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THE CONVERSATION LIKE SOCIALIZATION IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

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Introduction

The present work is based on the study of infant socialization through the analysis of conversation. Since conversation is "one of the daily, most normal and diffuse activities that are known" (Galimberti, 1994, p. 64), its study "represents a general approach to the analysis of the social action which can be applied to an extremely varied array of topics and problems" (Heritage, 1984, p. 291). Basing on the concepts developed in ethno-methodology, social truth is not considered a given datum, but a continuous process in becoming; and that means that individuals continuously participate to interactive negotiation for the definition of social life (Duranti, 1992). Scholars of conversational analysis, following such approach, have applied the traditional methodology of ethnography to everyday life, and they study "the 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). Conversation analysis maintains that the organisation of daily life is supported by a series of assumptions that are shared and continuously confirmed just through social exchanges. It supplies a contribution through which the participants construct and reach mutual understanding in verbal interaction. The main innovations of this approach are about the analysis of conversations in natural contexts, therefore not programmed and controlled by the investigators, and the use of the categories used by the participants to the conversation themselves as analysis units, therefore without resorting to theoretical theses and pre-arranged categories (Levinson, 1983). From the practical point of view, conversations are recorded on tape, then listened to and transcribed, so that they can be analyzed into details and several times. With modern technological instruments, analysts use videotapes, so they can observe not only what is actually said, but also other extremely important aspects of the interaction, given that the aim of conversational analysis "is not to make light on 'what really happens' during an interaction [...] but to discover the systematic properties of the sequential organisation of speech" (Levinson, 1983, p. 292). Moreover analysts recognise the existence of two levels of organisation in conversation: one that acts on a local base, turn by turn, like the alternation of the speaking turns, and one that considers the conversation as a whole, a unit with a beginning and an end.

1. The conversation in the educational contexts: our study

The present search is an application of the methodology exposed above in two educational contexts: family and school. It doesn't start from specific hypotheses, but it rather aims to identify the participation of children to the communicative structure. The conversational analysis we have carried out is a valid instrument for an exploratory research aimed to the study of socialization in educational contexts. Studying infant socialization through the conversational interactions exactly answers to the need to understand the development process of competences as they actually develop during the daily activities (Fasulo & Pontecorvo, 1999).

1.1. Socialization in the family context

The analysis of Italian family dinner conversations has revealed that complex argumentative and rhetorical devices are present in everyday family discourse as well. Indeed, at dinner table young children are exposed and can practice relevant rhetorical and reasoning skills, given that parents prefer to regulate children's behaviors through the use of counterfactual

statements to discourage children's violations. Furthermore, in contributing to family narratives children learn and practice different forms of participation to social activities, thereby improving their argumentative and cognitive ability.

The corpus on which we based the analysis consists of 77 dinner conversations of 23 Italian families, each including two parents and at least one child between 3 and 6 years of age and an older sibling. They are all middle class families living in metropolitan areas in the cities of Rome, Naples, Reggio Calabria and Florence. Conversations were videotaped and fully transcribed: each family was recorded from 3 to 6 times. Transcriptions were revised by two judges both for verbal and non-verbal activity.

Our analysis reveals that often children elicit adults' instruction and guidance by overtly invoking it. By asking for information/explanation, children activate the novice-expert relationship and assign such roles to themselves and to their interlocutors respectively. Generally speaking, any request for information/explanation is a speaker's display of a gap of knowledge or understanding and an attribution of this same knowledge or understanding to the recipient. Within parent-child relationships, this epistemic asymmetry often has moral implications: on the one hand, when parents request information/explanations from their children, the enquiry is likely to be embedded in an argumentative sequence and projects sequential relevance for the next turn to be an account. On the other hand, when children ask for information/explanations parents are bound to provide an answer: this is present in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 1

Minelli family.

