

On the negotiation of the *issue* in discussions among young children and their parents

Rebecca G. SCHÄR

Università della Svizzera italiana

When analyzing argumentative discussions between young children and adults, it emerged that in some cases, adults and children do not share the same issue at the beginning of an interaction. The present contribution makes a first step in investigating how issues are negotiated among the discussants so that this diverging understanding can be overcome. To do so, an example from a corpus of everyday discussions in a family is analyzed. For the reconstruction of the argumentation, the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion will be used. Furthermore, the analysis of the implicit contextual-material premises on which the discussants base their reasoning will contribute to a better understanding of the interaction.

1. Introduction

In the literature, children's argumentative skills are discussed from different perspectives (e.g. linguistic, psychological, educational). The existence of young children's argumentative skills is acknowledged throughout the literature. However, depending on the basis of comparison (i.e. if compared to an adult or a child) these skills are in some cases described as 'not fully developed' (Golder 1996: 120; see also Rapanta et al. 2013: 488). Nonetheless, when children's argumentation is studied in informal settings, in which the children are given space to discuss, they prove to be competent and clever discussants (see e.g. Arcidiacono & Bova 2015; Völzing 1982 for children's argumentation in the home). In order to gain an in-depth understanding of young children's contributions to argumentative discussions, the research project "Analysing children's implicit argumentation: reconstruction of procedural and material premises" (ArgImp)¹ studies the implicit in children's argumentation.

The present paper was developed within the ArgImp project. It starts from a positive case, in which children actively engage in argumentative discussions. Its focus lies on the concept of issue in argumentative discussions between young children (from 2 to 6 years of age) and adults. The issue is a central concept in argumentation theory. It describes the subject around which argumentative discussions revolve (Schär & Greco 2018). Studying the issue

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and its evolution in a discussion furthermore allows gaining insights on how and why a discussion comes into place.

The issue has been studied by several ancient authors, like Aristotle, whereas it has received comparatively little attention in recent times. Plantin (2005) perceives the issue as a question that occurs "par la contradiction discours / contre-discours" (ibid., 57). Argumentation scholar Jean Goodwin (2002) highlights furthermore that the issue is "a more or less determinate object of contention" (ibid., 86). This observation is especially important for the purpose of this paper as it aims to study the negotiation of issues in argumentative discussions among children and their parents. Put differently, this paper analyzes the emergence of the issue and its evolution within an argumentative discussion. It has the objective to understand how discussions can evolve in case the issue is not (entirely) shared among the discussants. This research interest emerged during the exploration of a corpus of argumentative discussions that occurred in a family setting. The corpus features discussions in which the issue may not be, only partially or supposedly shared among an adult and a child. In fact, sometimes the discussants seem to lead 'two different discussions', or typically the child, 'modifies' the issue in order to better accommodate the adult's request, his or her own perspective on the discussed facts or to indirectly support the standpoint taken on the main issue. The following analysis aims at shedding light on where the 'problem' of the incompatible issues lies.

2. Methodology

The argumentative discussion will be reconstructed by means of a slightly modified version of the analytical overview² (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992: 93–95) taken from the pragma-dialectic approach to argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984, 2004). In Pragma-Dialectics, argumentation is perceived as a social and communicative interaction. With the analytic overview, it provides a heuristic grid for the reconstruction of argumentative sequences within interaction.

Furthermore, the Aristotelian concept of endoxon (Tredennick & Forster 1960: 273–275) will be used for the analysis of the negotiation of the issue. The endoxon is a component of the material-contextual premise of a person's reasoning that is often left implicit in the actual discussion. The term endoxon designates "opinions that are accepted by everyone or by the majority [...]" (Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2009: 45). In the present case, an endoxon can be

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The analytical overview taken from van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) was modified in order to give a greater emphasis on the issue and to clearly display the temporal sequence in which the contributions occurred.

specific to one family (i.e. be a rule or a specific habit that is shared among all the family members, but not necessary among people that do not belong to the family).

3. Corpus

The case chosen for this paper stems from a corpus of everyday discussions in family, collected in three different linguistic regions of Switzerland at the beginning of 2016. The discussions between the children and adults (in most cases one or both of their parents) have not been induced. The researcher visited the families at their homes, observing and audiotaping their conversations without giving them specific tasks or instructions about what to do during the researcher's visit. The registered discussions, therefore, naturally occurred in everyday family interactions such as playing, eating a meal together or doing household related tasks. Even though it is not possible to rule out that the presence of the researcher had an influence on the children's behavior, bilateral conversation with the parents confirmed that the children's behavior during the researcher's visit did not differ from their usual behavior in family.

