

**Power plays: The representation of mother-daughter disputes  
in contemporary plays by women  
A study in discourse analysis**

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To my mother, without whom this study would not have come into being.

Some are kissing mothers and some are scolding  
mothers, but it is love just the same -  
and most mothers kiss and scold together.  
(Pearl S. Buck)

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Well begun is half done. (Aristotle)

## **1 Introduction**

### **Scope of the study**

Conflict is universal and ubiquitous. It is an activity that even small children grasp rather quickly and are quite adept in practising. Throughout their lives, people are faced with all kinds of conflicts. Many conflict situations go by just as quickly as they emerge. Others, however, have a long-lasting (positive or negative) impact on people's lives and their social relationships. But although conflict is an everyday occurrence in our lives, its mechanisms have not been sufficiently clarified. Even though conflict has attracted considerable attention in the academic world, many issues are still unaccounted for. In discourse analytic research, verbal means of carrying out conflict have not received much notice. Only since the early 1980s have studies in the field of linguistic conflict research begun to examine aspects of conflict communication, and many questions are still open.

Like conflict, power is a social phenomenon that we encounter every day in our lives. "Power is everywhere" (Foucault 1978: 334). Many of our social relationships can be characterised as relations of power: employer and employee, teacher and student, parent and child, and so on. Power has been the focus of study and concern across all social science disciplines. Yet, as with conflict, many questions remain unanswered.

A primary locus of conflict (Simmel 1955) and power struggles (Emery 1992; Tannen 2001, 2003; Watts 1991) is the family. Empirical research on family interaction has shown that family discourse (Emery 1992; Vuchinich 1984), and in particular mother-daughter interaction (Tannen 2001, 2003; Wodak 1984), is characterised by the frequent occurrence of disagreement and dispute. However, there is a relative paucity of discourse analytic research on conflict interaction in families and almost a complete lack of studies focussing on linguistic aspects of mother-daughter disputes. With this study, I will attempt to fill this gap. I will investigate how

mother-daughter disputes and underlying power relations are created and negotiated by characters in the fictional world of contemporary drama.

The observation that aggravated conflict is an essential aspect of mother-daughter interaction runs counter to the fact that in studies on gender and discourse cooperation, supportiveness and harmony are frequently cited as organising principles of women's talk (cf. Coates 1989, 1991, 1994, 1998; Maltz & Borker 1991). Likewise, female disputing style has often been described as mitigated and conciliatory and as displaying an orientation towards consent (Kotthoff 1984; Sheldon 1996; Trömel-Plötz 1992, 1996). A number of studies have demonstrated, however, that conflict is in fact omnipresent in the interaction of females, and that in the context of argument the communicative behaviour of women may well be offensive and confrontational (cf. Goodwin 2003: 231ff; Günthner 1992). These findings call into question the still-prevalent notion of women as generally displaying an orientation towards cooperative, face-saving interaction and consent. They show that in examining women's talk-in-interaction it is vital to avoid generalisations about female discourse and instead to adopt a context-sensitive approach. Specifically, what is required is detailed descriptions of women's discursive practices in particular interactional situations, which take into account contextual features such as the conversants' socio-cultural backgrounds, the situational context and interpersonal relationship aspects (cf. also Cameron 2003; Wodak 1997). This is in keeping with the recent trend in sociolinguistics, and in particular in research on language and gender, to look at specific "communities of practice" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999), rather than to conceive of gender as a monolithic, essentialist concept. A community of practice as defined by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992, 1999) is a group of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, and power relations - i.e. practices. It is precisely such a detailed description of women's discursive practices in a particular interactional context in a specific community of practice that will assume centre stage here, namely the family.

To date, women's conflict discourse has largely been neglected as an object of research. As Goodwin (1988: 55) points out, research on female interaction patterns has tended to restrict analysis to those features of female communication which clearly differ from those of male discourse, excluding those which women's and men's talk have in common. For example, cooperative aspects of female language usage have been examined (e.g. Brown 1980; Coates 1989, 1991, 1994, 1996; Maltz & Borker 1982), while ways in which disagreement may be expressed have been largely ignored (cf. however Kulick 1993 and Sidnell 1998). Correspondingly, in her 2001 survey of studies on conflict and discourse, Kakavá (2001: 663) states: "An area that further needs exploration is women's conflict." This dissertation will try to contribute to the clarification of this desideratum of research on the basis of an exploratory study of mother-daughter disputes.

Since disputes usually arise suddenly and are considered a private matter in Western societies, the study of verbal conflict, in particular in close relationships, faces a major methodological difficulty: data are very hard to obtain. Therefore, I will base my investigation on a corpus of contemporary plays by women, conflict talk being an essential feature of drama. Characters in plays frequently insult and interrupt one another, dispute each other's claims, or oppose each other in some other way.

Even though my research focuses on constructed dialogue, it has implications for the study of naturally occurring conflict sequences, because it reveals patterns of knowledge about the workings of real (mother-daughter) disputes. The principles, norms and conventions of use which underlie ordinary conversation are the resource that dramatists use to create dialogue in plays. Hence, the interaction in plays represents an internalised model or schema for the production of conversation - a competence model that speakers have access to. Thus, by looking at artificial dispute sequences between mothers and daughters, we can reconstruct the tacit knowledge by which women organise verbal conflict in a specific community of practice, i.e. the family.

This study investigates the interface of conflict and power in mother-daughter interaction. To this end, data from contemporary

plays by women will be analysed. The analysis sheds light on a number of questions, most significantly the following:

- How do mother-daughter disputes arise; which mechanisms drive them forward?
- Why do some disputes escalate; which elements aggravate or defuse them?
- How are mother-daughter disputes terminated? Are they usually resolved? And if not, what happens instead?
- What are mother-daughter disputes about? Getting one's way? A contentious issue or problem? Finding agreement?
- How are social relations of power (re)constructed or resisted by participants in the course of mother-daughter disputes?
- What are the discursive resources that female interactants employ in conducting verbal conflict?
- How do the disputants deal with each other?

Thus, the present study has implications for several scholarly fields, including research on conflict talk, family interaction, intergenerational communication, female discourse, stylistics, as well as power in talk-in-interaction.

### **Organisation of the study**

This study is divided into the following chapters: Chapter 2 provides an overview of previous research on conflict talk both between children and adults, both in private and institutional contexts. It then indicates some of the problems related to data for the analysis of conflict talk such as the problem of obtaining data and the problem of the generalisability of data. Subsequently, it discusses the value of dramatic dialogue as a data source for discourse analytic research in general and for research on conflict talk in particular. Finally, it describes the corpus used in the present study.

Chapter 3 briefly discusses some of the ways in which (interpersonal) conflict and its discourse has been conceptualised and then proposes a process-oriented notion of conflict. Conflict is conceived of as a dynamic interactional relationship.

Chapter 4 gives a concise overview of the main differences in theories on power leading up to a working definition of power for the purpose of this study.

The analytical framework used in this study is presented in chapter 5. The chapter, firstly, discusses various approaches to the analysis of situated verbal interaction and conceptualisations of the relationship between context and language (use), and then gives a brief outline of the basic assumptions and concepts of interactional sociolinguistics as developed by John Gumperz, which forms the methodological basis of the present investigation.

Chapters 6 and 7 constitute the empirical part of this study. They consist of turn-by-turn analyses of selected examples from the corpus, which explore the ways in which verbal conflict is interactively produced and framed (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualised (Gumperz 1982) by the participants.

Chapter 6 explores structural aspects of the mother-daughter disputes in my data. It examines the sequential organisation of openings (Ch. 6.1) and closings (Ch. 6.2) of conflict episodes in my data and discusses the implications for social functions of mother-daughter disputes. Subsequently, it investigates how the sequential organisation of the mother-daughter disputes in my data differs from other interactional contexts and thus contributes to the framing (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualisation (Gumperz 1982) of this speech activity (Ch. 6.3). It looks at the relationship between various sequential aspects of conversation, in particular preference and turn-taking organisation and formal cohesion, and the procedures by which the adversative character of oppositional moves in my data is highlighted (rather than downplayed). The results of this analysis allow a characterisation of the verbal conflicts in my data on the structural plane of interaction.

Chapter 7 focuses on the speech act level of interaction. It investigates what kinds of speech actions the disputants in my data use most frequently to oppose each other. It examines the ways in which these argumentative actions and their responses are formatted and considers how these speech actions contribute to the confrontational character of the interaction. In so doing, it uncovers the dynamics of the delicate power play that can take place between mothers and daughters and that is enacted in conflict talk.

In the process, it inspects whether these argumentative resources are equally available to both mothers and daughters, and how they can be effectively employed by participants to seize control over various aspects of the ongoing interaction.

Chapter 8 summarises and discusses the findings of the analyses and offers suggestions for further research.

Finally, chapter 9 describes the role of paralinguistic and nonverbal cues in the co-construction of meaning and presents the drama-reading conventions used in this study.

### **Notes On Pronoun usage and spelling**

Throughout the text, the feminine pronouns she, her, etc. are used as generic pronouns to refer to both sexes. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, the data this investigation is based on portray exclusively interaction between women. Secondly, the generic use of the feminine pronoun avoids a tiresome repetition of phrases like "he or she" and thus facilitates both the writing and reading process.

I follow the conventions of British English in the main text. However, the majority of examples and a large number of references are American English and have retained their original spelling.

Go to the poets.

(Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*)

## 2 Dramatic Dialogue as a data source for conflict analysis

The linguistic means of conducting conflict have not received much attention in research on language and communication. As Grimshaw (1990) reports, in the 1970s, there has only been a handful of pioneering studies on conflict talk (e.g. Brenneis & Lein 1977; Labov 1972a, b; Labov & Fanshel 1977; Mitchell-Kernan & Kernan 1975). Not until the early 1980s did a growing body of literature on the topic develop, including contributions on different aspects of conflict talk in the areas of sociology, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, social psychology, pragmatics, communication analysis, discourse analysis and conversation analysis (cf., for example, the publications cited in Brenneis 1988; Kakavá 2001; Schwittala 2001; the papers in Schank & Schwitalla 1987 and Grimshaw 1990; and M. H. Goodwin 1990; Gruber 1996; Messmer 2003; Spiegel 1995). A number of discourse analytic studies have dealt with the interactional dynamics of verbal conflicts, examining, for example, the opening and closing of conflict episodes, or features of interactional moves with respect to their aggravating or mitigating functional potential. However, as Kallmeyer (1996: 15) notes:

Allerdings liegen insgesamt zum Streiten und zu Kampfformen der Kommunikation nicht sehr viele sprachwissenschaftliche Arbeiten vor - *die linguistische Konfliktforschung ist eindeutig unterentwickelt.* (my emphasis; cf. also Apeltauer 1978; Gruber 1996a; Spiegel 1995)

One reason for the shortage of linguistic/discourse analytic studies on conflict talk is that it has been considered as constituting a type of "disorderly discourse" (cf. Briggs 1996) and, as a result, researchers did not venture into this form of ostensibly disruptive behaviour. In addition, there are several difficulties in obtaining authentic data for the analysis of verbal conflict (cf. Apeltauer 1978; Aronsson 1987; Gruber 1992, 1994, 1996a; Kakavá 2001; Keppler

1994; Kienpointer 1997; Messmer 2003; Schwitalla 1987; Vuchinich 1987; Weatherall 1996). On the one hand, disputes usually come about spontaneously, which makes it very difficult to obtain recordings of complete verbal conflicts. On the other hand, in Western culture, dispute is viewed as part of the private sphere, as "backstage talk" (Goffman 1959) that has to be kept secret.<sup>1</sup> Hence, if a researcher by chance happens to record an authentic dispute, the participants rarely give their consent for this tape to be analysed, let alone published. Schwitalla (1987: 99) puts his finger on the problem when he states:

Nichts ist so schwierig, wie von seinen Bekannten ein Tonband zu erbitten, auf dem zu hören sein soll, wie sie sich mit ihren Gesprächspartnern um etwas streiten.

This is especially true for conflicts in families. As Hughes (1971/1962: 91) notes:

People can and do keep a silence about things whose open discussion would threaten the group's conception of itself, and hence its solidarity ... It is a mechanism that operates in every family and in every group which has a sense of group solidarity.

At the same time, there are ethical issues involved in making surreptitious recordings, complicating the issue even further. These problems in obtaining suitable data for the analysis of verbal conflict are mirrored in the research on conflict talk. As Keppler (1994) reports, empirical studies of naturally-occurring conflicts among adults and in families are rare; studies of children's disputes are more numerous, "nicht zuletzt wohl aufgrund der Tatsache, dass sich hier empirisches Material leichter erheben lässt" (102).

As pointed out by Keppler, disputes between children and adolescents often serve as data for studies on conflict interaction, both in natural situations, in which conflict occurs spontaneously (e.g. Abrahams 1962; Corsaro & Rizzo 1990; Dundes et al. 1972; Eckert 1990; Eder 1990; Eisenberg & Garvey 1981; Emihovich 1986; Evaldson 1993; Genishi & di Paolo 1982; C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin

1990; M. H. Goodwin 1982, 1983, 1988, 1990, 1993; M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987; Katriel 1985, 1986; Kochman 1981, 1983; Logothetis 1990; Maynard 1985a&b, 1986; Rehbock 1987; Shantz 1987; Shantz & Hartup 1992; Shantz & Shantz 1985; Sheldon 1992, 1993, 1996) and in experimental situations, in which conflict is elicited for observation (e.g. Brenneis & Lein 1977; Lein & Brenneis 1978; Camras 1977; Gottman 1986). Children are less self-conscious about arguing in front of others and behave more "naively" than adults in (well planned) experimental settings, and thus provide fruitful data for the investigation of verbal conflict behaviour. However, the question arises whether the findings of the studies are also valid for conflicts among adults.