Participants: Dad; Mom; Luca, 10 years 9 months; Luisa, 3 years 10 months.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Luca: Listen dad.
 2. Dad: What?
 3. Luca: But wh- daddy I used the green
 4. disinfectant, and the injury
 5. Is getting darker and darker.
 6. Dad: Uhm.
 7. Luca: Why?
 8. (2.4) ((Dad has his mouth full))
 9. Dad: The injury?
 10. Luca: When I fell down yesterday,=
 11. Mom: =Because injuries are like that Lu'. you never
 12. had them
 13. So you don't know
 14. they get darker make a scab
 15. then the scab falls off (0.8)
 16. And the skin becomes a little
 17. whiter,
 18. Luca: [But then]
 19. Mom: [And then] it becomes normal.
 20. (3.0) ((Dad brings away from the
 table some dishes and Luca
 drinks his Coke))</p> | <p>Senti papà.
 Che c'è?
 Ma per- papà mi sono messo il disinfettante verde, e
 la ferita
 mi diventa sempre più scura.
 Mhm.
 Perché?
 (2.4)
 La ferita?
 Quando ieri sono caduto,=
 =E perché è così che fanno le ferite
 Lu. Tu non le hai mai avute
 perciò non lo sai.
 Diventano più scure, fanno la crosta
 poi ti cade la crosta, (0.8)
 e div- diventa un po' più bianca la
 pelle,
 [Ma poi]
 [E poi] diventa normale.</p> |
|--|--|

After summoning his father's attention, Luca reports an event and asks for an explanation. The father shows minimal reactions and even scarce understanding of the topic (lines 6 and 9). Luca (line 10) then provides some context to help his father memory (apparently he had imagined his injury to be more prominent in the parent's concerns), with a narrative line which is cut off by mother's intervention (lines 11-17). When it is clear that the father is not going to help Luca understand the strange behavior of his injury, the mother replaces his husband in this function, and offers an explanation based on the ordinary stages of injuries' healing, accounting also for the child's surprise since he has not enough experience to know that.

First of all we want to underline that the kind of question asked by the child assign the father the position of expert in wordly matters. The child's insistence in getting his answer reveals something more.

The child repeated trials to get an answer show that the child keeps on an interpretation of the unfolding sequence in which lack of answer is possibly caused only by local misunderstanding, and not by other reasons as for example lack of knowledge or interest. Such interpretation, that we detect in the attention he puts in self-repairing the first turn, trying to tune on with a conversational malfunctioning, can be seen as a scaffolding of father's role of expert. The construct of scaffolding, applied initially to parental action, need not be only voluntary help. It can be generated also, as it seems to be the case here, by a line of interpretation of role-based capabilities and duties which is in fact the very origin of the role's

performance. In other words, children's expectations about parents come out in the form of initiating moves of conversational sequences, the completion of which are occasions for tutorial or normative responses. Any utterance which is a first pair part (of an adjacency pair) expects its second part to be conversationally due, but kinds of first and second are also constitutive of social positions and identities: social worlds are created by the same machinery that keeps conversations going. It must be noticed here that different cultures grant children different amount of *conversational power*: While in our Italian data, even young children are allowed to initiate conversational sequences - and consequently their interlocutors have to provide a *second pair part* - in other cultures children are not acknowledged as conversational partners or they are limited to a recipient position (Schieffelin, 1990).

The next excerpt illustrates a case in point, concerning the delicate issue of going out by themselves, and shows that the ten year old child's efforts to conquer a new space of autonomy set for the mother a phase of apprenticeship in which she needs to try and test both her child and herself in the new settlement.

Excerpt 2

Tanucci Family.

Participants: Dad; Mom; Leonardo: 3 years 6 months; Marco, 10 years.

((Marco is asking Mom for permission to go to the beach in the afternoon))

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Marco: | mommy today may I | mamma oggi posso |
| 2. | () | () |
| 3. Mom: | not yet to mummy | adesso ancora no a mamma |
| 4. | we'll make some attempts (.) | faremo dei tentativi.(.) vediamo un po' |
| 5. | we'll see. | |
| 6. | but to the beach by yourself, | ma ancora al mare da solo no |
| 7. | not yet | |

Here we see how the mother puts herself, together with the child, on a learning path where permissions and norms will be moment by moment suggested, negotiated and tested. In line 2 the dialectical vocative form "*a mamma*"=*to mummy*) identifies the child in his relationship with the mother. The plural form of the pronoun, used by the mother ("*we*", line 3) here means that not only the child has to learn how to become responsible for going alone to the beach, but also the mother has to "make attempts" on how to learn to give more autonomy to him.

The middle class, young and urban families we observed exhibit socialization practices profoundly dependent on verbal interaction and extended explanations of parental decisions and general policy. Children are accustomed to be imparted directives together with explicitation of their underlying logical rationale and coherence.