4. Analysis

In the following paragraphs the negotiation of the issue in a discussion between Ladina (4:11 years old) and her mother will be analyzed. The discussion takes place in the family's kitchen at around 10:00 o'clock in the morning. The original language is a variety of Swiss German. At the beginning of the transcript, Ladina and her mother both refer to the researcher (R.). Later in the conversation, Ladina also refers to her friends Rahel, Anna and Lisa who will visit her in the afternoon. Ladina's brother Flurin (2:2 years old) intervenes in turn 9, but his mother and sister do not consider his contribution.

Turn	Speaker	Transcript	My translation
(0:08:40.5)			
1	Ladina	mami hüt isch ja d R. da und ((flüstert der mutter etwas ins ohr)) schoggistängeli ((flüstert))	mummy today R is here and ((whispers something in the mother's ear)) chocolate bar ((whispers))
2	Mother	will d R. da isch wetsch du es schoggistängeli↑ mm ((verneint)) weisch wieso↑ will das han ich dir no welle zeige du hesch mich gfrogt was ich gkäuft ha wenn d für wenn d Rahel chunnt	because R is here you would like to have a chocolate bar ↑ mm ((negates)) you know why↑ because i wanted to show you you asked me what i bought for when Rahel will come
3	Ladina	aha	ah
4	Mother	lue iz das da ((nimmt eine packung mit süssgebäck zum küchenschrank heraus))de düemer scho öppis süesses	look ((takes out a package of pastry out of the cupboard)) we will already eat something sweet as an afternoon snack

		zum zvieri ässe lueg das sind madeleines	look these are french madeleines
5	Ladina	((schaut die madeleines an)) (3.0) w wieviel döf jede	((looks at the french madeleines)) (3.0) h how many can each one of us have
6	Mother	eh wosch mal zelle↑ (1.0)	eh do you want to count↑ (1.0)
7	Ladina	xxx	xxx
8	Mother	zell du mal=	have a go
9	Flurin	will au zelle	i want to count too
10	Ladina	eis zwei drei vier (3.0) fuf sächs	one two three four (3.0) five six
11	Mother	mhm weisch ä wie viel mer sind↑ (1.0) hüt namitag↑	mhm do you also know how many we will be↑ (1.0) this afternoon↑
12	Ladina	eis zwei drü (2.0) vier fuf (3.0)	one two three (2.0) four five (3.0)
13	Mother	chumm zell nomal d Anna	come on count once again Anna
14	Ladina	mhm (1.0) d Rahel ich du (1.0) dr Flurin (2.0) und (1.0) d Lisa (2.0) aber d Lisa cha ja no nüt süesses ässe	mhm (1.0) Rahel me you (1.0) Flurin (2.0) and (1.0) Lisa (2.0) but Lisa cannot yet eat sweets
15	Mother	i weiss es nid d Lisa isch scho gross jetz mir chö mir mnd mir müed froge ich weiss es nid (1.0)	i don't know Lisa is already grown up now we ca we need to ask i don't know (1.0)
16	Ladina	aber jetz sind ja süsch z chli ich wett ja öppis grosses ässe	but (they) are yeah too small i want to eat something big
17	Mother	aber lueg mal jetz wenn alli döfe eins ässe denn längts für jede grad eins (1.0) gäll (4.0)	but see if everyone is allowed to have one there will be just one for each of us (1.0) you see (4.0)
18	Ladina	aber wiso chani nid es halbs mitem Flurin (3.0) ((spricht vom schoggistängeli))	but why can't i share half with Flurin (3.0) ((she is talking about the chocolate bar))
19	Mother	wötsch kei ganzes oder wie↑ (1.0) ((spricht von den madeleines))	don't you want an entire one↑ (1.0) ((is talking about the french madeleines))
20	Ladina	schoggistängeli xxx	chocolate bar xxx
21	Mother	ne iz düemer ä kä schoggistängeli ässe Ladina weisch mir händ zum znacht scho süesses und mir düen am wuchenend süesses ässe mir händ ganz vil wär het am wuchenend geburtstag↑	no now we don't have chocolate bars Ladina you know we will have sweets for dinner and we will eat sweets on the weekend too we have a lot who has her birthday on the weekend↑
22	Ladina	i:ch	me:

(0:10:24.6)

Figure 1: transcript of the discussion between Ladina (4:11 years) and her mother

Throughout this discussion, it becomes clear that Ladina does not seem to spare any expense to reach her goal: the chocolate bar. In fact, within the main discussion, several sub discussions, some of them argued, can be identified. In the following analytical overview that was slightly adapted from van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992: 93–95), only the argued issues that are necessary for the analysis of the negotiation of the issue are represented.