Conflict researchers also often draw on data from "exotic" cultures (e.g. Boggs 1978; Dundes et al. 1972; Edwards & Sienkewicz 1990; Goldman 1980, 1983, 1986; Gossen 1976; Hickson 1979; Kotthoff 1992b, 1995; Merlan & Rumsey 1986; Sidnell 1998; Tolosana 1978). In non-western cultures, conflict talk is often not considered as private, as it is in Western societies (cf. Brenneis 1988; Kotthoff 1995). Such cultures provide data on aspects of disputes which would hardly be accessible otherwise. It is open to discussion, however, whether the results of the studies can be applied to other cultural contexts.

Besides, much research on conflict talk is based on data from institutional contexts such as, for instance, courtroom interaction (e.g. Bilmes 1981; Atkinson & Drew 1979; Drew 1990, 1992), staff, association and other official meetings (e.g. Bilmes 1995; Kallmeyer & Keim 1996; Keim & Schwitalla 1989; O'Donnell 1990), doctor-patient-interaction (e.g. Bloor & Horobin 1975; Fisher & Groce 1985; Fisher & Todd 1983, 1986; Nothdurft 1992), therapeutic discourse (e.g. Labov & Fanshel 1977), mediation hearings (e.g. Depperman 1997; Garcia 1991; Nothdurft 1986, 1993, 1995, 1996; Schwitalla 1996; Spranz-Fogasy 1986), classroom discourse (e.g. Adger 1984; Davies 1982; Kakavá 1993a), naturally-occurring (e.g. Kakavá 1995) and elicited discussions between university students (e.g. Stein et al. 1997) and between students and lecturers (e.g. Günthner, Kotthoff 1984, 1989, 1990, 1993a), broadcast news interviews (e.g. Clayman 1988, 1992; Greatbatch 1988, 1992; Heritage 1985, 2002a, b; Holly 1993; Schegloff 1989), discussions on radio or TV (e.g. Apeltauer

1978; Bilmes 1999; Gruber 1992, 1994, 1996a, b, 1998a, b, 2001; Gruber et al. 1993; Hutchby 1992, 1996a, b, 1999, 2001; Kallmeyer & Schmitt 1996; Kotthoff 1991, 1992a, b, 1993b, c). Since much institutional interaction takes place in front of the public anyway, it is unproblematic to get access to such data. However, there are problems with trying to apply findings of research on conflict talk in institutional settings to other communicative contexts. Institutional contexts impose severe restrictions on how arguments are conducted. For instance, in the case of TV discussions and interviews, the point at issue is usually pre-established. Similarly, the participant framework (i.e. distribution of proponents' and opponents' roles as well as the formal role of a chairperson or interviewer) is usually fixed beforehand. Likewise, individual contributions are often planned in advance. In addition, the organisation of turn-taking differs from that in natural arguments, as speaking rights are usually allocated by the host or interviewer rather than locally negotiated by the participants (Greatbatch 1988; Heritage & Greatbatch 1991). These limitations obviously do not hold for spontaneous conflict talk in informal settings such as family arguments, or, more precisely, mother-daughter disputes.<sup>2</sup>

Studies of verbal conflicts in families have often relied on self-report surveys (e.g. Straus 1974; Scanzino 1978), therapy sessions with distressed couples or families (e.g. Frankenberg 1979; Millar et al 1984; Millar & Rogers 1976, 1988), or artificial tasks in laboratory settings to induce conflict (e.g. Billings 1979; Gottman 1979, 1994; Gottman et al. 1977; Knudson et al. 1980) for their data. This raises the question whether arguments in a laboratory setting correspond to those that occur in the family's daily routine at home.

Some researchers have addressed this problem by relocating the experimental setting to the family home. For instance, Billig's (1991) investigation of rhetorical aspects of holding strong views is based on family discussions that were initiated by an interviewer, who visited the family at home and was present during the recording. Similarly, researchers based at the Mannheim Institute of German Language (Hofer et al. 1990a, b, 1991, 1993; Pikowsky 1993; Spranz-Fogasy & Fleischmann 1993; Spranz-Fogasy et al. 1993)

have based their analysis of argumentative discussions between mothers and their adolescent daughters on elicited conflict episodes.<sup>3</sup> As in Billig's study, the recordings took place at the subjects' homes, with the interviewer present but not intervening in the discussion. However, in contrast to Billig's study, in which the interviewer's task was to inaugurate the family's conversation rather than to raise specific issues, the subjects were explicitly asked to discuss a contentious issue (e.g. help with household tasks, curfew, clothes, school, rights and obligations in general) for about ten minutes, trying to convince the partner of their position by supporting it with arguments. The researchers report that despite the conflict sequences being elicited and an interviewer being present during the recording, the subjects did not role play their discussions but seemed to have "real" arguments, as indicated by an increase in tempo, the use of dialect, mutual interruptions and overlapping speech. According to the authors, this "authenticity" is partly due to the fact that the conversations centred on issues that were important for both parties, which led to emotional involvement in the discussion (Hofer et al. 1993: 17-18; Pikowsky 1992: 62).

Again, it is debatable if elicited arguments are representative for unprompted disputes that occur in the participants' everyday life and, thus, if the research findings also apply to spontaneous disputes. Stein et al. (1997) argue that "naturally occurring language behaviour can be studied quite easily within an 'experimental' setting, without disrupting the natural flow of negotiation or conversation" (259). But as Goodwin (1982) notes, "while studies of elicited or role-played speech events provide information about the formal properties of such events, they cannot answer the questions concerning how it comes to be that these events emerge in talk in the first place" (91). For instance, in the elicited mother-daughter discussions investigated by Hofer and his colleagues, a controversial issue is given to be argued about by the subjects, and, as a result, the subjects' argumentation revolves around this issue.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, in naturally-occurring mother-daughter disputes contentious issues are not given in advance. In fact, as we will see later on, disputes are precisely the processes

by which controversial matters are interactively constructed by the participants by means of mutual disagreement.

Some researchers have tried to come to grips with the aforementioned problems by doing naturalistic data collection in routine situations in the home (e.g. dinner conversations), in which dispute sequences occurred as part of the family interactions (e.g. Keppler 1994; Knoblauch 1991, 1995; Miller et al. 1982; Patterson 1982; Vuchinich 1984, 1986, 1987, 1990). However, as Vuchinich (1987) notes, in this approach, measures must be taken to be as inconspicuous as possible, and a large amount of talk must be recorded in order to capture the odd spontaneous conflict episode.

To sum up, the investigation of verbal conflict faces a major methodological problem: disputes usually occur spontaneously and are viewed as a private affair in Western societies. As a result, researchers of conflict communication have investigated mainly children's disputes, conflict behaviour in non-western cultures, interaction in institutional contexts or arguments that were elicited in experimental settings. With all these kinds of data, however, the problem of generalisation of results to spontaneous disputes in every-day contexts arises.

For this reason, I will draw on a different data source for the analysis of mother-daughter disputes and base my investigation on a corpus of contemporary plays by women. The underlying assumption is that the mother-daughter disputes in these plays are comparable to naturally-occurring disputes in all relevant aspects on the macro- and micro-levels of discourse such as, for example, the organisation of turns and sequences, opening and closing procedures, turn-taking patterns. As Schank (1987) notes, several studies have shown that from the perspective of conflict analysis "sind kaum Unterschiede zwischen Alltag und Fiktion auszumachen" (20). Watzlawick et al. (1967) go even further, suggesting that some plays may even be "more real than reality" (150).

Drama is notorious for involving a high degree of controversial and confrontational talk. In plays, the fictional participants disagree with each other, blame each other, interrupt each other, deny or refute each other's claims, and so on. According to Burton (1980: 16), "drama dialogue presents conflict." Similarly, Wandor (1982: 12) maintains that "some form of conflict and resolution,

even in its most subtle form, is present in every play." In fact, conflict has been argued to constitute the core element of drama. To quote Broobs et al. (1952: 605):

The basis of drama is conflict. The most obvious feature of a good drama is the clash of wills as the various characters come into conflict with each other's purpose and desires.

And these conflicts are for the most part dramatised through verbal interaction.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, dramatic dialogue is a key site for investigating how interpersonal conflicts are constructed by participants in and through talk-in-interaction.

In fact, several researchers have drawn on dialogues in plays for the analysis of conflict and its discourse. For example, Apeltauer (1978) uses disputes in plays alongside transcripts of authentic dispute sequences, in his speech-act analysis of dispute. Likewise, Schank (1987) uses both authentic everyday conversations and fictitious dialogues (from prose and drama) as data for the linguistic study of conflict talk, on the assumption that that the differences between conflict talk in real life and fiction are minimal. Tannen (1990) investigates the function of silence as a conflict management strategy in Pinter's *Betrayal* from an interactional sociolinguistic perspective. Similarly, Jaworsky (2000) examines the interactional relevance of silence to the *dynamics of social relations between the characters in Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Edward Thomas's TV drama *Fallen Sons*. Aronsson (1987) analyses the organisation of turn-taking and topic management in the disputes in Eugene O'Neill's play *Long day's journey into night*, arguing that, although the script does not offer a direct recording of real disputes, due to its autobiographic aspects, "it echoes authentic struggles once fought" (194). Watzlawick et al. (1967) investigate the relational functions of communicative patterns in the fictional domestic arguments in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. They account for their use of a fictitious system rather than actual clinical data for the illustration of their theory of interactional systems and the axioms of interpersonal communication by claiming that Albee's play satisfies the major criteria of appropriate data, namely manageable size, reasonable independence (of both the therapists point of view

and the therapeutic context) and public accessibility (150). As mentioned above, rather than considering the fictionality of the data as a drawback, they regard it as a benefit: "The limits of the data presented in the play are fixed by artistic licence, though the play is possibly even more real than reality" (150, my emphasis). Similarly, in their analysis of pathological family relationship patterns in plays by Terence Rattigan, William Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, Manocchio & Petitt (1975) treat the literary characters as if they had the same relationship problems as real people.

Research on women's literature has shown that in plays by women, certain issues, which are rooted in the writers' experiences as women, keep emerging. Of these, the central one is the mother-daughter relationship in its various facets. In particular the issue of mother-daughter conflict is crucial to the lives of women and has been found to be a recurrent motif in women's drama (cf. Goodman 1994; Griffiths 1993; Pearlman 1989; and Robson 1991).<sup>6</sup> Thus, to analyse mother-daughter dispute in dramatic dialogue is to approach the issue of conflict most directly while at the same time examining one of the key aspects of women's plays.

The working hypothesis of this study is that the procedures for the analysis of naturally-occurring conversation are profitable for the study of play-talk and, conversely, that dramatic dialogue is a rewarding research object for the analysis of everyday conversation, and in particular for the study of conflict talk. Before I move on to a more detailed discussion of the dual value of the application of discourse analytical procedures to dialogue in plays,<sup>7</sup> some preliminary remarks are in order to clarify the relation between real-life talk and dramatic dialogue.

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.  
(William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*)

### **2.1 Dramatic dialogue versus naturally occurring conversation**

Dramatic dialogue, however realistic it may seem, is not identical to naturally occurring conversation. A most obvious difference between the two is that everyday conversation is a spontaneous exchange between a speaker and one or more interlocutor(s), whereas characters in plays are simply not real people in the way that participants in conversation are. Instead, in dramatic dialogue, words are thought up by a playwright to be spoken by fictional characters, created for, existing and interacting within the invented action that takes place in the imaginary world of a play. Obviously, then, in contrast to real conversation, dramatic dialogue is not spontaneous but highly pre-planned speech that is comprised of invented sequences designed to be staged and overheard by the audience. By contrast with real talk, speaker change is not locally managed but totally author-controlled with turn-taking rights being established on dramaturgical grounds rather than on democratic conversational principles (cf. Caldas-Coulthard 1992; Coulthard 1985; Elam 1980; Simpson 1997, 1998).

Another, related difference is that while naturally occurring conversation is straightforwardly face to face, in dramatic dialogue the communication process is more complex. More precisely, there are (at least) two communicative layers at work in dramatic discourse: on the one hand, there is interaction within a play - this is the character-to-character dialogue which is displayed on stage or in the text. On the other, there is communication between the playwright and the audience/reader. At this higher level, the playwright controls the displayed interaction, and the conversation between the characters is part of what is communicated to the audience. Each turn of a speaker on stage addressing her interlocutor, at the same time, explicitly (as, for instance, in the case of Brecht's Epic theatre) or implicitly, addresses a hypothetical receiver of the message outside the fictional world. Thus, the

messages passed between characters within the play become, at the higher communicative level, messages about the play itself.