As a conclusion, we want to underline two points, emerging from the data:

1 - Assuming the participants' perspective, the family interaction can also offer some information about the ways in which learning is considered to be happening within cultures. In other words, it reveals the local epistemology, namely participants' theories of how knowledge is acquired, what kinds of knowledge can be acquired in what social context, who can uptake the role of expert, etc. (cf. also Ochs, 1993). In excerpt 1, the shared representation seems to be that learning comes out from a personal experience that the child had still to acquire; in excerpt 2 the shared procedure is that there are common "repeated attempts" to be done by the dyad child-mother in order to learn to be responsible (on the part of the child) and to give autonomy (on the part of the mother). It emerges from these excerpts how learning is always an interactional accomplishment, which implies mutual apprenticeship, a dynamic flow of knowledge and a bidirectional scaffolding of each other's participation.

2 - The creation of a disequilibrium, which interrupts the flowing of a predetermined and unidirectional cultural transmission mechanism, unbalances the system, allowing innovation and change. In this sense, the socialization practices - such as those we have exemplified here- that are open to negotiation, accountability and argumentation from all participants, can be considered as a challenge to established asymmetrical powers and roles; they introduce some elements of risk and uncertainty, that, however, we consider positively as warrants for individual freedom and opportunities for social and cultural innovation.

1.2 Socialization at school

Narrative activity can constitute a significant resource and a powerful tool for enhancing children's literacy development, cognitive abilities, and for the making of personal existential meaning, insofar as the teacher promotes co-narration and multivoicedness, orchestrates the participants' contributions and scaffolds the co-constructing of meanings. Then schools may become places in which children can find large possibilities to practice, enrich and refine the reasoning skills they have acquired at home, in their everyday interactions.

The corpus on which we based the analysis consists of 23 school lessons of 6 Italian primary schools. For the present study we carried out observations in fourth classes at primary public schools in Rome. Lessons were videotaped and fully transcribed: each class was recorded twice and transcriptions were revised by two judges both for verbal and non-verbal activity.

School is the first institutional context in which the child must act without parents' help. School "explain itself" to the child both by making explicit its rules and through the way in which it organises the participation to the collective speech. A fundamental aspect of the scholastic socialization is just the familiarisation of children with a system of activity of institutional type, in which the same rules are valid for everyone and individuals must conform to behaviours repertoires linked to the roles.

Whether in informal situations the possibility to reorganise the participation is always present, in the scholastic context the standard organisation of turn taking, when the teacher interacts with all the class, is that the turn goes back to the teacher after she/he has transferred it to someone in particular or to the class in general with its previous participation. In the excerpt that follows we introduce this type of participation structure in a class.

Excerpt 3

IV grade - History lesson/ Teacher with students Celeste, Barbara and Claudio

- | | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| 1. Teacher: | then Celeste=come along and read come on
(8.0) ((Celeste gets close to the teacher)) | allora Celeste =vieni a leggere tu va.
(8.0) |
| 2. Teacher: | well let's start | allora cominciamo |
| 3. Teacher: | (2.0) | (2.0) |
| 4. Celeste: | the agorà ((reading the book's title)) | l'agorà |
| 5. Teacher: | then let's see who remembers what the agorà is? | eh: allora, chi si ricorda che cos'è l'agorà? |
| 6. Teacher: | (2.3) | (2.3) |
| 7. Teacher: | Barbara? | Barbara? |
| 8. Barbara: | it's a square where: inhm [there- | è una piazza in cui: e: [ci- |
| 9. Teacher: | [what the square of | [la piazza di che cosa. |
| 10. Barbara: | then of: of: the town where the citizen did and: | eh de: de: della città in cui i cittadini fa: fa: |
| 11. Teacher: | used to talk about | facevano e: parlavano dei: |
| 12. Teacher: | how do you call it, | come si chiama, |
| 13. Teacher: | about the proble:ms, | dei proble:mi, |
| 14. Barbara: | of [of the town | della:: [della città |
| 15. Teacher: | [of the town >I mean< of their life. | [della città. >insomma< della loro vita. |
| 16. Teacher: | and what town are we speaking about. | e di che città stiamo parlando. |
| 17. Barbara: | about Athens | di Atene |
| 18. Teacher: | about Athens, but al[so what about? | di Atene, ma an[che? |
| 19. Barbara: | [about Sparta | [di Sparta |
| 20. Teacher: | about all the other Greek towns well go ahead. | di tutte le altre città? gre:che. vabbè vai. |
| 21. Celeste: | here men used to meet for dealing with important
business | qui si radunavano gli uomini per discutere di
affari importanti |
| 22. Teacher: | of the [city state. | della [città stato. |
| 23. Teacher: | [city state there we are, so we find here it's
written that | [città stato. ecco, allo:ra abbiamo- qui c'è
scritto quindi |
| 24. Teacher: | every city was a city state | che ogni città era una città stato |
| 25. Teacher: | (1.5) | (1.5) |
| 26. Teacher: | who does explain to me why there were in
Greece so many cities that were city state | chi mi spiega perché in Grecia c'erano tante città
che ognuna era città stato |
| 27. Teacher: | ((Flavio raises his hand)) | |

