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Co-construction of argumentative discussions between parents and children during mealtime conversations. A pragma-dialectical analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine how both parents and children contribute interactionally to the dialogic process of negotiating their divergent opinions during mealtime conversations. Within a data corpus comprising 30 video-recorded meals of 10 Swiss and Italian families, 132 argumentative discussions were selected for qualitative analysis by adopting the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion. Despite the differences in roles, age, and competencies between parents and children—which help explain both the higher number of different arguments used by parents and the fact that the most frequent type of conclusion was when the child accepted the parent's standpoint—the findings of the pragma-dialectical analysis indicate that the process of negotiating the divergent opinions between parents and children is a co-constructed dialogic process wherein both parties play a fundamental role. By engaging in argumentative discussions, parents accept the commitment of clarifying to their children the reasons on which their standpoints are based. Children, in turn, encourage their parents to advance arguments to justify their standpoints by asking questions. Argumentative discussions in the family context should thus be viewed as a bidirectional dialogical process that opens a shared space for parents and children to think together.

1. Introduction

Family mealtime[1] is a social activity organized and produced by family members in a locally situated way using the resources of talk and interaction (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Fiese et al., 2006). Among the everyday activities that bring family members together, mealtime represents an excellent opportunity to investigate how parents and children can spontaneously interact and engage in argumentative dialogues (Bova, 2019a). Mealtime in families with young children is no less embedded in socio-cultural routines and norms than other social events, yet it also has distinctive features. Indeed, it is not always acceptable for parents and children to talk while eating together at mealtime, particularly in certain cultures where verbal interactions between parents and children are reduced to a necessary minimum. Such mealtime conversation is usually regulated by norms of what is appropriate to say, at which moment,

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[1] Mealtime is the term used to describe all meals consumed during the day. In many cultures, meals include breakfast, lunch, and an evening meal referred to colloquially as dinner or tea. Research about mealtime practices, however, is usually concerned with lunchtime and dinnertime, as in the present work.

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and to whom. However, in most urban, well-educated Western populations, this type of talk between parents and children is not only permitted but actively encouraged and expected.

I agree with the considerations made by several argumentative scholars (e.g., Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009; van Eemeren, 2011) regarding the necessity of studying argumentation in the real contexts in which it takes place. For this reason, I have chosen to analyze the spontaneous argumentative dialogues between parents and children during a typical, ordinary activity such as family mealtimes. In particular, the present study sets out to examine how both parents and children interactionally contribute to the co-construction of the dialogic process of negotiating their divergent opinions during mealtime conversations.

The issue of co-construction through dialogical interactions has already been widely addressed within the fields of social and developmental psychology (Cole, 1985; Doise & Mugny, 1984; Rogoff, 1990), conversation analysis (Goodwin, 1979, 1995; Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1982), and linguistic anthropology (Duranti, 1985; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). By co-construction, I specifically refer to the dialogical processes through which interlocutors jointly construct new knowledge during their argumentative interactions. As stated by Jacoby and Ochs (1995, p.171):

> "The co-prefix in co-construction is intended to cover a range of interactional processes, including collaboration, cooperation, and coordination. However, co-construction does not necessarily entail affiliative or supportive interactions. An argument, for example, in which the parties express disagreement, is nonetheless co-constructed".

Accordingly, the present study focuses on the dialogical interaction between parents and children rather than looking for a statistical correlation between specific types of arguments and specific behavioral outcomes. In line with other scholars (Kuhn, 1991; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; Weigand, 2006), I refer to a single argument as a product and the dialogic argumentation as a process, the latter being implicit in the former. An argument is always included within a "dialogic structure of negotiation which results on the basis of diverging views" (Weigand, 2006, p. 71) and can only be understood fully if the contribution of all participants to the dialogic interaction is considered.

In this endeavor, I employed a methodology based on the contemporary argumentation theory. Specifically, the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) was adopted to qualitatively analyze the argumentative discussions between parents and children. The "ideal" model of argumentative discussion advanced by this approach aims to describe how an argumentative discussion would be structured if it were solely aimed at resolving differences of opinion rather than how such discourse would occur in reality. As the researchers stated, "To some degree, real-life argumentative discourse will always deviate from the ideal model" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992, p. 35). According to the pragma-dialectical model, an argumentative discussion begins when the speaker advances a standpoint,[2] and the listener casts doubts upon it or directly attacks it. Confrontation, in which disagreement regarding a standpoint is externalized in a discursive exchange or else anticipated by the speaker, is necessary for an argumentative discussion to occur. In the present study, the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion provides the criteria for reconstructing argumentative dialogues between parents and children. The pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion is suitable for both this study and, more generally, the study of argumentative interactions within the family context because it permits the identification of all components of an argumentative dialogue, including which points are at issue, which arguments are advanced, and which type of conclusions are reached.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: in its first part, a concise review of the most relevant literature on parent-child argumentation is presented; afterward, the methodology on which the present study is based and the results of the analyses are described; finally, the results obtained from the analyses and the conclusions drawn from this study are discussed.

2. Studies on parent-child argumentation

Over the last two decades, argumentative interactions between parents and children have received increasing attention in argumentative studies. The existing research has mainly focused on the structure and linguistic elements that characterize this type of interaction, particularly in terms of the strategies adopted by family members to resolve a difference of opinion in their own favor. In this regard, Wiggins (2004) has shown that during food-related argumentative discussions, parents often advance activity-bound arguments, i.e., about food and mealtime-related activities. Similar results can be found in studies on family eating practices (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2014; Russell et al., 2015). Furthermore, a series of studies (Aronsson & Cekaite, 2011; Bova, 2015a; Bova & Arcidiacono, 2013a) has shown that the parents' authority can be an effective argumentative strategy only when the reasons behind a prescription are not hidden from the child's eyes but are made known and shared by parents and children. Laforest (2002) noted that using humor when responding, which creates an ironic distance that takes away the severity of the blame, is a typical strategy adopted by parents to avoid the beginning of an argumentative dialogue with their children. Bova et al. (2017) have further shown that commenting ironically on children's attitudes and behavior appears to be an argumentative strategy adopted by parents to persuade their children to withdraw their standpoint. Similar results have also been found by Brumark (2006) and Nevat-Gal (2002).