Short (1981, 1989, 1994) describes dramatic discourse in terms of "embeddedness." On one level, the dramatist addresses the reader/audience, and on another embedded level, the dramatic characters interact with one another. This embedded level is part of what the playwright communicates to the reader/audience. Thus, "features which, for example, mark social relationships between two people at the character level become messages about the characters at the level of discourse which pertains between author and reader/audience" (Short 1989: 149). Short's model, which has been adopted by various researchers in the field of stylistics (cf. Simpson 1997; Culpeper 2001), echoes Widdowson's (1975) claim that dramatic discourse represents "a communication situation within a communication situation" (50). Similarly, Clark (1996) distinguishes several layers or domains of action, which are created on top of one another, each of which is in principle a complete world. On the topmost layer, the *dramatis personae* interact within the fictional world of the play. (In case of theatrical performance, on a lower layer, the actors on stage pretend to be the dramatic characters.) On the basic layer, the audience/reader watches/reads the play (text), "imagining" that the interaction between the dramatic characters on the highest layer of action takes place and "appreciating" the techniques involved in the creation of that layer.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to the participant roles in dramatic discourse, Short (1989) cautions that, despite our intuition, the audience or reader of a play (text) cannot be considered an eavesdropper in the sense of Goffman (1976, 1979) because "dramatic discourse is arranged to be overheard on purpose" (149). Likewise, according to A. Kennedy (1983) the unique distinctness of dramatic dialogue is that "the audience is being allowed to 'overhear' the dialogue" (10) and the spectator or reader "does not have the role of an interlocutor in conversation, or that of a listener silently nodding or shaking his or her head by way of active response, or even the role of one eavesdropping behind the door" (*ibid.*)<sup>9</sup>

We have to be careful, however, to keep apart the different levels of discourse, and bear in mind that it is not the interactors

on the character level who design their talk for an overhearing spectator/reader but the playwright - and, in the case of theatrical performance, the actors, the director, and others involved in the staging of the play (cf. Elam 1980: 37-39). To quote Goffman (1979: 13):

the words addressed by one character in a play to another (at least in modern Western dramaturgy) are eternally sealed off from the audience, belonging entirely to a self-enclosed, make-believe realm.

Hence, I want to argue that in the complex communication situation of drama, the audience/reader is both addressee and overhearer, depending on the level of discourse one is looking at: on one level of discourse (the basic layer in Clark's model), the playwright designs the dramatic dialogue specifically for the spectator/reader of the play (text). On this level, then, the recipient of a drama is the addressee. As mentioned above, Clark (1996) states that the primary participants (i.e. the audience/readers) "are intended to imagine what is happening in the highest current layer of action" as well as "to appreciate the instigator's purposes and techniques in creating the highest current layer of action" (359). This appreciation can take various forms. For instance, as Elam (1980: 38) notes, in the situation of live theatre, the spectators will interpret the complex of messages (speech, gesture, etc.) transmitted to them by the source (i.e. dramatist, director designer, performers, etc.) according to the theatrical, dramatic and cultural codes at their disposal and will in turn assume the role of transmitters of signals to the source (laughter, applause, boos, etc.), which will be interpreted in terms of approval, hostility, and so on. Thus, the playwright, director, actors etc. and the audience collaborate in the construction of meaning in theatrical discourse. By the same token, although the readers of a play text do not take an active part in the interaction in drama, they are still active participants in the joint construction of meaning, in dramatic discourse as in mediated discourse in general (cf. Aston & Savona 1991; Bakhtin 1986; Bubl forthcoming; Bubl & Spitz forthcoming; Duranti 1986; Esslin 1987; Klemm 2000; Morley 1994).<sup>10</sup> On another level of discourse (the embedded level in Short's

and the top layer in Clark's model), the situation of the spectator/reader who is listening to/reading the dramatic dialogue is similar to that of an overhearer in everyday situations who is bystander or eavesdropper to a conversation. Both are unratiſed participants to a social encounter having no rights or obligations in it. In both cases, the interaction they are overhearing - whether it is factual or fictional - is sealed off from them, belonging to a self-enclosed realm.

In addition to the fictionality and multi-dimensionality of dramatic discourse, there are literary conventions at work governing the dramatic representations of talk, so that the depicted dialogue is quite different from a transcription of a natural conversation. In fact, a comparison between transcriptions of real-life talk and even the most naturalistic dramatic dialogue shows that the latter is a representation of ordinary conversation, and not a mirror image of it. For instance, dramatic discourse generally exhibits fewer characteristics of spoken language: it contains occasional rather than pervasive false starts, repetition, interruption, overlaps, simultaneous speech, etc. (cf. Betten 1975, 1980, 1985; Person 1999). For that reason, it has been considered a "pure," "concentrated," "condensed," or "tidied up" version of social intercourse (cf. Burton 1980; Elam 1980; Herman 1991, 1998, Piazza 1999).

This is not to say, however, that the character-to-character level of interaction cannot be subjected to the same analytic procedures as naturally-occurring conversation. On the contrary, despite the aforementioned differences between dialogue in plays and real-life discourse, dramatic dialogue can be analysed as conversation, since it relies on the same mechanisms as natural communication. It is hard to see how readers and spectators are able to recognise and respond to fictional dialogue as a version of real-life conversation if the two did not share significant properties. In fact, dramatic dialogue can only be accessed through its relationship to the social context outside the play text. The norms, values and conventions of behaviour which regulate how real people organise their social encounters form the basis for interpreting the interactions of the fictional characters in the world of plays. The intelligibility/accessibility and success of constructed dialogue

thus depends on how well it confirms to cultural understandings of and expectations about appropriate discursive practice. By the same token, the creation of dramatic worlds draws on given, existing resources - of language, (inter)action, etc. and the conventions of use underlying these - but exploits and artfully develops them in the design of speech and (inter)action in plays. To conclude, the conventions of behaviour, action and speech in real life are made operative in the creation, assessment and understanding of behaviour in the fictional world of the play (cf. also Hall & Daniels 1992; Herman 1991, 1995; Kennedy 1983; Khader 2000; Lemert 1997; O'Barr 1984; Person 1999; Schneider 1988; Simpson 1997, 1998; Tannen 1989, 1990, 1997; Toolan 1990).

This claim is analogous to Bakhtin's (1986) notion of dialogue as growing out of a view of language as fundamentally interactive and grounded in context; of meaning as the result of interplay between novelty and formulaicity; of meaning as created by listeners as well as speakers in response to prior text; and his conception of ordinary conversation as made up of primary genres that are "absorbed" and "digested" by "secondary genres" such as novels and drama (62). According to Bakhtin (1986: 87), "when we select words in the process of constructing an utterance ... we usually take them from other utterances, and mainly from utterances that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition, or style." Similarly, Becker (1984: 435) states: "The actual a-priori of any language event ... is an accumulation of remembered prior texts." Consequently, "our real language competence is access, via memory, to this accumulation of prior text."

By the same token, recipients of discourse can make sense of what they hear/read only by reference to recognisable scenes composed of people engaged in meaningful activities. They imagine these scenes in response to the clues provided by the discourse, thereby participating in the mutual process of sense-making. In drama dialogue a similar process is at work. The play text represents visually recognisable elements of conversation which provide the basis for the listener's/reader's recreation of a complete meaningful conversation. In other words, dramatic dialogue gives the impression of representing real conversation through the suggestion of remembered conversations. In the same way that Bakhtin

claims that every conversation echoes other conversations, by the same speakers and others, dramatic dialogues echo both other dramatic dialogues and remembered conversations from real life. That is dramatic dialogues conform to expectations established by other dramatic dialogues and remembered conversations from real life. As Tannen (1997: 153) puts it:

By a process of synecdoche, the representation of recognizable conversational parts triggers in the reader the re-creation of a conversation like those that have been experienced.

For that reason, in spite of the dissimilarities to everyday conversation, in many respects, the dialogue in which dramatic characters engage is similar to that found in naturally occurring conversation and thus lends itself readily to similar kinds of analysis.<sup>11</sup>

For example, it is generally acknowledged that crucial structural and functional principles and patterns are at work in fictional dialogue, just as they are in natural conversation (cf. Burton 1980; Herman 1991, 1995; Kennedy 1983; Lowe 1998; Noguchi 1978; Person 1999; Toolan 1985, 1990). In the fictional situation of the dramatic scene, the participants act as if they were subject to the same rule systems valid in everyday discourse and produce conversation by using procedures similar to those used by people in real life. For instance, both dramatic dialogue and everyday conversation have interlocutors who (generally) speak alternately and not simultaneously.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, just as in natural conversation, the characters in plays can be seen as socially organising their speech by linking their utterances to preceding utterances and thus have similar procedures for raising, developing, changing and closing topics. It is above all this sequential organisation of conversational contributions in dramatic dialogue that makes it amenable to analysis as conversation. To quote Noguchi (1978: 15):

Insofar as characters in literature, like conversationalists in real life, produce conversation through a series of concerted actions, the characteristic patterns in dialogue

exemplify, or at least reflect, characteristic patterns of social interaction.

In fact, although dramatic discourse is not equivalent to the dialogue spontaneously produced in interaction, paradoxically, it often strikes audiences and readers as extremely realistic and apparently represents something that rings true to them. Indeed, as Lakoff & Tannen (1984) point out, if we look at transcripts of natural conversation, "we are struck, often, in a perverse way by their apparent unnaturalness, their difficulty in being understood" (323). Compared with dialogue in a play, "naturalistic conversation strikes us not as what we expected, not working by preconceived patterns" (ibid). They suggest that "artificial dialog may represent an internalized model or schema for the production of conversation - a competence model that speakers have access to" (ibid). Likewise, according to Schneider (1988: 115), "dramatic discourse is authentic in that it is a projection of the playwright's communicative competence, who relies on the competence of the audience." In other words, play texts are created by individuals who have grown up and participate in the society/culture they portray and to which they play. Dramatists base their dialogue on their intuitions about and (implicit) knowledge of how conversation works - intuitions and knowledge they share with their audience/readers.<sup>13</sup> Hence the interaction portrayed in a drama reveals how the author perceives the workings of conversation in real life, and thus provides a fruitful site for the discourse analyst. To quote Lakoff & Tannen (1984: 323):

If, then, we are interested in the ideal model of conversational strategy, there is much to be gained by looking at artificial conversation first, to see what these general, unconsciously-adhered-to assumptions are; and later returning to natural conversation to see how they may actually be exemplified in literal use.

From this perspective, then, rather than presenting a drawback, the lack of some typical features of everyday speech and conversation, such as deficient syntax, hesitation phenomena, redundancies, simultaneous talk, interruptions, etc. may even aid empirical analyses to focus on typical global structures of discourse

regardless whether real or constructed (cf. also Apeltauer 1978; Betten 1975; Hess-Lüttich 1985; Watzlawick et al. 1967).

To sum up so far, dramatic dialogue can be a rich source of insight about the workings of everyday talk. The principles, norms and conventions of use which underlie spontaneous communication in everyday life are exploited and manipulated by dramatists in their constructions of dialogues in plays. They are the resource that dramatists use to create conversations in plays (cf. also Herman 1995; Tannen 1989). Through the creative elaboration and manipulation of these resources, i.e. by presenting critical situations of interaction and highlighting and foregrounding features of ordinary conversation, dramatic dialogues reach a degree of condensation in the communicative mechanism which can hardly be found in the everyday practice of interacting individuals, and that renders it a rewarding research object for the discourse analyst (cf. Betten 1975; Kallmeyer 1979; Schlieben-Lange 1980; Schnebly 1994; Schütze 1980; Ungeheuer 1980). In other words, examining what playwrights do can yield valuable insight into the workings of natural conversation.

Likewise, fictional dialogues provide a valuable testing ground for assessing the reliability and validity of linguistic and especially discourse analytical concepts, models and theories. As Halliday (1967: 217) emphasises:

It is part of the task of linguistics to describe texts; and all texts, including those, prose and verse, which fall within any definition of literature, are accessible to linguistic analysis.

Many linguistic theories are highly abstract and the creative discourse that characterises many plays makes it an excellent site for investigating theories about language and social interaction. It has become an axiom in stylistics that we often perceive conventional modes of language and interaction only through exposure to deviant or distorted ones. In this respect, literary discourse has an important role to play in that it highlights the norms of communication by exploiting and manipulating them.<sup>14</sup> Hence, the application of discourse analytical procedures to dramatic dialogues is an important heuristic device for generating theoretical

hypotheses concerning fundamental rules of interaction and refining analytical concepts for the analysis of the overall structure of conversation and thus contributes to the development of linguistic theory (cf. Aronsson 1987; Burton 1980; Carter 1994; Carter & Simpson 1989).

