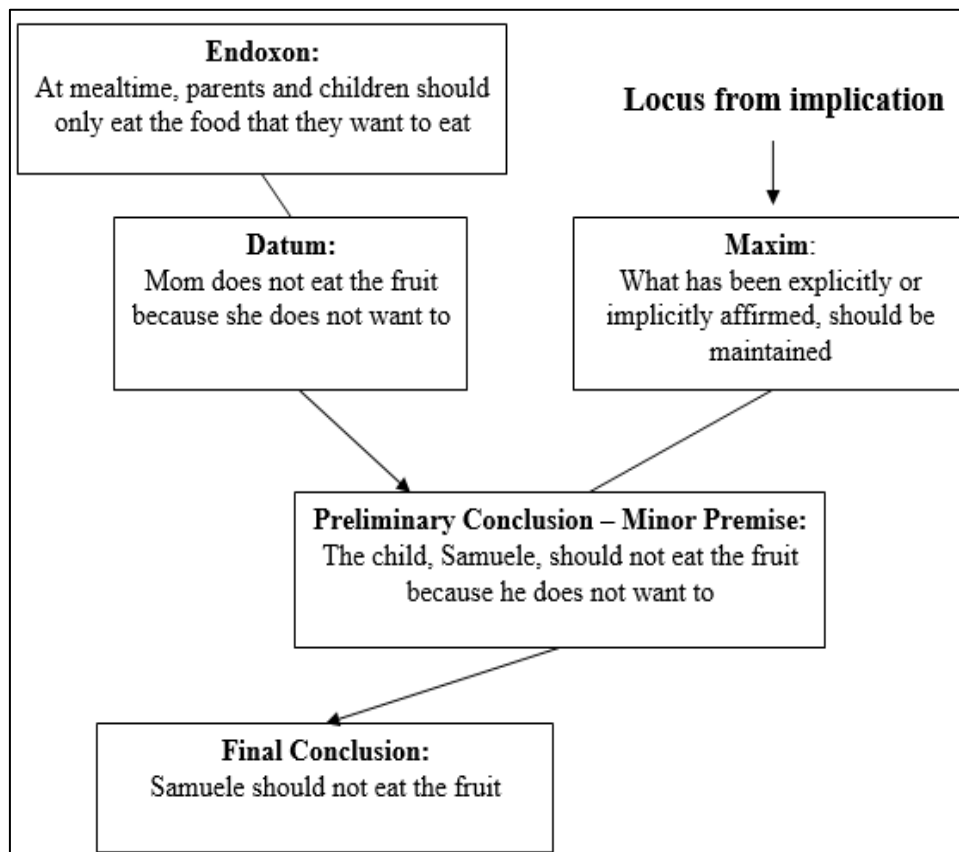


Figure 3. AMT-based reconstruction of the argument advanced by Samuele:
 “But if before you also said that you do not want the fruit!”

The appeal to consistency argument advanced by Samuele is based on a maxim that is engendered from the locus from implication: “What has been explicitly or implicitly affirmed, should be maintained”. The reasoning follows with the minor premise of the topical syllogism (“The child should not eat the fruit because he does not want to”) which, combined with the maxim, brings to the following final conclusion: “Samuele should not eat the fruit”. Looking at the left-hand side of the Figure 3, the endoxon can be described as follows: “At mealtime, parents and children should only eat the food that they want to eat”. The datum (“Mom does not eat the fruit because she does not want to”), combined with the endoxon, leads to the preliminary conclusion (“The child, Samuele, should not eat the fruit because he does not want to”).

The argument used by Samuele in the argumentative discussion with the mother is logical. The child shows to be able to relate in a duly manner a past event, i.e. Mom, you previously said that..., with a present event. Most importantly, the child uses this relation to convince the mother of the validity of his opinion, specifically his refusal to eat a little of fruit. The second reason to consider Samuele’s argument is that, by using it, the child shifts the focus of his argumentation from himself (and his desire of not eating the fruit) to the mother and her incoherent behavior (asking him to eat). In this sense, this argumentative move seems relevant, because it implies the capacity to decentrate from his/herself by creating new frames above and beyond sentences.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we focused on a case study by paying attention to the interplay between the justification advanced by the interactants as social need to provide evidence for a particular assertion and its function that refers to the goal arguers want to achieve during the discussion (in our case, the non-compliance of a rule).

The findings of the present study indicate that children express a variety of arguments to justify their behavior, especially when they do not want to comply with a parental order. Children use arguments of quality when the argumentative discussions they engage in with their parents concern the food. The arguments of quality of food are mostly advanced by children in reaction to the same types of arguments previously advanced by their parents. In fact, it is likely to observe that, when a parent is putting forth an argument of quality of food, also the child's argument is an argument of quality of food. What distinguishes parents' and children's opinions is a different evaluation of the quality of food. Moreover, in line with previous studies (Bova and Arcidiacono 2014; Brumark 2008), the children's capacity to justify a standpoint and to advance an argument with their parents appear to be largely context-dependent. Arcidiacono and Bova (2015) already indicated that the arguments of quantity and quality are typically put forth by children to convince their parents to let them not to refuse eating or eat more food. Children aged 3-5 years are almost exclusively referring to such a kind of arguments with their parents, according to their argumentative skills.