*Issue: (Can Ladina have a chocolate bar?)*Ladina, Standpoint 1

T. 1 1 (yes)

Mother, Standpoint 2

T. 2 2 no

Arguments in support of Standpoint 1

T. 1 1.1 R. is here

Arguments in support of Standpoint 2

T. 4 2.1 we will already eat something sweet as an afternoon snack

*Sub issue°: (Are the madeleines enough?)*Ladina Standpoint°1

T. 16 °1 (no)

Arguments in support of Standpoint°1

T. 16 °1.1a the madeleines are too small

°1.1b I want to eat something big

T. 21 2.2a we will have sweets for dinner already

T. 21 2.2b we will eat sweets at the weekend

T. 21 2.3 we will have a lot of sweets

Figure 2: analytical overview of the discussion between Ladina and her mother

As figure 2 shows, the discussion is initiated by Ladina, who proposes the main issue "Can I have a chocolate bar?" and is also responsible for the introduction of the following sub issue "Are the madeleines enough?". Ladina's request, which becomes the main issue of this discussion, would not be argumentative as such. However, it seems that Ladina is aware from the start that she will need to support her (implicit) standpoint with arguments. She therefore, together with her standpoint, puts forward argument 1.1 "R. is here". Her mother does not agree with Ladina's standpoint and gives a counterargument that she visually supports by showing the French madeleines to Ladina. So, even though the mother would have the possibility to immediately shut down the discussion, thanks to her parental authority, she dedicates herself to this rather lengthy discussion with her daughter. Figure 3 illustrates the ongoing discussions on the different issues, as well as the endoxa the discussants respectively base their reasoning on.