Finally, a discourse analytical approach to drama also provides a basis for fuller understanding and interpretation of language effects in plays (cf. Aston & Savona 1991; Brumfit & Carter 1986; Burton 1980, 1982; Carson 1974; Carter 1982b, 1984; Carter & Simpson 1989; Herman 1991: 99; Hess-Lüttich 1985; Khader 2000: 21; Noguchi 1978; Schnebly 1994; Short 1982, 1988, 1995; Thornborrow & Wareing 1998; Wales 1989). As discussed above, the principles, norms and conventions of use which underlie spontaneous conversation in daily life are the resource that dramatists use to construct dialogue in plays and that readers/spectators draw on in understanding interactions in plays. Therefore, attention to these can enable us to analyse and appreciate the resourceful and creative exploitation of such conventions and processes by dramatists. More precisely, a discourse analytical approach to drama has a critical potential for literary study, since it highlights and explains linguistic patterns in play texts and shows their functional significance for the textual interpretation. It can assist critical readings by providing a sound methodology for understanding how dramatic dialogues are constructed, how they convey certain effects to their readers and audiences. It is therefore more profitable than the traditional approaches to drama, which remain essentially descriptive, since it proceeds beyond an identification of the effects of language to an analysis of how such effects are achieved, why it is that large numbers of recipients respond to similar effects in any play text, and how to locate these effects in the details of the text itself. In a nutshell, if looking at what playwrights do leads to a better understanding of real-life conversation, then knowing about real-life conversation is an extremely effective way of finding out about what playwrights are doing. The upshot of this is that approaching dramatic discourse by drawing on procedures for the analysis of naturally-occurring conversation can inform our understanding of both in various ways.

So far, I have argued that the procedures for the analysis of naturally-occurring conversation are profitable for the study of play-talk and, conversely, that dramatic dialogue is a rewarding research object for the analysis of everyday conversation, and in particular for the study of conflict talk. I have shown that notwithstanding obvious differences, dramatic dialogue - especially in the case of modern plays - closely resembles ordinary talk, and thus can be analysed by drawing on procedures for the study of natural conversation. Dramatic dialogues are created by individuals who live and participate in the society they portray in plays. Accordingly, the interaction rendered in plays reflects how dramatists envisage the mechanisms of interpersonal exchange in real life. This is also, or especially, true for plays by women. As Pearlman (1989: 6) states: "It is obvious that literature by women is not removed from 'lived female experience'." Similarly, Griffiths (1993: 48) maintains that "plays can be seen as reports from the front line of women's experience, examining ... the family through the focus of mother-daughter relationships." To put it differently, many plays by women can be considered slice-of-life accounts of family life, and in particular of mother-daughter relationships, reflecting the authors' personal experience as conversationalists and professional observations as lay sociologists, as it were. Thus, play texts allow us to see how women perceive and conceptualise crucial relationship issues, such as power and conflict in mother-daughter relationships, and the manifestation of these issues in (verbal) interaction. Consequently, dialogues in plays by women have particular merit as a source of data for the analysis of conflict talk between mothers and daughters - and it is as such that they will be exploited here: in the present study, I will investigate how verbal conflicts and underlying power relationships are jointly and interactively created and negotiated by mothers and daughters in the fictional world of contemporary plays by women.

This is certainly not the first time play texts have been subjected to pragmatic, discourse-analytic, or sociolinguistic investigation. While until fairly recently, any type of data other than naturally occurring conversation was rejected as unsuitable for linguistic analysis, researchers have started to appreciate a wider range of data and now accept material that was rejected earlier.

Thus, the data is no longer restricted to recordings of spontaneous conversations. Especially dramatic dialogues have been the object of investigation, since theatrical works are generally considered to mimic spoken interaction more faithfully than other types of literary works. Analysts in the past have looked at dialogue in plays from various angles: in a study exploring differences in the language behaviour of men and women, due to a lack of historical archives of natural conversation Biber & Burges (2000) use dramatic dialogue as a source that provides useful representations of historical spoken language: "Drama represents extended conversational dialogue played out in live settings and thus allows for detailed analyses of the perceived language use patterns associated with men and women" (Biber & Burges 2000: 23). Similarly, in his study of comparison in Middle English, Norrick (1987) takes into specific consideration the *Towneley Plays*, arguing that they provide a plausible representation of spoken late Middle English, because they were written and produced by local guildsmen, and hence a valuable source for analysis of natural syntactic constructions. Likewise, in his discussion of jokes and comic narrative passages in drama in chapter seven of *Conversational Narrative*, Norrick (2000: 182-195) compares a spontaneous conversational story with the Nurse's story of the young Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* (Act 1, Scene iii), citing evidence that it represented folk speech and narrative in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England. He also contrasts the tailor's joke from Beckett's *Endgame* with conversational joke telling, showing that the tailor's joke is effectively introduced into dialogue with the typical hesitations of everyday talk ("I never told it worse," 191). Brown & Gilman (1960, 1989) draw on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* for their study of politeness as reflected in pronoun usage in Early Modern English. They account for their use of Shakespearian plays pointing out that "there is nothing else" (1989: 170) as well as by referring to Salmon, who claimed that "the more skilful the dramatist, the more skilful he will be, if presenting the normal life of his time, in authenticating the action by an acceptable version of contemporary speech" (1965: 105). Salmon (1965, 1967) argued a long time ago that at least certain portions of the dialogues in Shakespeare's dramas are "reasonable imitations of Elizabethan speech" (Salmon 1965:

106). Mazzon (2003), too, studies address term patterns in *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* and focuses in particular on the social relationships between individual characters. Stein (2003) investigates the social, pragmatic and emotional meanings of the occurrences of you and thou in *King Lear* and *As You Like It*. Kielkiewicz-Janowiak (1985) also examines the use of pronominal address in *As You Like It*. Similarly, Calvo (1992, 1994) looks at pronouns of address and social negotiation in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Busse (2003) analyses the co-occurrence of nominal and pronominal forms of address in Shakespeare's plays. Hunt (2003) studies the usage of T and V pronouns in the Anglo-Norman play *Seinte Resureccion* dating from the second half of the twelfth century, and Brown & Ford (1961) investigate norms of address in American plays. Leech (1992) examines deviations from pragmatic principles such as Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and conversational maxims, and Leech's (1983: 104-151) principle of politeness in Shaw's *You never can tell*. Short (1989) draws on insights in pragmatics (i.e. speech act theory, presupposition, cooperative principle, and terms of address) in his analysis of the dialogue in Pinter's short sketch *Trouble in the works* to account for the 'absurdity' of the play. Similarly, Schlieben-Lange (1980) draws on Gricean theory and conversation analysis in her analysis of the (mis)communication in Ionesco's *The bald primadonna*. Magnusson (1992) studies the rhetoric of politeness in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. Simpson (1989a) examines politeness phenomena in Ionesco's *The lesson*. Culpeper (1996, 1999, 2001) draws on politeness frameworks to account for phenomena of impoliteness in drama and film and their importance for the development of character and plot. Similarly, Kienpointer (1997) examines instances of "rudeness" in Albee's *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Bennison (1998) explores the relationship between turn-taking patterns, the use of politeness strategies and the perception of power relationships among the characters in Stoppard's *Professional Foul*. Cooper (1981) examines the use of implicature in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Schmachtenberg (1982) discusses the application of speech act theory to dramatic dialogues as a method of interpreting plays. Lowe (1994, 1998) draws on speech act theory to examine the speech act confession in Miller's *The Crucible*. Frilling (1991) employs speech act theory in

her investigation of the absurd dialogue in Ionesco's *The bald primadonna*. Fish (1976) examines the use of speech acts in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Petit (1980) looks at performatives in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Coulthard (1985: 184-192) examines question-answer sequences in Shakespeare's *Othello*. While cautioning that the analyst must keep in mind that these are invented sequences, shaped for an artistic purpose and that some of the rules and conventions are different, he claims that "drama texts, being scripts for the performing of pseudo-conversations, can be successfully approached with techniques originally developed to analyse real conversation" (182). Klammer (1971, 1973) applies tagmemic analysis to Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and Dickens' *Great Expectations* to investigate the dialogue structures in these works. Herman (1991, 1995, 1998) draws on the findings of conversation analysis in her investigation of turn management in plays (e.g. Pinter's *Homecoming*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*). Gautam (1987) draws on Grice's (1975) principles of conversation, Sack's (1974) insights on questions and answers, as well as Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) model of discourse in his analysis of Pinter's *The Caretaker*. Nash (1989) makes use of sociolinguistic, pragmatic and discourse-analytic concepts in his examination of the opening of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Piazza (1999) draws on the findings of conversation analysis in her study of repair mechanisms in contemporary plays (Norman's *'night mother*, Hayes' *Skirmishes*, Shepard's *Fool for love*, and Pinter's *The Caretaker*). Burton (1980, 1982) offers a modified and extended version of Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) model of classroom discourse and applies it to drama dialogue, mostly from the plays of Harold Pinter, in order to systematically account for the "alienated" structure of the dialogues, in which silences, non sequiturs, breaking of rules for turn-taking, etc., serve to underline the kinds of power relations which obtain in the dramatised conversations. Weber (1998) also draws on discourse analytic concepts to examine manifestations of power in Mamet's *Oleanna*. Rommetveit (1991) draws on IR analysis (Linell et al. 1988) to investigate dominance and asymmetries in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

It is also not the first time dramatic dialogues have been the object of conflict analysis (cf. above). But to my knowledge it is

the first time dramatic dialogue has been studied with the focus on mother-daughter disputes.

Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.  
(Alfred Hitchcock)

## 2.2 Data

The investigation is based on a corpus of eleven contemporary plays by British and American women playwrights: *Home* by Laura Cahill; *Neaptide* by Sarah Daniels; *The Alto Part* by Barbara Gilstrap; *Stuck* by Jessica Goldberg; *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry; *My mother said I never should* by Charlotte Keatley; *My sister in this house* by Wendy Kesselman; *Perfect days* by Liz Lochhead; *Avenue of dream* by Elyse Nass; *'night Mother* by Marsha Norman; and *Tell me another story, sing me a song* by Jean Lenox Toddie.<sup>15</sup>

The plays were chosen because they all portray intense family relations which are marked by the frequent occurrence of mother-daughter disputes. Moreover, the dialogues in the dramas selected display a close similarity to real-life talk, exhibiting characteristic features of ordinary conversation. The restriction to plays by female authors is based on the research interest of this study. As mentioned above, the mother-daughter relationship, and in particular mother-daughter conflict, is crucial to the lives of women and constitutes a key motif in women's plays. Playwrights draw their material for the creation of dramatic dialogues out of the mundane conversations in which they participate and which they overhear. In other words, dialogues in plays are rooted in the authors' own personal experience and observations as amateur ethnographers or sociologists. Thus, plays by women provide a window on how women themselves perceive and conceptualise crucial aspects of mother-daughter relationships, such as power and conflict, and the construction and negotiation of these relationship aspects in (verbal) interaction.<sup>16</sup>

Each of the plays in my corpus contains a whole array of dispute sequences, each of which in turn includes a wide range of different disputing practices. In the empirical part of this study, I will analyse a series of selected examples from the plays in my corpus, in which the characteristic aspects of mother-daughter disputes are particularly prominent. The majority of these examples are extracts from longer conflict sequences. Almost each of the sample passages displays a multitude of communicative features,

which cannot all be discussed in one go. Thus, one extract may be used as the basis for illustrating a variety of different discursive phenomena. As a result, I will look at some of the examples more than once, but each time with a different analytical focus. That is to say, the repeated analysis of the same segments is by no means due to a lack of suitable data, but on the contrary due to the richness of data provided by the plays.

Although I will generally focus on dyadic exchanges between mothers and daughters, I will occasionally look at stretches of multi-party talk to exemplify certain characteristics of the disputes in my corpus; but in these cases, too, I will concentrate mainly on the contributions of the mother-daughter dyads. Following Burton (1980) and Rommetveit (1991), in the analytical sections, I will deal with the play scripts as if they were transcripts of real-life face-to-face conversations, and read the stage directions as accounts of paralinguistic and nonverbal components of natural dialogues.<sup>17</sup>

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## Notes for chapter 2:

<sup>1</sup> As Bach & Wyden (1975: 14) state: "Die meisten Menschen meinen, sie müssten ihren Ärger und ihre Streitigkeiten geheim halten."

<sup>2</sup> For critique of the application of findings of research on conflict talk in institutional settings to informal discussions cf. also Knoblauch (1991, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Argumentative discussions are a type of conflict management in which the speakers use arguments in order to convince the interlocutor of their position or to get her to perform the desired activity (Hofer et al 1993: 16).

<sup>4</sup> Within the framework of argumentation theory, argumentative exchanges are considered to presuppose a *quaestio*, i.e. a contentious issue that is to be resolved. Argumentation is then defined as the process of solving the problem posed in the *quaestio* (cf. and Klein 1985; Kotthoff 1984, 1989; Maas 1974; Toulmin 1983; Van Eemeren et al. 1992). In terms of argumentation theory, then, in the elicited discussions analysed by Hofer and his co-workers, the *quaestio* is pre-given by the interviewer.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle (1965) in his *Poetics* (VI) first stressed the significance of dialogue as an element of drama, arguing that the dialogue has a unique function which cannot be replaced by other dramatic elements. Correspondingly, in Szondi's (1970, 1987) *Theory of the modern drama*, dramatic dialogue is considered the most significant vehicle of the interpersonal world and the unique element in the texture of the drama. It attains a supreme place in the hierarchy of dramatic elements, mirroring interpersonal relations. Likewise, A. Kennedy (1983: 2) states: "The governing concept for all dramatic dialogue is *verbal interaction*." This view is echoed by several authors approaching dramatic dialogue from a linguistic (or, more precisely, a discourse analytic) perspective, who argue that the crucial role of verbal interaction in plays accounts for the preference of drama over other genres in stylistic research. For instance, Lakoff and Tannen (1994: 141) note that "novelists have many other techniques to fall back on, but for a playwright, dialog and its concomitant extralinguistic behavior is all the audience has to go on. Interpretation must be done by the viewer or listener - as in actual conversation." Similarly, Thornborrow and Wareing (1998: 121) maintain that "one crucial aspect in which drama differs from poetry and fiction is in its emphasis on verbal interaction, and the way relationships between people are constructed and negotiated through what they say." Burton (1980) also argues that since plays have to be concerned with human interaction, and have to be realised by human dialogue, play scripts are an extremely rich resource for discourse analysts.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, in his collection of articles on the "mother-daughter puzzle" in contemporary American literature, Pearlman (1989: 1) notes that there is a "superabundance" of recent American literary works by women about mothers, daughters and, above all, the mother-daughter relationship. Griffiths (1993: 64) also contends that "many plays by women focus on mother-daughter relationships."