Parent-child conversations during mealtimes have also been proven to be useful for investigating the argumentative strategies adopted by children to oppose their parents' argumentation. For example, Brumark (2008) found that children aged 12–14 years use arguments that last longer and require more exchanges to be resolved. In contrast, children aged 7–10 years use shorter arguments that are about the immediate context. Hester and Hester (2010) showed that children could use context-bound and cultural resources to

[2] Standpoint is the analytical term used to indicate the position taken by a party in a discussion on an issue. As Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009, p. 44) defined it: "a standpoint is a statement (simple or complex) for whose acceptance by the addressee the arguer intends to argue."

produce their arguments. In their analysis of an argumentative dialogue between a brother and a sister during a family meal, these authors (2010, p. 44) showed that the children's arguments are organized both sequentially and categorically: "The brother could be heard to degrade his sister via his conversational actions – directives, accusations, enacted descriptions, mimicry, and mockery – whilst she, in turn, resists them through her rebuttals, accounts, counter-enacted descriptions, and other oppositionals."

By analyzing a case study of a family mealtime conversation, Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono (2016) also showed how a 7-year-old child resisted his father's directive by employing an elaborated argumentative strategy based on the invocation of external sources as reasonable justifications to achieve his goal. Bova (2015b), meanwhile, found that the effectiveness of the argument from expert opinion used by children in argumentative discussions with their parents depends on how strongly parents and children share the premises on which the argument is based. In recent work, Pauletto et al. (2017) further highlighted how school-age children use arguments that invoke prior agreements during argumentative discussions with their parents. Marjorie Harness Goodwin and Charles Goodwin, in their numerous studies devoted to the analysis of children's argumentation and the examination of the "naturally occurring data" therein, have shown that rather than being disorderly, children's arguments are syntactically well-formed and pragmatically effective (Goodwin, 1983; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; in this regard, see also Arcidiacono & Bova, 2015 and Maynard, 1985). From a developmental psychology perspective, Dunn and her colleagues (Dunn & Munn, 1987; Slomkowski & Dunn, 1992) have shown that children most often use self-oriented arguments, i.e., talking about themselves, while parents predominantly use arguments that refer to their children and not to themselves, i.e., other-oriented arguments. Dunn and colleagues' studies indicate that the family's argumentative dialogues are oriented mainly towards the youngest child and less towards the parents or older siblings.

This synthesized discussion of studies shows that the literature on parent-child argumentative discussions has devoted considerable attention thus far to investigating the specific argumentative contribution provided by either parents or children, independently from each other. Accordingly, less attention has been paid to examining the construction of the dialogic process involved in negotiating the divergent opinions between parents and children by adopting an argumentative approach. To start filling this gap in the literature on parent-child argumentation, I aim to answer the following research question: "How do parents and children interactionally contribute to negotiating their divergent opinions occurring during spontaneous argumentative dialogues at mealtime?" In so doing, an idiographic perspective is adopted to focus on the role played by parents and children through the entire dialogic process of negotiating their divergent opinions during spontaneous argumentative discussions at mealtime, i.e., from the beginning of the argumentative dialogue to the phase of negotiation of their divergent opinions and the conclusion they reach. In this paper, idiography is considered a way to pursue generalized knowledge and give sense to intrinsically unique, singular, local, and embedded situations (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010).

By adopting a qualitative methodology including video recordings and transcriptions of family mealtime conversations as well as an inductive analysis of argumentative sequences between parents and children, the present study intends to contribute to this so far under-explored research direction in the recent literature on parent-child argumentation.

3. Methods

3.1. Data corpus

The present investigation is part of a larger project[3] devoted to the study of argumentation in the family context. The data corpus constitutes 30 separate video-recorded family meals (spanning about 20 h of video data in total; the length of each recording varied from 20 to 42 min) of 10 middle- to upper-middle-class Italian (*sub-corpus 1*) and Swiss (*sub-corpus 2*) families.[4] The criteria adopted in selecting the Italian families included the following: the presence of both parents and at least two children, of whom at least one is of preschool age (3 to 5 years), and at least one is aged between 6 and 9 years. All families in sub-corpus 1 had two children. Sub-corpus 2 consisted of 15 video-recorded meals in five families, all of whom were residents in the Lugano area. The criteria adopted in selecting the Swiss families mirrored the criteria adopted in the creation of sub-corpus 1. These families all had two or three children.

Furthermore, all participants were Italian speaking.[5] Although the data corpus on which this study is based is constituted of families from two different nationalities, a cultural comparison aimed at singling out argumentative differences and commonalities between the two sub-corpora is not a goal of this study.

3.2. Recruitment of the families

The creation of sub-corpus 1 (Italian families) took place from January to June 2004. At the beginning of the research, sub-corpus 1

[3] I am referring to the research project "Argumentation as a reasonable alternative to conflict in the family context" (project n. PDFMP1-123093/1) funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

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

[5] Participant Swiss families live 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.

was already at the researchers' disposal, including its complete transcriptions.[6] The creation of sub-corpus 2 (Swiss families) took place from December 2008 to November 2009 and utilized a recruitment process identical to the one used for sub-corpus 1. The families were recruited through fliers in schools and the personal acquaintances of the research team. After initial contact by phone, the researchers visited the families in their own homes and described the research plan to the parents. Families were informed that the study aimed to investigate the style of their mealtime conversations, but nothing was said about the study's specific interest in argumentative discussions. Participating families did not receive any financial reimbursement for their participation in the study. At the end of the transcription phase, the families were given a copy of the video as a token of gratitude for their participation.

3.3. Ethical issues

The ethical framework that guided this study included informed consent from the participants, as well as anonymity and confidentiality. All parents were approached through an information sheet outlining the study's general purpose in straightforward language and providing information about how the video data would be used. Consent letters were written in accordance with the Swiss Psychological Society (SPS) and the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, specifically the format outlined in the sixth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2009). As specified in a release letter signed by the researchers and all of the parents, the families gave us permission to video record the mealtimes, provided that the data would be used only for scientific purposes, and their privacy would be guarded. The families were further assured that their anonymity would be maintained at all stages of the study by using a single master sheet that contained each participant's name and their participant number. Transcriptions, video-recorded material, and information on the families were treated in the strictest confidence and seen only by researchers. Segments of video-recorded data were used for research purposes only. The researchers made clear to participants that they could choose to withdraw from the study and that any concerns they had about the research's ethics could be referred to the researchers for clarification at any time.