28. Teacher:	no not always Flavio, someone else please	no non sempre Flavio qualcun altro.
29.	who does remember? (.)	chi se lo ricorda? (.)
30.	why there was this need that every city was independent	perché c'era questa necessità che ogni città fosse indipendente
31.	from one another. why did this happen?	dall'altra:, perché era successo questo?
32.	(3.0) ((<i>Caterina raises her hand</i>))	(3.0)
33. Teacher:	Celeste do you remember it?	Celeste, tu te lo ricordi?
34.	((<i>Celeste points at Claudio</i>))	
35. Teacher:	well Claudio?	ah Claudio?
36. Claudio:	because there are a lot of mountains in Greece	perché la Grecia ha molte montagne
37.	consequently every city was separated from one another	e quindi divideva tutte le città
38.	and even though they were really close	e pure se- anche se stavano molto vicini
39.	they didn't get to have much connections	non riuscivano ad avere tanti contatti.
40. Teacher:	and [then each-	eh. quin[di ogni-
41. Claudio:	[and then each city had a state by its own	[e quindi una città aveva uno stato per sé.

In the first part of the excerpt, to the phase of reading follows a deepening question that the teacher asks to all the class (line 6). In order to obtain from some of the pupils an exhaustive and precise answer, the teacher intervenes several times with reformulations of the question (line 10, 15, 18).

In the second part of the excerpt, meeting the term city-state, the teacher again interrupts the reading and makes a question to the class. We notice that, as in the first part of excerpt ("who remembers what is agorà?" line 6), the question begins with "who can explain to me" (line 26) in order then to pass to the content of the issue. Beginning in this way, the question is like a turn offered to all the class, even though after it the answer will be entrusted to the single child who will stand as candidate. Moreover, by using the formula "who explains to me" the teacher defines her/himself as the primary interlocutor of the student's answer.

All the class therefore takes part to an interaction modality question/answer that creates a model of participation in which the group of pupils is something like a single organism, with a lot of heads. The "head" selected each time interacts in a specific way with the teacher, offering her/him the verification of the correctness of its own knowledges. It is not instead arranged a space for the verification or integration of knowledges *between* the pupils, as if they were all speaking through the companion who answers. The public character of the answers would have to serve to make true this assumption, that is to give back to all the pupils that element of knowledge that only one of them, in collaboration with the teacher, is reconstructing.

General Conclusion

Our interest in this search focused on conversation in class and family in order to inquire the socialization processes happening between adults and children. The results show that through conversation children can share and co-construct meanings and acquire new more complex strategies and knowledges both inside the family context and at school, existing however specific rules in each learning context.

Conversation analysis reveals therefore to be a valid and effective instrument for the study of socialization in educational contexts because it is just through conversational interactions that children experience their linguistic competences and participate actively to the community of which they are members (Pontecorvo, Ajello, Zucchermaglio, 1995).

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Transcription Conventions

- . The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
- ? The question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
- , The comma indicates "continuing" intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.
- ::: Colons indicate stretching of the preceding sound, proportional to the number of colons.
- A hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates a cut-off or self interruption.
- > < The combination of "more than" and "less than" symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed.
- < > In the reverse order, they indicate that a stretch of talk is markedly slowed.
- = Equal sign indicate no break or delay between the words thereby connected.
- (()) Double parentheses enclose descriptions of conduct.
- (word) When all or part of an utterance is in parentheses, this indicates uncertainty on the transcriber's part.
- () Empty parentheses indicate that something is being said, but no hearing can be achieved.
- (1.2) Numbers in parentheses indicate silence in tenths of a second.
- (.) A dot in parentheses indicated a "micropause", hearable but not readily measurable; ordinarily less than 2/10 of a second.
- [Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers indicates a point of overlap onset.