<sup>7</sup> The use of linguistic theories and procedures to approach literary texts is traditionally referred to as "stylistics," which, according to Leech (1983: 151), "may be regarded simply as the variety of discourse analysis dealing with literary discourse" (cf. also Carson 1974, Carter 1984, 1988; Carter & Simpson 1989;

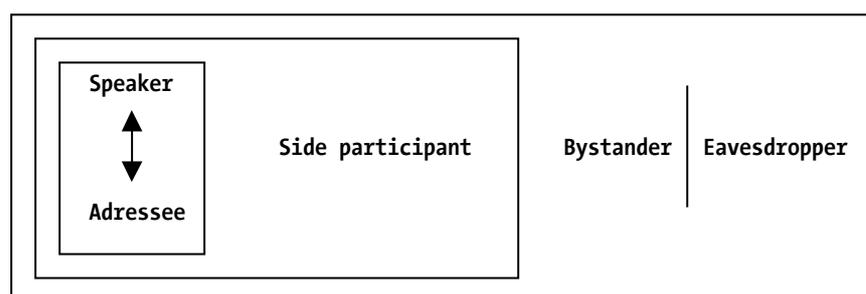
Halliday 1967; Short 1988, 1995; Thornborrow & Wareing 1998; Wales 1989; and others).

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of the multi-levelled character of dramatic, theatrical, and film discourse cf. also Aston & Savona (1991); Bubel (forthcoming); Bubel & Spitz (forthcoming); Elam (1980); Esslin (1987); Herman (1991); Kennedy (1983).

<sup>9</sup> In his participation framework, Goffman (1976, 1979), differentiates various hearer roles in conversation: (1) *addressed recipients*: ratified participants who are oriented to by the speaker in a way that suggests that her words are directed specifically at them. (2) *unaddressed recipients*: ratified participants, who - in the case of multi-party conversation - are not specifically addressed by the speaker. (3) *bystanders*: unratiified, participants who have no rights and no obligations in a conversation but who are recognised and allowed to be present by the speaker. These are further distinguished into (3a) *overhearers*: bystanders who unintentionally and inadvertently follow the talk, and (3b) *eavesdroppers*: bystanders who secretly and deliberately access the social encounter.

Drawing on Goffman's framework, Clark (1996) defines four categories of participant status in everyday conversation, as illustrated in figure 1 below. A speaker addresses an utterance to an *addressee*. A *side participant* is a ratified participant, i.e. a participant recognised by speaker and addressee as a full member of the conversation but not currently being addressed. All other listeners are overhearers, who have no rights or responsibilities in the conversation. Overhearers come in two main types. *Bystanders* are those who are openly present but not part of the conversation. *Eavesdroppers*, on the other hand, are those who listen without the speaker's awareness. Clark emphasises, however, that in reality, there are several varieties of overhearers on a continuum between bystander and eavesdropper.

**Figure (1): participant roles (adapted from Clark 1996: 14)**



<sup>10</sup> To quote Duranti (1986: 243-244): „interpretation of texts, sounds, etc.) is not a passive activity whereby the audience is just trying to figure out what the author meant to communicate. Rather, it is a way of making sense of what someone said (or wrote or drew) by linking it to a world or context what the audience can make sense of.”

<sup>11</sup> The similarity between real life and drama has been pointed out before, notably by Goffman. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) Goffman used the idea of the “theatrical performance,” in which human interaction is viewed in terms of a stage play:

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almost anyone can quickly learn a script well enough to give a charitable audience some sense of realness in what is being contrived before them. And it seems this is so because ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. Scripts even in the hands of unpractised players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify. (Goffman 1959: 78)

In his dramaturgical approach Goffman used theatre and drama as a metaphor to explain how the individual works to manage impressions and accomplish a successful presentation of the self to others. Goffman argued his point (as did Shakespeare), claiming that in interacting with others we play roles just like actors on a stage. To stay in character we speak the right lines, use certain non-verbal behaviours as well as appropriate props how. In other words, we "stage manage" the images we try to convey to those around us. This presentation varies from situation to situation, so that there is a possible gap between "frontstage" and "backstage" performances. For instance, a waiter may have a very different manner in the kitchen and out in the dining room taking orders from guests. The theatre metaphor is thus a means of illustrating the structure of social encounters that occur in all social life.

<sup>12</sup> It must be noted, however, that "one-at-a-time" is not a conversational universal. As several studies of shown, the degree to which overlapping talk is acceptable varies by culture and occasion. Different kinds of organisation of speaker change will be discussed in more detail Ch. 6.3.2.

<sup>13</sup> Sociolinguistic research, too, relies on people's intuitions and communicative experience. In a study of gender, race and speech style stereotypes by Popp et al. (2003), participants were asked to generate dialogues for a fictional character whose race and gender were varied and subsequently rate the character's talk. The instructions read as follows: "Try to make your character's talk as real as possible" (320). The experiment aimed at investigating how Black and White men and women are perceived to talk.

<sup>14</sup> As Burton (1980: 111) states, "plays are a means of presenting the social world in a specifically alienated, and therefore graspable way" (cf. also Betten 1975; Herman 1995; Schnebly 1994; Simpson 1989b).

<sup>15</sup> For complete bibliographical references see Ch. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Correspondingly, in a corpus-based study exploring differences in the language use of men and women as represented, for instance, in drama dialogue, Biber & Burges (2000) note that the sex of the author is an important parameter, since the perspectives of female and male authors on the language of men and women differ considerably.

<sup>17</sup> For drama-reading conventions see the Appendix.

No doubt there are other important things in life besides conflict, but there are not many other things so inevitably interesting. The very saints interest us most when we think of them as engaged in a conflict with the Devil.

(Robert Lynd, *The Blue Lion*)

### **3 Conceptualisations of interpersonal conflict: causes versus process**

In this section, I will discuss some of the ways in which conflict and its discourse has been conceptualised. The many-sided nature of research into conflict (talk) has resulted in a multitude of conceptualisations, terms and definitions. While this study is not concerned with producing a comprehensive definition of conflict (talk), a brief discussion of some of the conceptualisation issues is pertinent in order to delineate the scope of the study.

Numerous investigators focus on the underlying sources of conflict and define conflict as goal incompatibility occurring between two or more individuals or groups. For example, one of the most influential theorists, Galtung (1973: 113), stresses the importance of irreconcilable motives and goals for the occurrence of conflict: "Ein Handlungssystem liegt dann im Konflikt, wenn das System zwei oder mehrere unvereinbare Zielzustände vereinigt."<sup>1</sup> Similar notions can be traced in linguistic studies of conflict talk. For instance, Shantz (1987:284) maintains that "a state of conflict denotes incompatible behaviours or goals."

Such motive-centred conceptions put the accent on the preconditions of conflict rather than on the process of conflict itself. However, as Mack & Snyder (1973: 41) have pointed out, "the presence or persistence of underlying source factors does not necessarily mean that conflict, as defined, will arise." Moreover, while such emphases provide an insight into possible causes of conflict, they do not clearly identify an occurrence of conflict in ongoing interaction. On the contrary, the notion of conflict as goal incompatibility allows conflict to exist in the absence of its expression: two individuals who have opposing goals but who do not act on or express their opposition nevertheless are considered to be in conflict. In addition, from this source-oriented perspective, conflict can also be one-sided. When one person views her goals as being in opposition to another's, conflict exists even if the second

person does not share the perception (cf. Fincham & Bradbury 1991). Finally, and most importantly for this study, while such motive-centred approaches reveal possible sources of conflict, the ways in which conflict emerges, progresses and ends remain concealed; the conflict itself remains the analytical black-box (Messmer 2003).

By contrast, other researchers focus on the expression of underlying incompatibilities in interaction as a defining characteristic of conflict. From this perspective, conflict is conceptualised as mutual opposition, the overt display of differences between (at least) two individuals or groups. For instance, Mack & Snyder (1973: 36) view social conflict as an interactional relationship. They assert that "conflict requires interaction among parties in which actions and counteractions are mutually opposed." Foss (1980: 123) defines conflict as "active opposition between parties holding contradictory values and claims over scarce status, power and resources" and emphasises that the "term conflict refers to the actual behaviour of group members." Similarly, while viewing participants' perception of incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals as potential sources of conflict, Frost & Wilmot (1978: 10) stress that these incompatibilities have to be somehow expressed, and define conflict in terms of communicative interaction:

relational conflict *is* communicative behaviour; it is impossible to have conflict without either verbal or non-verbal behaviour, or both. The 'expression' may be very subtle, but it must be present for the activity to be interpersonal conflict. ... All interpersonal conflicts are expressed struggles, even if that expression is nonverbal or very subtle.

In other words, there is no conflict without communication. In his linguistic study of children's disputes, Rehbock (1987: 177, fn1) also emphasises the process character of conflict, when he defines conflict as:

jede Interaktion, deren Teilnehmer antagonistische Handlungsziele und/oder beziehungs-, wert-, wissens-, urteilsbezogene Geltungsansprüche wechselseitig 'behaupten',

d.h. kundtun und wenigstens ansatzweise gegeneinander zu verteidigen bzw., durchzusetzen versuchen. Konflikte werden demnach konstituiert durch mindestens dreischnittige Sequenzen gegeneinander gerichteter (,konfliktärer') Handlungen ... Als ,Konfliktgespräch' möchte ich jedes Gespräch bezeichnen, in dem ein Konflikt konstituiert oder ... aktualisiert und in irgendeiner Form ausgetragen wird.

Here, conflict is defined as an interactional process that emerges from the moves and countermoves that constitute it. It is conceived as an expressed struggle over contradictory goals, interests, values, and/or resource distributions, which arises from the perception of incompatible wants, goals, behaviours, etc. The incompatibility is expressed when the conflicting parties reciprocally oppose each others' actions or statements. In other words, the essence of conflict is interaction, as we can only realise that an opposition exists once we interact. The conceptualisation of conflict as the mutual display of opposition provides a much clearer focus than definitions that centre on possible causes of conflict and view conflict simply as the presence of incompatible interests or goals, i.e. as a state rather than a dynamic process.

While Rehbock (1987) differentiates between conflict and its verbal enactment (i.e. conflict talk), Bavelas et al. (1985) go one step further. On the assumption that the nature of a relationship is immanent in the participants' communication (Bateson 1972, 1982; Danzinger 1976; Millar & Rogers 1976; Rogers & Farace 1975; Sluzki & Beavin 1980; Watzlawick et al. 1967),<sup>2</sup> they equate interpersonal conflict with the conversational (inter)activity of arguing:

Most interpersonal conflict is verbal, not physical; the conflict is the argument itself. Thus, to analyze such dialogue is to approach and study the phenomenon most directly. In linguistic terms, interpersonal conflict is a speech event; it is performative in that saying equals doing. The argument, quarrel, insults, or disagreement are the conflict. In other words, people do not relate, then talk; rather, they relate in talk (Duncan 1967: 249); the relationship is the exchange of messages (Bateson 1972: 275). (Bavelas et al. 1985: 9)

This view is echoed by Garvey & Shantz (1992: 93) in their review on studies of children's disputes: "Conflict is considered here as a social activity, created and conducted primarily by means of talking."

In keeping with this interactional view of language as the means for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and for performing socially organised interactions between individuals, I view interpersonal conflict as an emergent process, which is jointly accomplished by the participants in and through talk-in-interaction. Therefore, rather than analyse why people conflict and with what outcomes, we should examine how people conflict, i.e. the interactional procedures participants employ to accomplish the activity (cf. also Bavelas et al. 1985; Gruber 1996a; Messmer 2003). Consequently, the analysis of the participants' verbal exchanges becomes the principal means of investigating conflict. In the present study, the emphasis is thus on the interactive processes through which actual conflicts emerge and develop in order to study conflict as a structured and functional (inter)activity in and through which participants construct social reality (cf. Goffman 1959, 1963; Berger and Luckmann 1966).

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**Notes for chapter 3:**

<sup>1</sup> For similar views cf. also Coser (1956); Deutsch (1971, 1973a, b); Fincham & Bradbury (1991); Thomas (1976); and Waln (1982).

<sup>2</sup> Following Bateson (1951, 1972, 1982), Watzlawick et al. (1967) propose that every message has a content (report) aspect and a relational (command) aspect. The content aspect conveys information. At the same time, on the relational level, interactors offer definitions of self and other and their position relative to one another and, thus, of their relationship. Thus, each message in an interaction serves either as the definition, confirmation or redefinition of the nature of the interactors' relationship. On this view, the communication process is essentially a negotiation process whereby individuals reciprocally define their relationships and themselves. As Danziger (1976: xiii-xiv) puts it, it is "the process of communication which constitutes the ongoing interrelationship between individuals."