3.4. Transcription procedures

All family meals were fully transcribed in the first phase, adopting the CHILDES standard transcription system, CHAT[7] (MacWhinney, 2000). Some modifications were introduced to enhance readability[8] and were revised by two researchers until a high level of consent (agreement rate = 80%) had been reached. The CHAT system provides a standardized format for producing computerized transcripts of face-to-face conversational interactions for the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES), which offers options for basic discourse transcription as well as detailed phonological and morphological analyses. Verbal utterances and nonverbal expressions with a clear communicative function relevant to the meal activity were identified in the transcription. This methodology allowed a detailed analysis of verbal interactions among family members during the recording sessions. Afterward, the researchers reviewed all of the transcriptions with the family members at their homes. This procedure made it possible to ask the family members to clarify passages unclear in the researchers' eyes because of the low level of recording sound and vague words and constructions. In the transcription of the conversations, the description of the physical setting of the mealtime, i.e., the kitchen and the dining table, has proved very useful for understanding some passages that, at first sight, appeared unclear. The direct experience of the entire process of corpus construction, including the recording of the interaction (construction of primary data) and the transcription (construction of secondary data), has allowed both the application of the availability principle, that is, "the analytical task of recording (and, in the same way, of digitizing, anonymizing, transcribing, annotating, etc.) is to provide for the availability of relevant details—which indeed makes the analysis possible" (Mondada, 2006, p. 55), and a fuller experiential understanding of the specific situations.

In this paper, data are presented in the English translation. In all examples, all turns are numbered progressively within the discussion sequence, and family members are identified by role (for the adults) and by pseudonyms (for the children), thereby ensuring anonymity, particularly among the child participants.

3.5. Analytical approach

In the present study, the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion provides the criteria for the reconstruction of argumentative dialogues between parents and children. It does not set up norms of 'good' or 'reasonable' argumentative discussions but instead provides guidelines of behavior that must be included in the reconstruction of argumentation. This model spells out four stages that are 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 solve the difference of opinion and explore whether there are premises to start a discussion; at the argumentation stage, the parties defend their own standpoints, and one of them may elicit further argumentation if they have further doubts; at the concluding stage, it is established

[6] A corpus of video recordings of family mealtime conversations held by a large number of Italian families has been gathered by Clotilde Pontecorvo and her colleagues at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" from the late '90s to early 2000. Thanks to Clotilde Pontecorvo, the most recent part of this broad corpus of video recordings of family mealtime conversations—15 meals in five Italian families video recorded from January to June 2004—has been used as part of the data corpus of the present research.

[7] The acronym "CHAT" stands for Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts.

[8] Cf. the Appendix for the symbols of transcription used in this paper.

whether the difference of opinion has been resolved on account of the standpoint or the doubt concerning the standpoint being retracted.

The analyses presented in this paper focus exclusively on the study of analytically relevant argumentative moves, i.e., "those speech acts that (at least potentially) play a role in the process of resolving a difference of opinion" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 73). Drawing on the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion, the dialogues between parents and children were considered to be argumentative whether the following three criteria were satisfied: i) during mealtime, a difference of opinion between parents and children arises around an issue; ii) one child questions the one standpoint advanced by the parent or one parent questions the one standpoint advanced by the child; iii) the parent puts forward at least one argument either in favor of or against the standpoint being questioned or the child puts forward at least one argument either in favor of or against the standpoint being questioned. Only the discussions that fulfilled the three criteria mentioned above were selected for analysis, while all non-argumentative discussions were excluded.

Subsequently, the analysis focused on the confrontation stage to identify the issues leading parents to engage in argumentative discussions with their children. In this stage, the interlocutors establish that they hold different opinions about an issue. To identify the types of arguments put forth by parents and children, the analysis then concentrated on the argumentation stage. In this stage, the interlocutors exchange arguments and critical reactions to convince the other party to accept or retract their standpoint. To identify the types of conclusions of the argumentative discussions, the analysis also focused on the concluding stage, which establishes whether the dispute has been resolved on account of the standpoint or the doubt concerning the standpoint being retracted.

The entire corpus was composed of $N = 132$ argumentative dialogues between parents and children during mealtime. The excerpts presented in the following sections are representative of the results obtained from the broader set of analyses conducted on the whole corpus of argumentative discussions collected. To present a clear picture of the results, I will also indicate the frequency of the types of issues leading parents to engage in argumentative discussions with their children, of the types of arguments put forth by parents and children, and of the types of conclusions of the argumentative discussions. However, I do not intend to look for a statistical correlation between specific types of issues, arguments and conclusions, and specific behavioral outcomes. Instead, my focus is on the role played by parents and children through the entire dialogic process of negotiating their divergent opinions during spontaneous argumentative dialogues at mealtime.

4. Results

The results of the analysis are structured in three phases: the beginning of the argumentative discussions, the types of arguments used by parents and children, and the types of conclusions to these argumentative discussions.

4.1. Beginning of the argumentative discussions

What has emerged through analyzing the corpus of parent-child argumentative discussions during mealtime conversations is that they are triggered by two general types of issues: *parental directives* and *children's requests*.

4.1.1. Argumentative discussions generated by parental directives

In most cases, the issues leading parents and children to engage in argumentative discussions are triggered by parental directives ($N = 87$; 66%). In particular, I observed that the issues generated by parental directives are strictly bound to the specific situational activity that the children are involved in, i.e., the activity of mealtimes. The following discussion between a father and his 8-year-old son, Marco, offers an illustration of how a parental directive related to feeding practices can trigger the beginning of an argumentative discussion during mealtime:

Excerpt 1. Italian family. Participants: father (DAD, 38 years), mother (MOM, 34 years), Marco (MAR, 8 years and 5 months), and Filippo (FIL, 5 years and 4 months).

%sit:		MAR is drinking a soft drink
1.	*DAD:	stop drinking XXX ((name of the brand of the soft drink)), Marco!
→	*DAD:	now I will give you some rice.
2.	*MAR:	no, I do not want anything else: ((sitting on the chair))
→	*MAR:	please, no more. [:! shaking his head in refusal]
3.	*DAD:	no:: you have not eaten enough.
4.	*MAR:	no:::
→	*MAR:	no:: I am full:
	%act:	MAR looks towards DAD and starts drinking the soft drink again
5.	*DAD:	I told you:: Marco stop drinking this stuff ((the soft drink))
	%act:	DAD takes MAR's glass and takes it to the kitchen

The excerpt is opened, in turn 1, by two directives advanced by the father to his son ("Stop drinking XXX, Marco!" and "Now, I will give you some rice"). The child's reaction fulfills this very claim negatively. Turn 2, in fact, is when a difference of opinion between Marco and his father arises. The child's intervention constitutes the beginning of the argumentative discussion, as the child replies to

the father that he does not want to eat anything else.[9] From an argumentative perspective, what is interesting is the fact that Marco does not consider that he must stop drinking but immediately focuses on the second directive advanced by his father, i.e., "Now, I will give you some rice." Marco's refusal to accept his father's directive gives a particular orientation to the discussion exclusively around the food, contributing to co-constructing the argumentative dialogue with his father. In turn 3, the father advances an argument based on food quantity ("no:: you have not eaten enough"). This discussion will continue with the opposition by Marco ("no::: no:: I am full") until the father turns back to the first directive, i.e., to stop drinking, thereby shifting the focus of the conversation to a different topic.

