The development of arguing competencies in the family and in school context

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Main idea

Goal:

□ To explore how children are socialized to argumentative discourse

□ Argumentative discourse as a language-game (Wittgenstein, 1958)

□ A procedure of reasoning which is used in various speech activities across a variety of contexts

Keywords

- **Cognitive development**
  - An inherently cultural and historical phenomenon

- **Learning**
  - A wider process of socialization through which children become members of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

Approaches: CA and DA

Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974), Antaki (1994),
Edwards, Potter & Middleton (1992)

□ To analyze the conversation in the actual *context of the everyday life*, as it occurs spontaneously

"*social life in situ, in the most ordinary of settings, examining the most routine, everyday, naturally occurring activities in their concrete details*" (Psathas, 1995, pp. 1-2)

□ *Participants' own perspective*

□ Transcription (Jefferson, 1985) and qualitative analysis

Settings of the investigation

- Two *loci* of linguistic and cognitive socialization:

  - Family

  - School

- Analysis of collective narrative activities to develop arguing and reasoning abilities (Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002)

Research design I: the family

☐ Family interactions and argumentation (Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007; Arcidiacono, Pontecorvo & Greco Morasso, 2009)

☐ Video-recordings of dinner conversations

☐ Families

- both parents

- a child aged from 3 to 6 (target)

- at least one preadolescent sibling

Exploring family dinner talk

☐ *Do children learn to argue at dinnertime?*

☐ *How are they socialized to discursive tools and rhetorical devices of reasoning?*

☐ Narratives and storytelling (Sacks, 1992; Pontecorvo, Amendola & Fasulo, 1994; Ochs & Taylor, 1996)

Evidence 1: Violation of rules

When an account of a violation of the normal is requested or provided, we can find the following reasoning/discursive device:

- If you do not do X the negative event Y will occur

- If you do non-X the negative event Z will occur

Excerpt 1

Nacchi family: dad, mum, Ludovica (14 years), Irma (10 years), Antonia (3 years,6 months)

1. Mum: Listen, are you still very sleepy? Later I'll let you sleep in my arms. All right?

2. Antonia: No: [I'm going to bed

3. Mum: [Eh yes my love, eh yes but you must sleep soon. Let's not do what we did last time when you fell asleep at midnight and then you feel sick all right

- Negative episodes as initiating events from which the main plot of the narrative develops

- Conditional structure and negative format = hypothetical and counter-factual pattern in children's preschool discourse

Evidence 2: Categorization

Rhetorical devices to account for an act

Rules can be negotiated and differently interpreted, exceptions can be invoked and denied (Garfinkel, 1967)

Categories of "*piccolo*" and "*grande*"

Excerpt 2

Traverso family: dad, mum, Carla (7 years), Federica (4 years)

1. Carla: We should eliminate all the puppets. Give them to the poor people. Give them away. Puppets that are in good health give them away

2. Federica: But I want to play with them *((whining))*

3. Carla: Eh Federica but you're grown-up. You're 5 years old now

4. Federica: Bit I play with them all the same. Isn't it true mum?

- To be "*grande*": the daughters do not achieve their opposite goals but they give different meanings and underline distinct implications linked to the category

Research design II: the school

□ Activity-theory perspective

□ Discussions as a type of instructional talk

　□ Types of verbal interactions aiming at facilitating children's topical talk and children's arguing through reasoning (Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992; Pontecorvo & Girardet, 1993)

□ The study: historical events

　□ 30 children (mean age: 9 years, 5 months), 4th grade of primary school (Rome, Italy)

　□ group discussions (5 children each) considering historical problems

The text: *Ammiano Marcellino*

Ammiano Marcellino is a Roman writer of the 4th century. In his description he says that the Huns had habits similar to beasts. What do you think he meant?

Was he right or wrong?

Discuss it with your classmates and write down the reasons that could cause him to think in this way and whether you agree with him or not.

Goal and levels of analysis

Aim

☐ to show if and how the peculiar epistemic procedures characteristic of historical reasoning can be practiced by children in a social situation

Three levels

☐ frame of discourse

☐ reasoning sequences

☐ idea units

System of categorization

- Argumentative operations
  - means of constructing and supporting the reasoning (Toulmin, 1958)
    - claim, justification, concession, opposition, counter-opposition

- Epistemic operations
  - particular historical content means of
    - definition, categorization, predication, evaluation, appeal to (analogy, authority, etc.)

Excerpt 3: *What does it mean to say that the Huns were "like beasts"?*

Participant	Talk sequence	Argum. operation	Epistemic operation
1.1 Andrea	A.M. does not describe them very well	Claim	Evaluation of the author's judgement
1.2	because if they have already been brought up like that	Justification	Categorization of behaviors
1.3	for instance, if we are used to cutting ourselves at birth	Justification Initiating analogy	Appeal to an instance from the source
1.4	that is our custom	Claim	Categorization
1.5	and for us, this is right	Claim	Evaluation of the categorization
1.6	it is the same for the Huns if they do	Justification End of analogy	Appeal to the consequence
2.1 Filippo	look, you are wrong, they were not the Huns	Opposition (conversational)	
3.1 Andrea	no, they were the Huns	Counteropposition	

Participant	Talk sequence	Argum. operation	Epistemic operation
3.2 Andrea	for the Huns it was normal to have those laws	Justification	Evaluation of behaviors
3.3	that's why they are not barbarians as they say	Claim	Appeal to the consequences
4.1 Alessandra	according to me A.M. is quite right	Opposition	Evaluation of the author's judgement
4.2	because from this document it is clear	Justification	Appeal to the source
4.3	that these people were not normal	Claim	Evaluation of the people
4.4	making cuts from birth to stop the beard growing	Justification	Appeal to an instance from the source
4.5	I think it's a really bestial habit	Claim	Evaluation of people's behaviors

Discussion

☐ Group discussions = situations of "cognitive apprenticeship" (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989)

    ☐ reasoning is both a situated and a distributed action

☐ Social negotiation activity

    ☐ absence of the teacher

    ☐ in comparison with activities guided by the teacher (Girardet, 1991): children's autonomous collective discourse is often on a higher level

General conclusion

☐ Narrative activity play a central role in everyday practices

☐ Need to promote co-narration and multi-voicedness

☐ To be aware of the patterns of reasoning and the rhetorical devices children acquire in the family context and practice in school

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