The fundamental concept in social science is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept of physics.

(Bertrand Russell, *Power: A new social analysis*)

#### **4 Power in (conflict) interaction**

Previous research has shown that verbal conflicts perform a range of social functions. Many scholars agree with Simmel's (1955/1908; cf. also Coser 1956) observation that conflict provides a central force for the constitution of social relations.<sup>1</sup> Proposals about the basic dimensions of social relationships all include the concept of power or the comparable terms control or dominance (cf. Danziger 1976; Emery 1992; Jacob 1975; Millar & Rogers 1976, 1987, 1988; Russel 1938/1969; Rogers 1998; Rogers & Millar 1988; Tannen 1994c, 2001, 2003; Thimm & Kruse 1991; Watts 1991; Wiemann 1985; Wiemann & Krueger 1980). Status, leadership and authority have also been used to refer to the organisation of social order, but power is typically viewed as the "regnant construct" of the set (C. Berger 1985: 440). Hence, verbal conflicts are generally conceived of as arenas for the display and negotiation of power (cf. for instance, Emery 1992; Emihovich 1986; Genishi & di Paolo 1982; Goodwin 1980, 1982, 1983, 1990, 1993; Hofer et al. 1991, 1993; Katriel 1985; Mack & Snyder 1973; Maynard 1985b; Millar et al. 1984; Pikowsky 1993; Ross & Conant 1992; Vuchinich 1984, 1987, 1990).<sup>2</sup>

While there is substantial agreement about the fundamental significance of power, there is much less agreement on how to define the concept (cf. C. Berger 1980; Davis 1988; Kramarae et al. 1984b; Hutchby 1996a,b; Ledyaev 1997; Locher 2004; Lukes 1974, 1978, 1979, 1988; Millar & Rogers 1988; Rogers & Millar 1979; Rollins & Bahr 1976; Safilios-Rothchild 1970; Thimm & Kruse 1991; Thimm et al. 1995; Thornborrow 2002; Watts 1991; Wrong 1968, 1979). Due to the scope of this study, a comprehensive overview and detailed discussion of the various different conceptualisations of power cannot be provided here. However, some of the major differences in theories on power can be summed up as follows: (1) Power is a potential, capacity, ability or dispositional property that does not have to be actualised (Weber 1947; Giddens 1976; Wrong 1988, 1993 and Morriss 1987). Power is actual social behaviour; to have power in relation to a subject is to exercise power over the subject.

Unused potential is not power, since power implies a successful use of the potential (e.g. Dahl 1957, 1986). (2) Power involves intention (will, purpose, objective); it is the production of consciously intended social effects (Dahl 1957; Russel 1938; Winter 1973; Wrong 1988, 1993). There is no inherent connection between power and intention, motivation or wanting (Millar & Rogers 1988; Giddens 1976, 1979). Power can be both intentional and unintentional; individuals might exercise considerable influence over others without intending to do so but still be credited with possessing power over the others in question (Betts 1993; Cartwright 1959; Emerson 1962; 1972; Gibson 1971; Huston 1983; Lukes 1974; Mokken & Stokman 1976; Nagel 1975; Oppenheim 1961; 1981). (3) Power belongs to the individual (Dahl 1969). Power belongs to collectivities (Arendt 1970, 1986; Parsons 1969, 1986). Power does not belong to anyone, but is a feature of social systems (Foucault 1980). (4) Conflict is a necessary condition of power (Bachrach & Baratz 1963; Dahl 1957; Etzioni 1968; Weber 1947). Power usually involves conflict, but does not have to (Baldwin 1978; Oppenheim 1981; Ledyaeu 1997). (5) Power is tied to domination and repression (Dahl 1957, 1969; Weber 1947). Power is productive and enabling (Arendt 1970, 1986; Foucault 1980; Morris 1987; Parsons 1969, 1986). Power can be both repressive (power over) and enabling (power to) (Fairclough 1998; Grillo 2000; Ng & Bradac 1993; Zelditch 1992). For a detailed review and discussion of basic views on power cf. Clegg (1989), Davis (1988), Ledyaeu (1997), Locher (2004), and Lukes (1978).

Many conceptualisations of power (e.g. Bachrach & Baratz 1970, 1993; Dahl 1957, 1969; Lukes 1974; Morriss 1987; Watts 1991; Wrong 1988) are rooted in Weber's classic definition:<sup>3</sup>

Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. (Weber 1947: 152)

Compare this with the definitions of power given by several linguists, who set out to examine power and its manifestations in language (use). For instance, in their classic linguistic study on address terms and power, Brown & Gilman (1960: 255) state that "one

person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other." Similarly, Fowler (1985: 61) defines power as "the ability of people and institutions to control the behavior and material life of others." Extending the scope of power, Johnson (1976: 100) contends that "interpersonal power may be defined as the ability to get another person to do or to believe something he or she would not have necessarily done or believed spontaneously."

According to these definitions, power is the potential ability of one actor to get her way and to control (influence) another's actions and/or beliefs. This potential rests on participants' access to power resources (bases of power), which are mobilised by the actors involved in the course of their interaction in order to exert control. These include occupation of certain social positions, attribution of power by others, age, expert knowledge, possession of information, economic resources, and many others.<sup>4</sup> However, this ability or capacity to control others and influence social outcomes can be made manifest only in interpersonal dynamics. Thus, power is not a property or an attribute of individuals but an "inherent component" of social interaction (Giddens 1981). Moreover, power is not a static social category that is imposed by some pre-existing social structure; rather it is a dynamic relationship that is constantly (re)produced or modified in and through social interaction.

A large body of research has attempted to uncover the interrelationship of interaction and social organisation, of talk and social structure. Crucial to much thinking on this issue is Giddens' (1976, 1981, 1984) notion of the "duality of structure." Rather than viewing people's actions and the relatively stable structures in social systems as disparate elements, Giddens (and other theorists such as Cicourel 1981 and Fairclough 1989) argues that the details of interaction and the features of social structure are intrinsically and reflexively related. Within the notion of the duality of structure, social structure is treated as both a resource for people's actions and an emergent outcome of those actions. Structures are described as "sets of rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems" (Giddens 1984: 23). In the course of their interaction, actors draw upon pre-

existing structures by mobilising resources, and, in that process, reproduce or transform these social structures. Thus, structural aspects of society both operate as resources for and are products of social interaction.

Olson and Cromwell (1975) have suggested a model of power that is consistent with Giddens' notion of the duality of structure. They view power as a generic construct consisting of three different but interrelated domains: (1) power base, i.e. the potential to affect social outcomes; a capacity which primarily depends on the resources each participant brings to an interaction. (2) power process, i.e. the dynamic interaction process within which control attempts are exerted and accepted or resisted; and (3) power outcomes, i.e. the actual outcomes of interaction. The three domains are closely interconnected, since the (assumed) potential to influence affects the actual process of interaction, which in turn affects outcomes; and the accumulating "history" of outcomes, again, partially determines the potential to influence.<sup>5</sup>

Correspondingly, Linell & Luckmann (1991) distinguish between "exogenous" and "endogenous" asymmetries, as two interdependent elements. Exogenous asymmetries are imposed or imported from outside; they are social-structural conditions for interaction, which are derived from social power and pre-established as constraints on interaction. Endogenous asymmetries, on the other hand, are dialogue-produced, i.e. interactively and dynamically achieved by the participants in and through interaction. Exogenous and endogenous asymmetries are mutually dependent:<sup>6</sup>

Asymmetries dependent on extrinsic sources must be occasioned, reconstructed, sustained or confirmed in actual discourse, thus re-established in situ, and, conversely, dialogue-generated asymmetries are constrained by predetermined conditions (social structures existing prior to the interaction). (Linell & Luckmann 1991: 10)

The upshot of this is that we cannot adequately understand global phenomena such as power without explicit reference to the actual local practices of social interaction through which such structures are brought into being, and without which they would not exist. But at the same time, interaction does not take place in a vacuum, nor

are structural phenomena created anew in each new interaction. Past practices and regularities inform people's actions, while those actions in turn recursively recreate (and also potentially change) the macro-structural frameworks that partially shape them. In other words, structural phenomena such as relations of power are constantly (re)produced, and transformed by the participants in the course of interaction. Thus, in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of power we have to take into account contextual factors such as the participants' socio-cultural and personal background(s), their interactional history, their social roles (e.g. mother vs. daughter) and the related rights and obligations as well as the details of the ongoing interaction.<sup>7</sup>

That is to say, power relationships are joint interactional accomplishments; they are interactively and dynamically achieved, maintained, and transformed by the participants in and through interaction by drawing on various resources (both intrinsic and extrinsic to the interaction) to influence each other and affect social outcomes. And a prime locus for the (re)construction and negotiation of power relationships is conflict interaction, i.e. the open clash of control attempts and resistance.

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#### Notes for chapter 4:

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Newell & Stutman (1989/1990: 156) maintain that "since social status and role may be ambiguous in any given situation or relationship, the social confrontation episode is a way in which to enact or negotiate the relationship." For similar views see, for instance, Grimshaw (1990b: 284), and Muntigl & Turnbull (1998: 226).

<sup>2</sup> Intimacy (closeness, solidarity) is assumed to be another central relationship dimension (cf. Emery 1992; Millar & Rogers 1976, 1987, 1988; Rogers 1998; Rogers & Millar 1988; Tannen 1994c, 2001, 2003), and thus another aspect of relationships that is displayed and negotiated in verbal conflict. In her study of arguments between American Jews, Schiffrin (1984) suggests that arguing can serve as an important means conveying sociability among adults. Building on Simmel's (1908/1955, 1911/1961) distinction between the form and content of social relations and his notion of sociability, she defines sociable argument as a "speech activity in which a polarising form has a ratificatory meaning" (331). This inversion of meaning and form is common: The "ritual insults" and "verbal duels" described by Abrahams (1970); Dundes et al. (1972); Edwards & Sienkewicz (1990); Fox (1977); Gossen (1976); Katriel (1985); Kotthoff (1995); Labov (1972a,b, 1974) Kochman (1968, 1970, 1972, 1981, 1983); Mitchell-Kernan (1972); and Tolosana (1978) turn on this very transformation. Although the sociable arguments in Schiffrin's data are less formalised than ritual insults, they appear to have a similar function: "They seem designed to show that the interactants' relationship is close enough to withstand what would be considered by outsiders to be verbal assaults" (Schiffrin 1984: 331). As indicated above, the speakers in Schiffrin's data did not use disagreement to reach common ground; they seemed to value the arguments as processes and activities in their own right rather than for their outcome. Byrnes (1986) and Koffhoff (1989, 1990, 1992b, 1993a) have reported a similar observations for Germans, Kakavá (1993a, b) for Greeks, Kochman (1981) for African Americans, and Kotthoff (1984, 1989, 1991, 1992b, 1993c) and Tannen (1990a, 1994b, 1998) for men. These findings suggest that in some "communities of practice" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999) arguing may be a practice by means of which participants display and maintain their solidarity and closeness.

<sup>3</sup> However, in the 1960s and 70s, the Weberian view of power was challenged by interpretations of power that were substantially different. For instance, Parsons (1969, 1986) views power as the capacity to achieve social and general societal objectives. Similarly, Arendt (1970) defines power as the "ability to act and to carry out concerted actions." She argues that the traditional conceptualisation of power as the potential of exerting some kind of influence upon people's behaviour or thoughts reduces power to domination and thus merely describes what power relations become in conflicting contexts. To her, power is a property of groups, not individuals. People create power collectively through their communicative action and interaction. Power, then, is coordinated action in pursuit of collective goals, and as such is equal to empowerment.

Foucault (1980) also criticises existing conceptualisations as too negative and narrow, reducing power to repressive force. He claims that "what makes power hold good, and what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only

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weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (119). Rather than view power as a property of individuals or collectivities, Foucault sees it as an omnipresent and neutral force, implicated and implemented by means of discursive practices. He describes power as "something which circulates ... something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (98).

<sup>4</sup> There is general agreement among researchers that the bases of power are numerous and varied and that there is no universal resource of power. There have been several attempts to establish all possible bases of power, and many different classifications of power resources have been suggested (cf. Bacharach & Lawler 1981; Dahl 1961; Etzioni 1971; Hillmann 1994; Lasswell & Kaplan 1959; Ledyaev 1997; Marshall 1994; and others).

<sup>5</sup> For an uptake and extension of this model cf. Rogers-Millar & Millar (1979) and Spitz (2001).

<sup>6</sup> For similar distinctions cf. Thornborrow (2002) and Weber (1998).

<sup>7</sup> For similar views of the interplay of micro- and macro-structural aspects, of global and local contextual factors, of diachronic and synchronic phenomena and the importance of both for the analysis of power cf. also Kotthoff (1993c) and Thornborrow (2002).