Parents and children frequently engaged in argumentative discussions because of parental directives related to eating a particular food. However, parental directives did not pertain exclusively to feeding practices but also the teaching of correct table manners and the behavior of children in social interactions outside the family. Other examples of parental directives triggering the beginning of an argumentative discussion between parents and children during mealtime include: "Should Elisa invite all her schoolmates to her birthday party?", "Should Nicola apologize to his schoolmate Domenico?" and "Should Laura lend her crayons to her friend Olivia?"

4.1.2. Argumentative discussions generated by children's requests

In the corpus, the argumentative discussions between parents and children were also triggered by children's requests ($N = 55$; 34%). The issues generated by children's request concern activities not only related to mealtimes but also children's social behavior within and outside the family context. In particular, I observed that one question asked by children to their parents, more than others, has a crucial role from an argumentative perspective: the Why-question.[10] In the corpus, children asked Why-questions not only to know the reasons for events already ascertained, i.e., Why-question with an explanatory function (Walton, 2004) but also to put into doubt the validity of the reasons on which the parents' opinions are based, i.e., Why-question with an argumentative function (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2013b). The following dialogue between the 4-year-old child, Giuseppe, and his mother is a good illustration of how the Why-question asked by the child represents the beginning of an argumentative dialogue with his mother:

Excerpt 2. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 36 years), mother (MOM, 34 years), Fabio (FAB, 8 years and 5 months), and Giuseppe (GIU, 4 years and 6 months).

	%sit:	GIU touches and looks at the container with the medicine
1.	*GIU:	I am: going to take one of these (pills).
→	*GIU:	yes!
2.	*MOM:	you cannot, Giuseppe!
3.	*GIU:	what?
4.	*MOM:	you cannot. [:! shakes his head]
5.	*GIU:	why not?
6.	*MOM:	because children, have to take special medicine
→	*MOM:	they cannot take medicine for adults
→	*MOM:	otherwise, they will get sick.

The sequence begins when the child, Giuseppe, tells his mother of his intention to take the pills from the medicine container. The child announces his action with a pre-sequence—"I am going to…"—and reinforces his position by concluding his remark with "yes" (turn 1). The mother disagrees with the child's behavior, twice repeating, in turn 2 and turn 4, "You cannot." In this discussion, we can, therefore, observe a difference of opinion between the child, Giuseppe, and his mother, since they have two opposing standpoints. In turn 5, Giuseppe then asks his mother why he cannot take the pills from the medicine container ("why not?"). Giuseppe uses his Why-question to make clear that he wants to know the reason behind the prohibition imposed by his mother. From an argumentative perspective, the child not only compels his mother to answer his Why-question but also assumes a waiting position before accepting or putting into doubt the parental directive. As a matter of fact, by asking a Why-question, the child challenges his mother to justify her standpoint.

Other examples of children's requests triggering the beginning of an argumentative discussion between parents and children during mealtime include: "Can Giuseppe use that eraser?", "Can Dad sing along with Fabio?", "Can Nicola take the crayon?", and "Can Luigi whisper in his Dad's ear?" In some but not all of these examples, it was clearly possible to observe the crucial role of children's Why-questions in encouraging the initiation of argumentative discussions and asking parents to justify their standpoints.

4.2. Types of arguments used by parents and children

In this section, I will describe the types of arguments used by parents and children during the process of negotiating their divergent

[9] Ervin-Tripp (1976) and Arcidiacono and Bova (2015) showed young children typically use want-statements, i.e., I want it, as types of arguments in conversations with adults. In our corpus of data, want-statements were indeed quite frequently used by children.

[10] In Italian, the word "perché" is used both to ask "why" and as a response, like the English word "because." In attempting to identify all Why–questions asked by children to their parents, I did not consider each instance of "perché" used by children when speaking with their parents but only those with an interrogative function.

Table 1
Types of arguments put forward by parents and children.

Types of arguments	Parents	Children
Quality	103 (43%)	52 (42%)
Quantity	93 (39%)	61 (49%)
Expert opinion	19 (8%)	9 (6%)
Appeal to consistency	14 (6%)	3 (3%)
Analogy	9 (4%)	0 (0%)
Total	238 (100%)	125 (100%)

opinions. In the corpus of 132 argumentative discussions, I have observed that the parents gave more arguments ($N = 238$) than the children ($N = 125$). The findings of the analysis indicate that parents and children used, in most cases, four different types of arguments during the argumentative dialogues at mealtime: *quality* and *quantity*, *appeal to consistency*, *expert opinion*, and *analogy* (Table 1). The argument of quality can be referred to as a property—positive or negative—of something or someone, while the argument of quantity can be referred to the amount or size of something or someone (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2014). The argument from expert opinion used by parents with their children can be described through the following statement: "Person X is an expert. The person X told me Y. Therefore, Y is true".[11] The appeal to consistency's argument can be described through the following question: "If you have explicitly or implicitly affirmed something in the past, then why aren't you maintaining it now?" As for the argument from analogy, the reasoning behind this argument is the following: "Major Premise: Generally, Case C1 is similar to case C2 (e.g., the weather in January is similar to the weather in December). Minor Premise: Proposition A is true in Case C1 (e.g., in December, it rained every day). Conclusion: Proposition A is true in case C2. (e.g., In January, it will rain every day)" (cf. Walton et al., 2008, p. 58).

4.2.1. Quality and quantity

A great many of the arguments used by parents and children refer to the concepts of quality (parents $N = 103$, 43%; children $N = 52$, 42%) and quantity (parents $N = 93$, 39%; children $N = 61$, 49%). Parents and children frequently used these arguments when the discussion they engaged in was related to food. The argument of quality was often—but not exclusively—used to convince the other party that the food was good and deserved to be eaten. Interestingly, when the parents used these types of arguments, children's counterarguments mirrored the same types of arguments previously used by their parents. In this sense, the process of arguments' choice was co-constructed by the parents and children because these decisions affected each other's argumentative choices. In the following dialogue between a mother and her 7-year-old son, Michele, we can see how the mother used an argument of quality to convince her son to eat the meatballs and how her son's counterargument is also an argument of quality:

Excerpt 3. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 35 years), mother (MOM, 33 years), Michele (MIC, 7 years 3 months), Nicola (NIC, 4 years 8 months), Martina (MAR, 3 years 4 months).