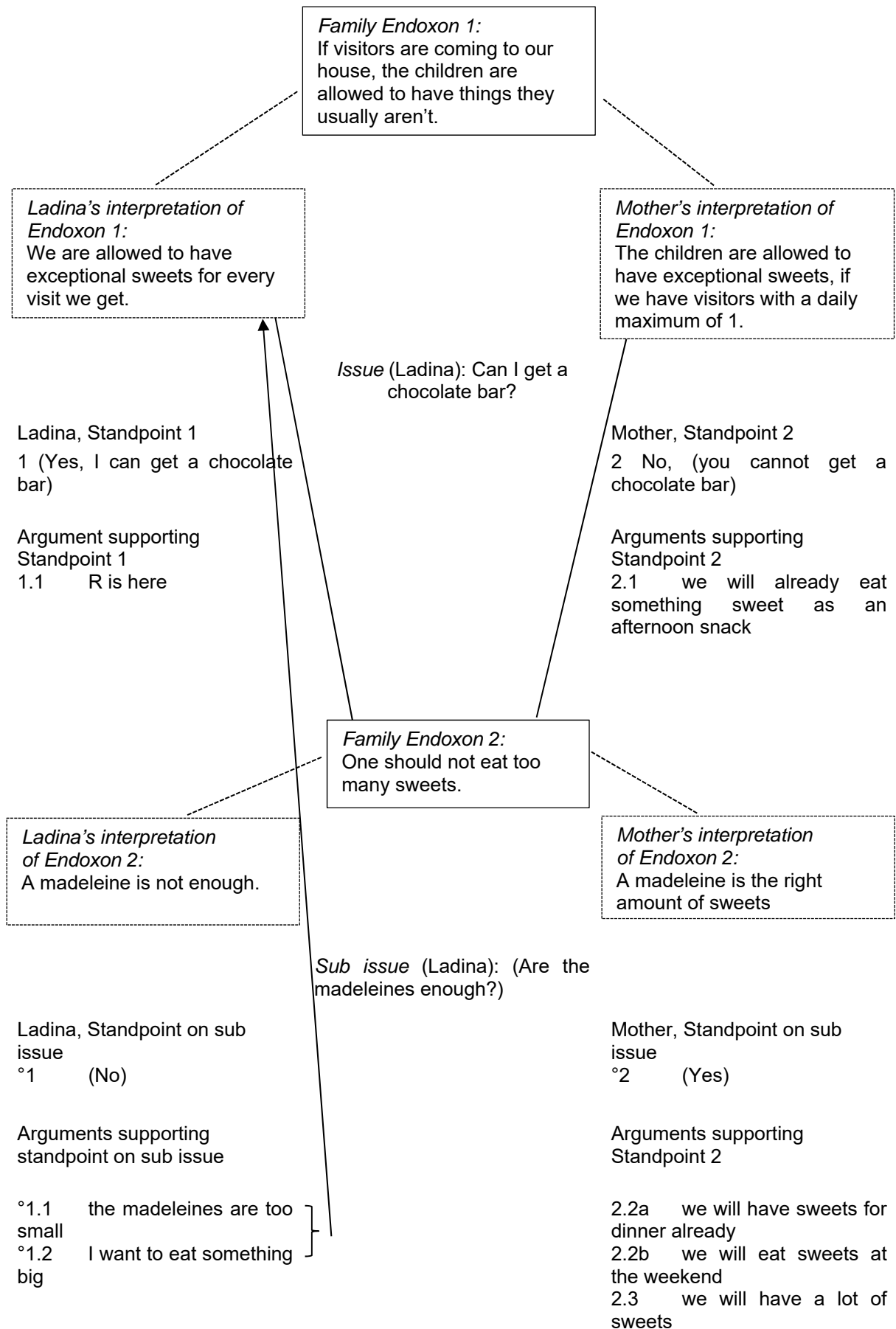


Figure 3: analysis of the negotiation of the issue

As the upper part of figure 3 shows, underlying this main discussion is an endoxon shared in the family: "If visitors are coming to our house, the children are allowed to have things they usually aren't". In the present situation, however, Ladina and her mother do not interpret this endoxon the same way. Ladina's version is more prone to support her standpoint 1: "Yes, I can have a chocolate bar", whereas the mother's interpretation is tied to her role of a caring mother that watches over her children's eating behavior. On the basis of these dissimilar starting points Ladina and her mother discuss the main issue raised by Ladina "Can I get a chocolate bar?". When Ladina senses that her argumentation will not be successful, she opens up a sub issue in turn 16, questioning whether the French madeleines will be enough and giving two arguments in order to support her implicit standpoint that one French madeleine is not enough. By shifting the discussion to the sufficiency of the French madeleines and supporting her standpoint that the French madeleines are not enough, Ladina indirectly supports her standpoint on the main issue on the chocolate bar. Ladina may sense that her mother will not agree with her standpoint, potentially explaining her interpretation of the second family endoxon explicitly in turn 16. The mother continues the discussion without argumentatively responding to Ladina's sub issue on the French madeleines. However, she puts forward arguments that support her initial standpoint, on the chocolate bar issue (turn 21).

The analysis of this seesaw on the issue shows that an argumentative discussion that at first glance sometimes seems to be incoherent, is in fact very coherent. Because of diverging starting points and personal interpretations of endoxa the discussants need to negotiate the issue. In fact, in a critical discussion, every party tries to persuade the other party of his or her standpoint (see e.g. van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004). In the present case, this is displayed in each party's interpretation of the family endoxa, which is used to support the respective position. Furthermore, the analysis shows that Ladina's argumentation and her interpretation of the family endoxa are not wrong. Ladina builds her arguments on an interpretation of the family endoxa that differs from her mother's. Moreover, she 'compensates' for this divergent interpretation with her engagement in the discussion and proves to be a clever discussant.

5. Conclusion and openings for further research

In the present paper, a single case of negotiation of the issue in a discussion between a child and her mother was analyzed. The discussion between Ladina and her mother demonstrates that a young child can lead and actively engage in an argumentative discussion that is complex. The analysis furthermore shows that children are able to negotiate on an issue that is not, or not entirely shared between themselves and an adult. Hence, the presented case illustrates very well Goodwin's (2002) point that an issue is not always entirely determined (ibid., 86). In fact, the negotiation on the issue takes place when opening up sub issues and supporting the respective issues with several arguments. One

reason for the negotiation of an issue to occur are divergent implicit premises of the discussants. In the analyzed case, the issue negotiation emerged due to different starting points and diverging interpretations of endoxa supposedly shared among the discussants. The analysis of the implicit contextual-material premises allows for a better understanding of misaligned premises that lead to diverging starting points (see Greco et al. 2017). Hence, an analysis of the negotiation of the issue also allows a better understanding of the elements that trigger the negotiation process.

More research is needed on the negotiation of issues. For instance, it would be interesting to understand whether a negotiation is always related to implicit premises that are not shared among the discussants or whether there are other phenomena that lie at the basis of an issue negotiation.

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Attachments: Transcription signs

sign	description
↑	raising intonation
(())	nonverbal component
(1.0)	pause of 1 second
xxx	non understandable utterance
=	immediately following turn