Methods and means cannot be separated  
from the ultimate aim. (Emma Goldman)

## 5 Methodology

As discussed above, in this study, (interpersonal) conflict is viewed as an emergent process, which is jointly and sequentially accomplished by the participants in and through talk-in-interaction. Conflict provides an important arena for the constitution of social relations, and in particular for the negotiation of power relationships. Power relationships are interactively and dynamically achieved, maintained, and transformed by the participants in and through (conflict) interaction by drawing on various resources - or bases of power - (e.g. social status, age, expert knowledge, economic resources, etc.) to exert control over each other and affect social outcomes. Thus, while power is not a static social category that is imposed by some pre-existing social structure, it is nevertheless also grounded in social structures that exist prior to/ are external to interaction. Hence, in order to examine the interactive sequential procedures by means of which participants jointly accomplish conflict and thereby (re)construct and negotiate social (power) relationships, we need an analytic framework that takes into account both local (micro) aspects of talk-in-interaction and global (macro) aspects of social structure. There are various approaches to the analysis of socially situated (verbal) interaction and several conceptualisations of the relationship between context and language (use),<sup>1</sup> which have entered into my analysis.

One approach to the study of the relationship between language use and socio-cultural context assumes that the extra-linguistic context manifests itself in the interaction and argues that in order to investigate language in actual social settings it is necessary to provide a description of those settings. Hymes (1962, 1964, 1972a, b, 1974) developed a schema for analysis of the socio-cultural context of verbal interactions that has as its prime unit of analysis the speech event. The term "speech event" refers to "activities ... that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech" (Hymes 1972a: 56). Speech events include interactions such as a conversation at a party, ordering a meal, a lecture at university, debates or discussions of various kinds, etc. Any speech event comprises several components and these are listed in what has

come to be known as the SPEAKING grid, which is illustrated in figure 1.

**Figure 1: the SPEAKING grid (adapted from Hymes 1972a)**

<b>S</b>	setting	where the speech event is located in time and space
<b>P</b>	participants	who takes part in the speech event and in what role (e.g. speaker/addressee/ audience/eavesdropper)
<b>E</b>	ends	what the purpose and the goals/ outcomes of the speech event are
<b>A</b>	act sequence	what speech acts make up the speech event, and what order they are performed in
<b>K</b>	key	the tone and manner of performance (serious or joking, sincere or ironic, etc.)
<b>I</b>	instrumentalities	what channel or medium of communication is used (e.g. speaking, singing, writing, drumming, etc.) and what language/variety is selected from the community's repertoire
<b>N</b>	norms of interaction and interpretation	the rules and norm for producing and interpreting speech acts
<b>G</b>	genres	textual categories, i.e. what 'type' does a speech event belong to and what other pre-existing conventional forms of speech are drawn on or 'cited' in producing appropriate contributions to talk (e.g. do people quote from mythology or scripture?)

Hymes argues that the values of these components on any given occasion determine members' use and interpretation of language. The analysis of these components of a speech event is central to what became known as the ethnography of communication or the ethnography of speaking, with the ethnographer's aim being to discover rules of appropriateness in speech events. In other words, within the anthropological approach of ethnography of communication, socio-cultural background knowledge is seen as revealed in the performance of speech events. These are in form and content culture specific and

reflect culture specific norms. In essence, variables extrinsic to interaction such as, for instance, the participants' social statuses, are viewed as critically relevant in shaping the talk.

A rather different approach to context can be found in the work on the sequential organisation of conversation by Sacks and his co-workers. They take a social constructivist position, claiming that social reality is ultimately shaped through (conversational) interaction and that analysis of the construction of social organisation requires looking at local interactive processes. The approach adopted within ethnomethodological conversation analysis (CA), aims to demonstrate the recursivity of action and structure at the empirical level by focusing on the sequential details of talk-in-interaction.

As an off-shoot of ethnomethodology, CA views talk as a structurally organised form of social (inter)action, as meaningful conduct, which is jointly produced and understood by the participants based on shared procedures or methods. It approaches naturally occurring conversation with the twin aims of describing the structural organisation informing its production, and thereby explicating the procedures and resources used by interactants to engage in mutually intelligible courses of action, i.e. members' own methods of production and interpretation.<sup>2</sup> It is concerned with how the jointly organised activity of talk-in-interaction is carried out, and how participants produce joint accomplishments such as the organisation of turn-taking, conversational openings and closings, storytelling, disputes, news interviews, medical diagnosis, and the complementary roles of interviewer and interviewee or doctor and patient, and so on.

It is argued that a key resource participants use to build and understand talk is the precise positioning of an utterance within an environment of other talk or action. Thus, sequences are the prime focus of analysis and each contribution to interaction is understood as a step in a joint activity and is assumed to be contextually oriented, in that the meaning of any utterance (action) is always dependent upon the context, and in particular the local context or co-text, of its production. As noted by Heritage & Atkinson (1984: 11):

in examining talk the analyst is immediately confronted with an organization which is implemented on a turn-by-turn basis, and through which a context of publicly displayed and continuously updated intersubjective understandings is systematically sustained.

CA treats talk-in-interaction as the means by which social organisation is mutually constructed and maintained in interaction, and hence as the major site in which we can examine agents' orientation to an evocation of social context, in the sense of the features of social context informing their activities. Taken on their own, most utterances tend to be vague and sometimes even unintelligible; members need to draw upon the context in which the talk takes place in order to create and sustain orderly and meaningful interaction. In other words, utterances are not produced as isolated actions but as actions embedded in an ongoing context of interaction, and they can only be understood with reference to that context of interaction. Within the framework of CA, the local sequential environment is assumed to constitute a core aspect of the context the participants use to make sense of the talk they are hearing and to engage in the activities they are performing. Hence, contributions to an interaction cannot be separated from the sequences in which they occur within a concrete conversation. This idea is expressed by Sacks et al. (1974: 36) as follows:

A turn is to be thought of as a turn-in-a-series, with the potential of the series being made into a sequence. Turns display gross organizational features that reflect their occurrence in a series. They regularly have a three-part-structure: a part which addresses the relation of a turn to a prior, a part involved with what is occupying the turn, and a part which addresses the relation of the turn to a succeeding one.<sup>3</sup>

Each turn is seen as having a Janus-like nature, as being both context-shaped and context-renewing (Heritage 1984: 242). On the one hand, utterances, and the social actions they embody, are context shaped because they are produced and understood in light of the context set up by preceding actions and interpretations. This contextual aspect of utterances is significant both because speakers

routinely draw upon it as a resource in designing their utterances and because hearers must also draw upon the local context of utterances in order to make adequate sense of what is said. On the other hand, utterances and actions are context-renewing because each in turn forms part of the context in which next actions will be produced and understood, so that the interactional contextual framework is constantly renewed (or altered) by each successive action. In other words, each turn is both responding to what came before and initiating what will follow. In this way, the interactional context is continually being developed with each successive action. Likewise, each current action will function to renew (i.e. sustain or transform) any broader or more generally existing sense of context which is the object of the participants' orientations and actions.<sup>4</sup> There is then another sense, in which (inter)action is simultaneously shaped by and shapes context: in everyday talk, speakers respond to their sense of the particular occasion of talk - who is interacting with whom, where, when and why - fashioning their contributions according to the ongoing context, and the conduct of talk in turn constructs the identity of the ongoing context for the interactants.

The conversation analytic view of context involves the break with what has been termed the "bucket" (Drew & Heritage 1992: 19) or "container" (Hutchby 1996: 11) model of context, in which some pre-established social framework is considered as 'containing' the participants' actions. Instead, CA puts forward a dynamic perspective, in which context is viewed as "both the project and product of the participants' own actions" (Drew & Heritage 1992: 19) and thus as inherently locally produced and changeable at any moment. Context is both attended to in discourse and constituted as a dynamic phenomenon through discourse. Thus, the emphasis is placed not on how the social context somehow determines the activities, strategies and procedures adopted within it, but on how those activities, strategies and procedures make available (both for participants and analysts) the participants' orientation to, and reproduction of the interactionally relevant features of the context. Rather than constituting a frame that shapes the speech within it, aspects of social context stand in a reflexive relationship to the talk; they are invoked within the talk while

simultaneously providing resources for its appropriate understanding. The external context is thus invoked and shaped within the details of the very talk that it is context to, and because of its ties to the emerging sequential organisation of the talk, such context is not fixed and static but rather fluid and dynamic. In brief, the sequential organisation of talk provides a key locus for the analysis of context. To quote Zimmerman (1992: 35):<sup>5</sup>

the sequential environment of talk provides the indispensable context for participants' understanding, appreciation, and use of what is being said, meant, and, most important, done in and through the talk.

CA assumes that people's understanding of 'what we are doing here', i.e. of the interaction they are engaged in, the actions performed, the matters talked about as well as participant's identities and relationships, is based on a close monitoring of design specifics, notably the positioning of items in relation to prior items within sequences and the specific format of items (the format specifics being describable at any of the conventional levels of linguistic description, such as syntax, lexis, prosody, as well as taking into account accompanying non-verbal behaviour, if available to the analyst). The form, content, and sequential placement of utterances continuously reflect interactants' understandings of the previous utterance and also of the kind of interpersonal relationship they perceive at that very stage of the interaction.

While CA undoubtedly takes into account the immediate sequential context when analysing stretches of talk, the reference to the wider situational context for an analytic interpretation of discourse data is problematic within the strictly empirical conversation analytic framework. Social context is not invoked as "an external interpretative resource" (Heritage 1984: 283) but rather is endogenously grounded in the detail of participants' actions within talk in interaction. A major requirement is that the contextual features considered relevant are "those that persons in the setting are themselves demonstrably aware of and/or oriented to in the course of their actions" (Pasthas 1995: 46). Conversation analysts have argued that one cannot assume the relevance of

particular contextual features, for example specific categorisations of participants or events, unless it can be demonstrated within the talk being examined that the participants themselves are orienting to such phenomena as a constitutive feature of the activities they are engaged in. This is an understanding of context that is based on analyses of participants' displayed orientations to features of context, as shown in special design features of talk. In a series of articles, Schegloff (1987a, 1989, 1991, 1992b, c, 1997) argued that aspects of social context (such as the participants' gender, age, their social roles and relationships and the related rights and obligations, their interactive history, etc.) should be treated as relevant to analysis only insofar as they feature as a participants' concern; that is, only inasmuch as they are invoked, formulated, oriented to, or displayed in actual interaction. Research conclusions should be disciplined by attending to the procedural consequentiality of any claimed contextual particular. Schegloff argues as follows: if an aspect of the external context, such as the setting or the participants' social roles, can be shown to be relevant for the participants on the basis of the participants' behaviour, then the analysis has to deal with the means by which the participants within the interaction enact this relevance or how they invoke the setting, rather than describe the setting itself. If, however, the relevance of the external context can not be shown to be relevant for the participants in terms of their behaviour, then the analyst has no objective grounds to determine which of the potentially infinite number of contextual elements should be included in an analytic description. Consequently, any description of and analytical reference to the external context is either irrelevant or of questionable validity.<sup>6</sup> Thus, for instance, the fact that a mother is talking to her daughter, is considered irrelevant. It is assumed that in the stepwise development of the interaction the participants will display in their behaviours which contextual parameters are made relevant at which points in the interaction. To conclude, CA takes the position that if structure informs talk, and talk simultaneously constitutes structure, then those processes must be observable in the details of talk itself. Participants' interaction has to reveal the "demonstrable relevance to the

participants" (Schegloff 1992c: 215) of the social-structural context.

Because CA stresses the local character of situated actions, it analyses the features of observable communicative interaction in a very detailed way. Thereby CA is able to demonstrate how participants jointly accomplish any meaningful interaction via the subtle reflexive linking between turns at talk. However, the purely social constructivist position of CA on context, the methodological restriction of analysis to the mechanisms of communicative interaction and the related exclusion of pre-existing social structures and relationships in the analysis of talk-in-interaction has its drawbacks and has been widely criticised in the literature.

Goffman (1981: 14-15) called the conversation analysts "communication engineers," because they only capture "the sheer physical constraints of any communication system." Especially the conversation analytic postulate to restrict investigation to the analysis of local contexts provoked Goffman's (1981: 32ff) critique: How can CA account for those elements which are not observable in the momentary interaction (a problem especially pertinent for those conversation analysts who restrict themselves to the audio channel)? And how can CA account for those elements of the situation which lie beyond the few communicative turns under investigation? Goffman argues that in stressing the local character of actions, CA ignores the broader social context in which they occur. Similarly, Gumperz criticises conversation analysts for conducting the investigation of the process of conversational management "without making any a priori assumptions about the social and cultural background of participants" (1982a: 158). This argument is even more accentuated by Bourdieu (1990a, b) who criticises CA for its "pointilist hyper-empirism." In his view, CA falls prey to a radical situationalism, which takes actors to construct social reality in every moment anew without being able to rely on rituals, conventions and institutions.

While participants actively shape context in and through interaction, this does not mean that context is created from scratch within the interaction so that larger structural patterns in a society can be ignored. That is, although social identities and relationships are actively and jointly constructed by participants in and through interaction, they do not need to be established

afresh every time. Instead, in face-to-face interaction participants invoke structural patterns whose existence extends well beyond the local encounter. Consequently, we have to take into account the interactive construction of social meaning and organisation and its relation to pre-existing social structures and hierarchies, integrating both local, micro-level aspects of context (such as the structural details of turns and sequences) and global macro-level aspects of context (such as participants' social roles and relationships as well as their shared interactional history).