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

In this excerpt, the mother and her child, Michele, have two opposite standpoints. The mother wants the son to eat the meatballs,

[11] In this study, the definition of argument from expert opinion coincides exactly with Walton's notion of epistemic authority (Walton, 1997, pp. 77–78): "The epistemic authority is 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, when used or appealed to in argument, is essentially an appeal to expertise, or to expert opinion." The issue of epistemic authority has been also addressed widely within ethnomethodological and conversation analytic work. In this regard, see the special issue of Research on Language and Social Interaction, 45(1), 1–109, and the two seminal articles by Heritage and Raymond (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006).

which Michele does not want to eat. As the parties commit to arguing about their stances, the mother advances an argument of quality, emphasizing the good taste of the food (turn 6). The mother's argumentative choice to stress the food's quality affects her son's argumentative choice. In fact, Michele's argument in reaction to the mother's argument is also an argument of quality: in his opinion, the meatballs are not crisp but, instead, are hard. While his mother underlines a positive property of the meatballs, Michele, by qualifying the meatballs as "hard," indicates a negative property of the food by contrast.

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

Excerpt 4. Italian family. Participants: father (DAD, 41 years), mother (MOM, 38 years), Mario (MAR, 7 years 2 months), Alessandra (ALE, 3 years 10 months).

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

The excerpt starts when the child, Mario, tells his mother that he does not want to eat more risotto (turn 1). The mother disagrees and advances an argument of quality, stating that the size of the portion that Mario ate was not enough. As for the previous example, the mother's argumentative choice thus affects her son's argumentative choice. Mario's argument in reaction to the mother's argument is also an argument of quantity. In fact, by saying, in turn 3, that he has already eaten a lot ("one kilo"), we can reasonably suppose that, according to the child, one kilo of risotto represents more than the right/usual amount that is supposed to be eaten.

Other examples of the arguments of quality and quantity used by parents and children include the following: "No, you cannot eat this ((cheese)); it is too salty", "They ((chickpeas)) are not that many and are also tasty", and "you must eat a little of the meat, at least a little bit". In almost all of these examples, it is clear that the process of arguments' choice is co-constructed by parents and children together since the counterarguments advanced by children mirror the same types of arguments previously used by their parents.

4.2.2. Expert opinion

The second type of argument put forward by parents and children is the argument from expert opinion (parents $N = 19$, 8%; children $N = 9$, 6%). In the corpus, the arguments from expert opinion are mostly based on the affective dimension. In fact, parents always referred to an adult who is well-known and has positive feelings towards the child, such as a grandparent or teacher. Similarly, children refer to an adult well-known by them as a source of expert opinion and never to another child. Accordingly, it is a further example of how the process of arguments' choice is co-constructed by parents and children. In their argumentative choices, parents and children affect each other because they both refer to an adult who is well-known and can be perceived as a reliable source by the other party. The following dialogue between a mother and her 5-year-old son, Alfredo, offers a clear illustration of these dynamics:

Excerpt 5. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 39 years), mother (MOM, 34 years), Antonella (ANT, 7 years and 4 months), Alfredo (ALF, 5 years and 1 month), and Andrea (AND, 3 years and 1 month).

1.	*MOM:	Alfredo, you must eat a little of this cheese
2.	*ALF:	no.
3.	*MOM:	yes, because just bread is not enough
4.	*ALF:	no, I do not want cheese
5.	*MOM:	this is the one Grandpa bought, though::
6	*MOM:	it is delicious!
7.	*ALF:	really?
8.	*MOM:	yes, Grandpa bought it!
9.	*ALF:	mhm:: ((he seems thoughtful))
10.	*MOM:	it is delicious!
	%act:	MOM puts a piece of cheese in ALF plate

In this example, Alfredo's mother and the child have divergent views on a food-related issue since the mother's standpoint, i.e., Alfredo must eat a little cheese, has been met by the child's refusal. In turn 3, the mother reacts to her son's opposition by advancing an argument of quantity to convince Alfredo to withdraw his opposite standpoint: "Because bread alone is not enough." However, the child, in turn 4, reacts to his mother's argument by reasserting his original position: "No, I do not want cheese." At this point, the mother puts forward two further arguments to convince the child to change his opinion. The first argument, i.e., "This is the one Grandpa bought," in turn 5, is an argument from expert opinion, while the second argument, that "it is delicious," in turn 6, is an

argument of quality. In this example, I want to draw attention to the argument from expert opinion advanced by the mother in turn 5 and turn 8 ("This is the one Grandpa bought"). The mother refers to her son's grandfather as a source of expert opinion to convince the child to accept her standpoint and eat a little cheese along with his bread. In this case, the child agrees with the mother's argumentation and withdraws from his opposite standpoint. The mother bases her argumentation on the nature of the grandfather–grandson relationship and the specific feelings at the ground of it, i.e., the grandfather loves his grandson and vice versa.

Other examples of arguments from expert opinion include the following: "You cannot have the lemons because I ((mom)) need the lemons," and "No, sweetheart, trust me because I know what I am talking about… sometimes you can try, other times you cannot try, and you must trust what parents tell you."

4.2.3. Appeal to consistency

The third type of argument used by parents and children refers to the consistency with past behaviors (parents $N = 14$, 6%; children $N = 3$, 3%). In this case, the process of how the choice of arguments is co-constructed by parents and children is less evident since only in a few instances this type of argument was advanced by children. In the corpus, children's response to this type of argument was an expression of further doubt, a mere opposition without providing any counterargument, or an immediate acceptance of their parents' argumentation. The next dialogue between a 7-year-old child, Luca, and his mother illustrates the use of this type of argument by the latter:

Excerpt 6. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 38 years), mother (MOM, 36 years), Luca (LUC, 7 years), Alessia (ALE, 4 years and 5 months), Chiara (CHI, 3 years and 2 months).

1.	*MOM:	Luca, you had been very good yesterday
2.	*LUC:	why?
3.	*MOM:	why?
4.	*MOM:	aunt Lina told me that you were very good yesterday
5.	*MOM:	you did all the ((school)) homework
6.	*MOM:	so tomorrow you are going back to aunt Lina's to do your homework, ok?
7.	*LUC:	no:: I do not want to
8.	*MOM:	come on, Luca
9.	*MOM:	but yesterday you were there all afternoon
10.	*MOM:	and today you said that you had so much fun!
11.	*LUC:	mhm:: ((LUC has a puzzled expression))
	%act:	LUC nods to say that he agrees with MOM
12.	*MOM:	ok, so tomorrow I will take you to aunt Lina

Within this excerpt, I shall focus on the dialogue between the mother and Luca between turn 6 and turn 12. In turns 6–7, the initiative and reactive moves represent the beginning of the argumentative dialogue since Luca's mother and the child have two diverging standpoints. The mother wants her child to go back to Aunt Lina's house to do his homework, while the child does not. At this point, the mother's reaction is an argument advanced to convince her child to change his opinion and go again to Aunt Lina's house to do his school homework. In turns 9–10, the mother puts forward an argument referring to the consistency with past behaviors: "but yesterday, you were there the entire afternoon, and today, you said that you had so much fun!" By referring to an action that Luca did in the past ("yesterday, you were there the entire afternoon") and emphasizing how good that event was for him ("today, you said that you had so much fun!"), the mother tries to show Luca that his present behavior should be consistent with his past behavior. The child's reaction, a non-verbal act, i.e., nodding to say that he agrees with his mother, fulfills his mother's argument in a positive sense since he accepts to go the day after to Aunt Lina's home to do his homework.