In the observed family an additional element could be highlighted, for instance by referring to the excerpt 1: "where" the misalignment is located (preliminary conclusion, endoxon) is relevant for the analysis, because it shows that mother and daughter can have a different opinion regarding the preliminary conclusion, whereas they fully share the endoxon. In other words, parents and children can use the same type of argument although they have opposite goals.

Compared to the arguments of quality, the argument from authority and the appeal to consistency used by children appear to be more complex and elaborated. What is interesting about these types of arguments is the fact that they introduce new elements within parent-child mealtime interactions, which are not food-related but also touch on other important areas of the family life. We refer in particular to teaching a correct behavior in social situations within and outside the family context, e.g. in the school context with teachers and peers.

The argument from expert opinion is essentially an appeal to expertise, or expert opinion, and can be described through the following statement: "The adult X told me Y; therefore, Y is true". The reason of the reference to the adult expertise is that when the children refer to a third person as a source of expert opinion, the expert always is an adult such as the teacher, the grandparent or a friend of the father, but never another child. The appeal to consistency argument can be described through the following

question: “If you have explicitly or implicitly affirmed it in the past, then why do not you maintain it now?” As their parents do with them, children ask their parents to conform to their previous behavior, as the past actions are important to justify the present behavior. The construction of the appeal to consistency argument requires an advanced level of reasoning skills because it is not exclusively based on children themselves, but it is based on someone else. This aspect is relevant in terms of argumentative competences and conversational practices: it implies, for the child, the capacity to decentrate from him/herself and to create new contexts above and beyond sentences (Quastoff and Krah 2012). The child is then able to consider the point of view of another person rather than just his/her own point of view as the center of any representation of the world, as explained by Muller Mirza and colleagues (2009), by referring to Piagetian work. As decentration allows to consider another person’s point of view (Astington 1994), the acquisition of a theory of mind permits the child to decentrate and take into account another position.

The selected examples provide evidence that a discursive arena involving children can be established through positions that are shaped within the family context of mealtime discussion. In our view, argumentative skills also imply the persuasion, the capacity to convince the interlocutor about an argument, adaptation to the language competencies, and mental capacities of the other. We are aware that the differences in age, roles, and competencies between parents and children certainly affect their argumentative interactions (see, e.g. Heller 2014; Tannen 1990). However, in our case, we observed how even young children could give justifications that can be considered the beginning of argumentative reasoning skills. In line with what has been observed in previous studies, the arguments advanced by children in our investigation are both logically coherent (e.g. Anderson et al. 1997; Köymen et al. 2020; Mercier 2011; Stein and Miller 1993) and pragmatically effective (e.g. Bova and Arcidiacono 2014; 2018; Brumark 2008; Pontecorvo and Fasulo 1997).

In our view, the connection between argumentative processes and rules is relevant within the context of family interactions because children and adults can practice, throughout argumentation, different forms of language socialization within everyday social activities (Pontecorvo, Fasulo and Sterponi 2001). As the negotiation of meanings within argumentative interactions is the result of a jointly constructed achievement of the participants (Goodwin 1994), children’s justifications can be intended as “a fundamentally social affair” (Goldman 1997: 155) during dinnertime conversations where people engage in presenting arguments that sustain a specific proposition in order to achieve a goal.

Certain analytical insights of our study (e.g. that children relied either on logical or syllogistic structures; or accomplish a decentration) are relevant in terms of implications for a model of argumentative competence. For instance, as family members calibrate their interventions with reference to each other’s actions (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014), children can respond to directives by referring to very different types of argumentative landscapes created in the *hic et nunc* of the interaction. As directives are situated within their praxeological context, there are multiple ways in which the sequential shape of directives is related to the activities they are performing (Goodwin 2006).

The results of this study bring further light on the actual knowledge of argumentative interactions and the interplay between the expression of justifications and the argumentative skills showed by young children to account for their non-compliances within the family arena. Children are capable to refer to various ways of non-complying, such as responding through bargaining or refusing (Aronsson and Cekaite 2011) which are central in the study of argumentation. In our view, it will be interesting to consider the significance of embodied actions for upgrading the social force of directives (Goodwin and Cekaite 2013) and compliance/non-compliance, as alternative forms to be considered with reference to verbal utterances. Further research should focus on children's activities to discover the influence of both children's orientations within the activity and demands from the setting and other people.

We want to conclude with some methodological remarks and further directions on lessons learned from our research. The methodological tools of analysis we adopted in this study, i.e. the pragma-dialectical model of critical discussion and the AMT, have allowed a detailed study of argumentative interactions between parents and children in a multiparty setting interaction. As the pragma-dialectical model of critical discussion describes how argumentative discourse would be structured to resolve differences of opinion, what we have found particularly useful is that the model starts from a precise definition of argumentation: if there is not a difference of opinion between – at least – two parties (and at least one party advances an argument in support of his/her standpoint), we cannot speak in favor of an argumentative discussion. Starting from this definition, we have been able to define precise criteria to identify all the argumentative discussions between parents and children. The AMT has been another useful tool, allowing a detailed reconstruction of the reasons behind the arguments advanced by family members. In our view, the integration of the two tools can open radically new perspectives, not only to identify types of arguments, but also to reconstruct the structure of reasoning underlying them. A more careful analysis (e.g. by the integration of conversational and discursive models) of the argumentative exchanges during family everyday lives could allow to identify specific linguistic elements and discursive patterns that are typical of parent-children interactions. This could constitute a promising way to better understand the interplays of action and cognition, within situated activities, as mealtime interactions.

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