Other examples of the appeal to consistency arguments include the following: "you usually eat many tortellini, but how can you say that you do not like ((lemon)) if you have never tried it?," and "you ate many mushrooms last night."

4.2.4. Analogy

The fourth type of argument put forward by parents in argumentative dialogues with their children is the argument from analogy (parents $N = 9$, 4%; children $N = 0$, 0%). In line with what we have seen for the appeal to consistency's argument, the process of how the choice of arguments is co-constructed by parents and children was not observed because only the parents used this type of argument in our corpus. Children's response to this type of argument was an expression of further doubt, a mere opposition without providing any counterargument, or an immediate acceptance of their parents' argumentation. The following example illustrates the use of this type of argument by a mother during a dialogue with her 7-year-old son, Federico:

Excerpt 7. Italian family. Participants: father (DAD, 42 years), mother (MOM, 40 years), Federico (FED, 7 years and 6 months), Alessio (ALE, 3 years and 9 months).

	%act:	dinner is just started. MOM serves the food to children, DAD instead is still seated on the couch watching TV
1.	*MOM:	come:: dinner is ready [talking to DAD]
2.	*DAD:	just a moment
3.	*MOM:	come: otherwise it gets cold
	%pau:	2.5 sec
4.	*FED:	Mom
5.	*MOM:	what Federico?
6.	*GER:	I think that the teacher Silvia ((the Math teacher)) will give us a lot of homework to do during the holidays ((referring to the Christmas holidays))
7.	*MOM:	no:: no:
8.	*MOM:	I do not think so
9.	*FED:	I do, though!
10.	*MOM:	no:: I do not think so.
11.	*MOM:	if teacher Sara ((the Italian teacher)) did not do it, teacher Silvia would not do it either
12.	*FED:	let us hope so! ((smiling))
	%act:	MOM smiles too

In the analysis of this excerpt, I shall focus on the dialogue between the mother and his son, Federico, between turn 4 and turn 12 because they engage in an argumentative dialogue within this phase to resolve a difference of opinion on an issue related to the school context. The child, in turn 6, makes a claim: he tells his mother that he thinks that the math teacher, i.e., the teacher Silvia, will give them—meaning both him and all of the students of his class—a lot of homework to do during the Christmas holidays. In turns 7–8, the mother's reaction fulfills this very claim in a negative sense because she disagrees with her son ("no:: no: I do not think so"). The child's reaction in turn 9 is then a further confirmation of his initial standpoint ("I do though!"). However, he does not advance any argument in support of his position. The mother, instead, in turn 11, advances an argument from analogy to convince her child to change his opinion. According to the mother, if the Italian teacher did not give them homework to do during the Christmas holidays, neither would the math teacher. The reasoning behind the mother's argument can be inferred as follows: because the two teachers share some similarities, i.e., they are both teachers of the same class, they will behave similarly. In this case, the mother's argumentation appears to be effective in convincing her son to change his opinion. In turn 12, the child does not continue to defend his initial standpoint ("let us hope so!"), and the dialogue ends with both of them smiling.

Other examples of arguments from analogy include the following: "look, the chickpeas are so good, and even if I have many bumps in my mouth as you have (smiling to her child), I am eating them."

4.3. Types of conclusions of the argumentative discussions

I will now describe the results of the analysis of the possible ways that parents and children conclude their dialogic process of negotiating their divergent opinions. In our corpus of data, I have observed four different types of conclusions of the argumentative discussions between parents and children. The first two types are dialectical conclusions, in which one of the two parties accepts or rejects the others' standpoint. Therefore, in these two types of conclusions, the parent and the child reach the concluding stage of their argumentative discussion, i.e., it is established whether the dispute has been resolved on account of the standpoint or the doubt concerning the standpoint being retracted. The most frequent type of conclusion is that *the child accepts the parent's standpoint* ($N = 74$, 56%). Often, the children accepted the parents' standpoint through a clear and explicit verbal expression, as in a dialogue that we have already seen (cf. Excerpt 5) between a mother and her 5-year-old son, Alfredo:

Excerpt 8. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 39 years), mother (MOM, 34 years); Antonella (ANT, 7 years and 4 months), Alfredo (ALF, 5 years and 1 month), and Andrea (AND, 3 years and 1 month).

[…]		
7.	*MOM:	yes, Grandpa bought it
8.	*ALF:	mhm:: [: he seems thoughtful]
9.	*MOM:	it is delicious
	%act:	MOM puts a piece of cheese in FIL's plate who starts eating the cheese

In the example above, the mother tries to convince her five-year-old son, Alfredo, to eat the cheese. In conclusion, the child shows an acceptance that he should eat the cheese without advancing an explicit verbal expression of acceptance of the mother's standpoint. In this case, the choice of continuing to object to the parental rule or ban appears to be more demanding and, therefore, less convenient than accepting the parent's standpoint. Even though challenging their parents' standpoint can be feasible for the children, it is not

always possible as the parents are the ones to decide the extent to which their standpoint is discussable. In this regard, I believe that the differences in roles, age, and competencies between parents and children certainly play an important role and must be carefully considered.

The second type is that *the parent accepts the child's standpoint* ($N = 14$, 11%). Interestingly, this second type of conclusion occurred when parents and children debated issues related to food. Instead, I did not find any case where the child succeeded in convincing the parent to accept a standpoint in discussions where the issue was related to proper table manners and rules on how to behave in interactions outside the family. Although this type of conclusion is less frequent than the previous one, it is essential to highlight how children, through their arguments, were able to convince the parents to accept their standpoint. The next example, which is similar to Excerpt 3, illustrates how a child convinces his mother that the quality of the dish is not good:

Excerpt 9. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 39 years), mother (MOM, 34 years); Antonella (ANT, 7 years and 4 months), Alfredo (ALF, 5 years and 1 month), and Andrea (AND, 3 years and 1 month).

1.	*MOM:	do you want a little risotto?
2.	*ALF:	no:: no::
3.	*MOM:	it is good, though!
4.	*ALF:	no:: it is a little strange
5.	*MOM:	but Alfredo, it is really soft
6.	*ALF:	no, it is strange I do not like it
7.	*MOM:	no::
8.	*ALF:	yes, it is strange
	%act:	MOM tastes the risotto
9.	*MOM:	yes, actually it is not very good
10.	*ALF:	it is strange!
11.	*MOM:	maybe because of the cheese
→	*MOM:	yes, it is a little strange

In this excerpt, we can observe how the argument put forward by the child in turns 4 and 6, i.e., the risotto is a little strange, produces the effect of convincing the mother to taste the risotto she has prepared herself. The adjective "strange" makes it clear to the mother that the taste of the risotto is not good. After tasting the risotto herself, she agrees that her child does not have to eat the risotto because it is not good.

The third type of conclusion encountered in the corpus is not a dialectical conclusion but is, instead, an interruption of the argumentative dialogue. At times, *the parents avoided continuing the argumentative dialogue with their children by shifting the focus of the discussion* ($N = 32$, 24%). In particular, I observed that parents tended to shift the focus of the argumentative dialogue either when they considered the issue not appropriate for discussion during mealtime or when they wanted their children to focus on eating rather than talking. This finding indicates once again that it is the parent who decides whether or not to conclude the dialogue. The next example illustrates these dynamics.

Excerpt 10. Swiss family. Participants: father (DAD, 36 years), mother (MOM, 34 years); Fabio (FAB, 8 years and 5 months), and Giuseppe (GIU, 4 years and 6 months).

1.	*FAB:	Mom, can I go to play with the computer?
2.	*MOM:	no.
3.	*FAB:	why?
4.	*MOM:	we are eating now
→	*MOM:	during mealtime, you cannot play with the computer
5.	*FAB:	why not?
6.	*MOM:	but today at school you had the Math test, didn't you?
7.	*FAB:	yes!
→	*FAB:	it was difficult::
8.	*MOM:	really?
9.	*FAB:	yes
10.	*MOM:	what was it about?
[…]		

In this excerpt, there is a difference of opinion between the mother and her 8-year-old son, Fabio. The child, Fabio, wants to play with the computer during mealtime (turn 1), but his mother disagrees with him (turn 2). After listening to the argument put forward by his mother (We are eating now. During mealtime, you cannot play with the computer) (turn 4), Fabio keeps asking his mother the reason why he cannot play with the computer (turn 5). At this point, the mother shifts the focus of the dialogue (but, today, at school,

you had the math test, didn't you?) (turn 6), interrupting it before it reaches a conclusion. As a result, the issue of playing with the computer will not be addressed any further over dinner.

The fourth type of conclusion—and the second type of non-dialectical conclusion—of the parent-child argumentative discussions is when *the parent, or the child, after a pause of a few seconds, changed the topic of the discussion* ($N = 12$, 9%). Differing from the previous type of non-dialectical conclusion, i.e., when the parents avoided continuing the argumentative dialogue with their children by shifting the focus of the discussion, both the parent and the child, in this case, appeared to be uninterested in continuing the argumentative discussion and, accordingly, began a new discussion on a different topic. This second type of non-dialectical conclusion is the least frequent of all four types of conclusions observed, as the children often asked questions, particularly Why-questions, to find out the reasons on which their parents' standpoints were based, thereby causing the parents to continue the argumentative discussion. An example of this fourth type of conclusion is illustrated in the following dialogue between a mother and her 7-year-old son, Luigi.

Excerpt 11. Italian family. Participants: father (DAD, 38 years), mother (MOM, 36 years), Luigi (LUI, 7 years), Valentina (VAL, 4 years 5 months).

	%sit:	LUI goes towards DAD and whispers something in his ear
1.	*MOM:	Luigi, you cannot whisper things in people's ears
2.	*LUI:	why not?
3.	*MOM:	because everyone must hear it
4.	*LUI:	no::
5.	*MOM:	you cannot whisper in the ear
	%act:	MOM and DAD smile
	%pau:	(4. sec)
6.	*VAL:	more salad
7.	*MOM:	darling, do you want a little more salad?
8.	*VAL:	yes:

In turn 1, the mother says to Luigi that he cannot whisper in his father's ear, but the child disagrees with his mother ("why not?", turn 2). In turn 3, the mother puts forward an argument supporting her standpoint ("because everyone must hear it"). The child shows, in turn 4, that he still disagrees with his mother ("no::"), who then restates her standpoint in turn 5 ("you cannot whisper in the ear"). The long silence after the mother's statement indicates that their argumentative discussion is concluded. After this long silence, the family members start a new discussion on a different topic.

5. Discussion

Family mealtime conversations are an object of research that can provide us with significant information on how parents and children spontaneously interact and engage in argumentative dialogues. This study has shown how the process of negotiation of the divergent opinions between parents and children during mealtime conversations emerges as a co-constructed dialogic process, during which both parties play a crucial role in every phase of their argumentative interactions. As already stated in the Introduction section, by co-construction, I specifically refer to the dialogical processes through which interlocutors jointly construct new knowledge during their argumentative interactions. At this juncture, it seems appropriate to take stock of the findings of this study.

What does characterize parents' and children's roles during the beginning of their argumentative discussions? The findings of the analysis of the initial phase of the argumentative discussions between parents and children have brought to light some typical dynamics characterizing the beginning of their argumentative discussions. By engaging in argumentative discussions, parents accept the commitment of clarifying to their children the reasons on which their standpoints are based (Bova, 2019a; Bova & Arcidiacono, 2018). In line with what was observed in previous studies (Aronsson & Gottzén, 2011; Goodwin & Cekaite, 2013), I noted that it is very complicated for children to resist parental directives without initiating a dispute. On these occasions, children assume the active antagonist's role in the argumentative discussions with their parents because they encourage their parents to justify their rules and directives through their questioning. In particular, the Why-questions asked by children seem to have a crucial role in co-constructing the argumentative discussions between parents and children during mealtime more than any other type of question. By asking such questions, the children compel their parents to justify the reasons why they have to accept their rules and directives, thus assuming a waiting position before accepting or casting doubt on the parental directives. Therefore, children's presence and involvement in family conversations favor the beginning of argumentative discussions, which represents a stimulus factor that induces parents to reason with their children.

Afterward, I have examined the types of arguments used by parents and children during the argumentation stage, i.e., the phase of the discussion during which the parties defend their own standpoints and in which one of them may elicit further argumentation if they have further doubts. The findings of the analysis highlight an interesting aspect that has not been described by the relevant literature thus far. The differences between parents and children are not only limited to the higher number of arguments advanced by parents than children (see, e.g., Bova, 2019b) but also to the higher parental capacity to adopt a different form of reasoning in support of argumentation. While children used, in large part, arguments of quality and quantity, the parents also used different types of arguments, such as the appeal to consistency, the arguments from expert opinion, and the arguments from analogy.

In most of the examples analyzed, it is possible to observe that the process of arguments' choice is co-constructed by parents and children together since the counterarguments advanced by children mirror the same types of arguments previously used by their parents. The fact that parents and children affect each other's argumentative choices is especially evident when the parents used the arguments of quality and quantity and the argument from expert opinion. In the third excerpt analysis, we have seen how the mother's argumentative choice to stress the food's quality affected her son's argumentative choice. The child's counterargument, in fact, is also an argument of quality. In the fourth excerpt analysis, the child's argument in reaction to his mother's is also an argument of quantity. The study of the argument from expert opinion has brought further evidence of how the process of arguments' choice is co-constructed by parents and children. Indeed, in their argumentative choices, parents and children affect each other because they both refer to an adult who is well-known and can be perceived as a reliable source by the other party. The co-construction of the argumentative discussions between parents and children was not observed, however, when parents advanced arguments appealing to consistency and arguments from analogy because the parents used these two types of arguments almost exclusively in our corpus. Children's responses to these types of arguments were an expression of further doubt, a mere opposition without providing any counterargument, or an immediate acceptance of their parents' argumentation.

Finally, the analysis focused on the role played by parents and children in the conclusion of their argumentative discussions. Through a conversation analysis of three sequences of parent-child mealtime interactions, Laurier and Wiggins (2011) found that finishing a meal is interactionally achieved. We observed that concluding an argumentative discussion during mealtime is also interactionally achieved by parents and children together. In particular, the findings of the present analysis have brought to light that the most frequent type of conclusion is that the child accepts the parent's standpoint. This finding does not coincide with what was found by Vuchinich (1987, 1990), who found that most of the conflicts between parents and children during family mealtime ended with no resolution. I posit that this difference can be explained by the fact that Vuchinich did not focus his analysis on argumentation but, instead, concentrated on verbal conflicts among family members. In an argumentative discussion, at least one of the parties has shown interest in resolving the difference of opinion in their favor by advancing at least one argument supporting their standpoint. In the verbal conflict, instead, neither party may show the willingness to resolve the difference of opinion. For this reason, it is more likely that the conclusion of a conversation with no resolution will be observed in a verbal conflict than in an argumentative discussion.

In some cases, parents and children did not reach a dialectical conclusion of their argumentative discussions. For example, this happened when the parents avoided continuing the argumentative dialogue with their children by shifting the focus of the discussion as well as when the parent or the child, after a pause of a few seconds, changed the topic of the discussion. In our corpus of argumentative discussions between parents and children, the non-dialectical conclusions were much less frequent than the dialectical conclusions, as children often asked questions, specifically Why-questions, to find out the reasons on which their parents' standpoints were based, thus prompting the parents to continue the argumentative discussion. The findings of the analysis of the types of conclusions of the argumentative discussions, again, bring to light the crucial role of the Why-questions asked by children to their parents in contributing to co-constructing their argumentative discussions during mealtime.

6. Conclusions

Argumentative interactions in the family context cannot but be dialogically co-constructed. Despite the differences in roles, age, and competencies between parents and children—which explain, for example, the higher number of different arguments used by parents and the fact that the most frequent type of conclusion is when the child accepts the parent's standpoint—the examination of the process of negotiation of their divergent opinions during mealtime conversations reveal that argumentative discussions between parents and young children are an activity in which children play a role that is equally fundamental to that of their parents. By engaging in argumentative discussions, parents accept the commitment of clarifying to their children the reasons on which their rules and directives are based. Children, instead, compel their parents to advance arguments to justify their standpoints by posing questions, in particular, Why-questions. Accordingly, argumentative discussions during mealtime open a shared space for parents and children to think together.

The results of the observations and the subtle analyses of the dialogues exchanges among family members open the way for new research paths that have not been addressed in this paper. The analysis of parent-child argumentative interactions should consider how socio-cultural routines and norms can affect their interactions. Further research in this direction is needed to a deeper understanding of how family members make strategic choices in argumentative interactions. Moreover, the asymmetry—real or perceived—of the knowledge and experience between participants in an argumentative dialogue affects each stage of the argumentative interaction, i.e., the beginning, development, and resolution. Is this asymmetry between parents and children something that remains stable during the argumentative discussion, or can it change instead? To answer this question, I propose that it would be useful to consider the evolution of the asymmetry of knowledge and experience between parents and children during the dialogic process of negotiating their divergent opinions. Like any other form of interpersonal interaction, argumentation is a form of action played within an interaction, thereby making it necessary for both dimensions (the construction of the dialogic process and the symmetric/asymmetric nature of interactions) to be considered in the analysis of argumentative discussions.

I want to conclude this work with some methodological remarks. I am conscious that many challenges derive from the advantages and disadvantages of the research design adopted for this study of argumentative discussions during family mealtimes. Every theoretical and methodological approach plays a role in the identification of what communicative processes are of interest for the analysis. I have found the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion to be particularly useful in that it starts with a precise definition of argumentation. If there is not a difference of opinion between (at least) two parties and there is not at least one party who advances an argument in support of their standpoint, we cannot say that an argumentative dialogue is taking place. In the context of family

discussions, the analysis has been achieved by starting from what parents and children have actually expressed rather than speculating about what they think or believe. In so doing, I identified the points at issue for the participants, the positions they adopted, their arguments, and the argumentative structures they employed to sustain their positions. In agreement with van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 7), I argue that whenever a model is used, "the argumentative discourse as it emerges has to undergo some analytic interpretation before insight provided in the theoretical model can be brought to bear in practical situations." Accordingly, the study of argumentation can neither be based unilaterally on experience nor on logic construction. These two ways must instead be interwoven in an integrative approach.

The limited number of recordings has favored a more careful analysis but did not allow certain quantifications, such as the statistical correlation between categories, e.g., number and types of arguments. A more extensive database would likely permit more quantitatively reliable data for statistical relationships. Furthermore, using mealtime conversations does not automatically solve the problem of obtaining optimal family interaction data. Although 'perfect' data does not exist, I believe that mealtime discussions are a highly informative source for studying the dynamics of argumentative interactions in the family context.

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Appendix A. Symbols of transcription

*	indicates the speaker's turn
[…]	not-transcribed segment of talking
(( ))	segments added by the transcriber to clarify some elements of the situation
[=!]	segments added by the transcriber to indicate some paralinguistic features
xxx	inaudible utterance(s)
%act:	description of speaker's actions
%sit:	description of the situation/setting
,	continuing intonation
.	falling intonation
:	prolonging of sounds
?	rising intonation
!	exclamatory intonation
→	maintaining the turn of talking by the speaker
%pau:	pause of (at least) 1.5 s

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