Kotthoff (1993c, 1994, 1998) calls into question the conversation analytic claim that all the categories that are relevant for the analysis of talk-in-interaction are displayed and oriented to by the participants, and can thus be gathered solely from the interaction itself. She points out that power asymmetries, for example, are not always manifest in the surface structure of conversations because they may be papered over, e.g. for reasons of politeness. Therefore, she argues, in order to arrive at an adequate interpretation of what participants are doing in a given interaction, analysts must (and do) draw on their socio-cultural world knowledge<sup>7</sup>: the more acquainted the analysts are with the circumstances in which the conversations take place, the more appropriate their analyses will be. She emphasises, however, that the integration of ethnographic information does not replace detailed analysis of the data, but rather complements it.

Wood and Kroger (2000: 25) also advocate an interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis. While their claim that researchers have to ground themselves in "participants' concerns, with the way that they themselves work up the issues at hand" as they enact their own conversational events, they note that the meaning underlying a communicative act might not be analysable solely through empirically gathered, naturally occurring, moment-to-moment talk.<sup>8</sup>

Moerman (1998), too, maintains that talk-extrinsic data are needed to understand talk and the social work that it accomplishes. He suggests that CA "provides some foothold on the technical specification of context as significant place" but does not take the further (and necessary) step of finding "the meaning and consequence of a conversational event" (29). He suggests that these meanings reside in the history of interactions, in participants'

"relationships and biography" and other data external to the details of talk and interaction. Therefore, he proposes a culturally contexted conversation analysis (CCCA), i.e. a synthesis of ethnography, "with its concern for context, meaning, history, and intention" with conversation analysis and its "sometimes arid and always exacting techniques ... for locating culture in situ" (xi).<sup>9</sup>

In line with the above authors, the present analysis of mother-daughter disputes will draw on the analytical methods (and copious findings) of CA without sharing its methodological restriction to the formal sequential analysis of talk-in-interaction and its exclusion of the external. In recent years, the framework of CA has been extended by a number of researchers in ways that allow for the consideration of macro-level, socio-cultural aspects of context as resources for the interpretation of verbal interaction. Many researchers who integrate micro-analyses of verbal interaction with ethnographic information (e.g. about the setting, the participants' social roles and relationships, etc.) work in the tradition of interactional or interpretive sociolinguistics (cf. Auer & di Luzio 1984, 1992; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz 1976, 1994, 1996; Gumperz 1982a, b, c, 1984, 1992a, b, 1999; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1981; Kotthoff 1996b, 1998, Tannen 1989; Schifffrin 1994, 1996). Interactional sociolinguistics (IS) developed from the ethnography of communication (Gumperz & Hymes 1972), but it is also based in sociology, ethnomethodology, discourse analysis, anthropology, linguistics and pragmatics/politeness theory, and thus shares the concerns (and some of the analytical concepts and procedures) of all these fields with the study of language (use), society and culture.

IS represents an approach to discourse which attempts to 'bridge the gap' between top-down theoretical approaches, which privilege macro-societal conditions in accounting for communicative practices, and those which provide a bottom-up social constructivist account, such as CA (Gumperz 1999: 453-454). IS shares many analytical procedures and notions with CA, such as the view of social structure and meaning as jointly constructed in (verbal) interaction. Both traditions work with data recorded in natural situations; like conversation analysts, researchers working within the framework of interactional or interpretive sociolinguistics do not take isolated sequences, but rather sequences of action as their

starting point. IS draws heavily on conversation analytic techniques in its micro-analytic approach to verbal interaction, but unlike CA, IS views context as extending beyond the immediate context of the discourse sequence (the local context), explicitly recognises the wider socio-cultural context impacting on participants' production and interpretation of (inter)actions.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the structural approach taken by conversation analysts, interactional sociolinguists pursue a functional perspective (Kotthoff 1998; Schiffrin 1994). They do not primarily aim to uncover structural patterns of conversation. Instead they seek to reconstruct how social identities and social relationships are interactively created, confirmed and modified, how socio-cultural norms of interaction (e.g. politeness norms) are (re)constructed and transformed by participants by drawing on linguistic aspects of utterances, which relate what is said to shared background knowledge of social, cultural, linguistic and interactional norms, and to specify the background knowledge that needs to be shared in order to maintain conversational involvement, i.e. to interpret correctly what the conversation is about, what communicative goals are being pursued, what others say, mean and do, and to respond in an appropriate way.

John Gumperz, who is generally regarded as the founder of IS, characterises the approach as building from a conversation analytic approach in the following way:

We must turn to a speaker-oriented perspective and ask what its speakers and listeners must know or do in order to take part in a conversation or to create and sustain conversational involvement. By formulating the basic issues in this way, the focus shifts from the analysis of conversational forms or sequential patterns as such to the necessarily goal-oriented interpretive processes the underlie their production. (Gumperz 1992c: 306).

The interactional sociolinguistic approach is characterised by methodological variety. For the empirical analysis of verbal interaction, IS integrates micro-analysis and ethnographic information; it combines detailed sequential analyses à la CA with reflections on socio-cultural structures, power relationships and ideologies, emotion politics, and relational politics/politeness

(Auer & di Luzio 1992; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz 1994, 1996; Kotthoff 1996c, 1998; Ochs 1989). Some researchers elicit the participants' perceptions and include these in their analyses (Erickson & Schulz 1982; Tannen 1984). Many studies use detailed linguistic and sequential analyses in the investigation of code switching (Heller 1982; Auer 1984a, b, 1995), prosody (Auer 1996, Selting 1994; Cooper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996), conversational coherence/discourse markers (Schiffrin 1985b, 1986, 1987), and conversational style (Kakavá 1993a, b, 2002; Kallmeyer 1994, 1995; Kallmeyer & Keim 1996; Keim 1995, 1997; Keim & Schwitalla 1989; Kotthoff 1989b; Sandig 1983; Sandig & Selting 1996, 1997; Schiffrin 1984, 1985a, 1990; Schwitalla 1995; Tannen 1984, 1986a, 1989, 1990a 1994a, b). Other research interests lie in the field of intercultural communication (Gumperz 1982a, b, c; Kotthoff 1989a, Günthner 1993; Scollon & Scollon 1995) and institutional communication (Wodak 1981a, b; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982; Jacquemet 1996).

In the following I will give a brief overview of the basic assumptions and concepts of the interactional sociolinguistic approach to the analysis of verbal interaction as developed by John Gumperz. He was centrally concerned with the importance of context in the production and interpretation of discourse. Gumperz' work is grounded in the assumption that the meaning, structure, and use of language are contextually, i.e. socially, culturally and situationally relative. The same utterance can be interpreted in many different ways given the context in which it occurred. As Gumperz explains, our (inter)actions take place against the background of - and are critically affected by - our socio-cultural and situational context. He suggests that, in order to understand these influences, we need to integrate what we know about grammar, culture, and linguistic and related interaction conventions into a general theory of verbal communication, which is built upon a single theoretical and methodological framework. The central concept of this framework, namely that of contextualisation,<sup>11</sup> and the related concepts of contextualisation cues, contextual presupposition and situated/conversational inference are part of Gumperz' integrated programme for the analysis of verbal communication and will be briefly discussed in the following.

The basic assumption on which the concept of contextualisation is based is that participants in an interaction use certain signs (contextualisation cues) to point to the background knowledge that is relevant for the appropriate interpretation of their activities. Only if the current behaviour is viewed against this background knowledge, does it acquire its context-specific social meaning. In other words, participants signal to each other the relevant context (aspects) for the interpretation of their behaviour. Roughly, contextualisation comprises all activities by means of which participants make relevant any aspect of context that, in turn, is responsible for the interpretation of a word, utterance or action in its particular place of occurrence.<sup>12</sup> Potentially relevant aspects of context include, for instance, the larger activity participants are engaged in (the "speech activity," or "activity type"), the small-scale activity or "speech act," the mood, tone or "key" in which the interaction is performed, the topic(s) of talk, but also the participant framework, comprising the roles of "speaker," "recipient," "bystander" etc., the participants' social identities (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, social roles) and relationships, and the sequential organisation of longer stretches of interaction (e.g. turn-taking and preference organisation).

The notion of contextualisation implies a dynamic and reflexive conceptualisation of context. As in CA, context is not understood as fixed, but as being continually reshaped in time. Moreover, contextualisation proposes a reflexive relationship between language (use) and context, in which language (use) is not determined by context but itself contributes in an essential way to the construction of context. In addition, it stresses the importance of socio-culturally specific background knowledge for the production and interpretation of interactional events and for the constitution of relevant contextual presuppositions. Gumperz emphasises this reflexive notion when he states that contrary to the notion that culture has a unidirectional influence on language or that language has a unidirectional influence on culture, "the two, to the extent that they could be considered as separate, are closely intertwined" (1992b: 51). Thus, language is not only affected by the context of its occurrence but is also responsible for the availability of the very context which is necessary to interpret the information it

conveys.<sup>13</sup> Hence, context is not simply a given in an interaction but the outcome of participants' joint efforts to make it available. It is not a collection of data about the material or social surroundings of the interaction (e.g. where/when the interaction takes place and/or who is participating in it) but a set of assumptions and expectations about what is relevant for the interaction at any given point in time. What is relevant in this sense may exclude or include certain aspects of the material and social environment of the interaction as they might be perceived by an outside observer, but it may also include aspects that are not available independent of the interaction. These emergent context parameters may include types of linguistic activities that are not predictable from the material or social environment of the interaction, but also facets of knowledge which, while they may be shared by the participants from the very beginning, have to be turned from imperceptible - and interactionally irrelevant - categories into commonly available grounds on which to conduct (and understand) the interaction. Thus, context aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, participant's social statuses and relationships and their interactional history, but also the local setting in which the interaction takes place can be treated as (ir)relevant categories in situated practice.<sup>14</sup> In this perspective, context is viewed as both existing independently of talk and as (re)created in and through talk; or as Auer (1992), using Giddens' (1976) terminology, puts it, context is both "brought along" to and "brought about" in communicative interaction.

Gumperz' approach to the analysis of verbal interaction coincides with (and is informed by) several others in this dynamic and reflexive view of context, most notably, Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology and Bateson's (1951, 1956, 1958, 1972) and Goffman's (1974/1986) work on "frames." But, as mentioned above, it also draws on various other approaches that investigate communication from different angles and with different methods of analysis.<sup>15</sup>

With ethnomethodology, he shares the view of social reality as interactively constructed by the participants in interaction and transfers this view to questions of context meaning and construction. Using ethnomethodological terminology, Gumperz himself

talks at various places about context as "accomplishment" or "achievement." He explicitly refers to Garfinkel's sociology and his notion of social knowledge which is revealed in and through interaction:

Garfinkel ... demonstrates that social knowledge cannot be adequately characterized in the forms of statistically countable, abstract categories such as scalar ratings of role, status or personality characteristics. He argues that social knowledge is revealed by the process of interaction itself and that interactants create their own social world by the way in which they behave. (Gumperz 1982: 158)

Goffman's analyses of face-to-face interaction provide an understanding of how language is situated in particular circumstances of social life and how it both reflects and adds meaning and structure to those circumstances. Goffman located the relationship between self and society at a micro-level of analysis, i.e. within the everyday encounters, interactions, and activities in which we routinely engage. Roughly, our identity is a product not only of social processes that operate at the level of social institutions (e.g. family, school, work) but of social processes that are embedded in the situations, occasions, encounters, and rituals of everyday life. These micro-level processes help organise and give meaning to our everyday behaviours and help provide us with a sense of self. By using certain behaviours (both verbal and nonverbal) we not only construct and sustain social interactions but also express our sense of who we are and who our co-participants are. Our everyday actions and interactions with one another thus play a crucial part in creating and maintaining our social identities, i.e. the roles we fill, the statuses we occupy, and our personal identities, i.e. the personalities we attribute to ourselves and others, and our relationships with others. The identities we adopt and attribute to others also help produce social order and stability, and thus help to give social institutions their meanings and foundational structures. Thus, a 'mother' is not a mother simply because she gave birth to a child and a 'daughter' is not a daughter because she was borne by her mother. Rather, both become incumbents of the complementary roles of 'mother' and

'daughter' through the ways in which they interact, taking on the respective rights and obligations of parent and child in this asymmetrical relationship. At the same time, their subscriptions to these social identities and the behaviours through which these identities are displayed reinforce the familial social structure. That is to say, although there may be a pre-existing repertoire of possible roles people can take over in a society, the actualisation of (one or more of) these roles has to be achieved in and through interaction, and is therefore changeable: 'mother' and 'daughter' may become 'two theatre-goers' or 'two chorus members' and vice versa.

Bateson (1951, 1956, 1958, 1972) was the first to introduce the idea that every interactional move incorporates signals that indicate how it is to be interpreted. His concept of meta-communication refers to the information interactants need to send off in addition to the message they want to convey, in order to indicate how their action or utterance is to be understood. Bateson formulated part of his theory based on his observation of otters 'playing' a fight and how they seem able to distinguish between potentially hostile moves that are meant to be merely playful and those that are truly aggressive; he wondered what kind of cues indicated to the participants of this pseudo-fight that there was no real fighting going on. He suggested that, in general, actions are framed as either serious or play by the meta-messages accompanying them, and that these framings are just as important as the messages themselves in determining how an interaction will unfold.<sup>16</sup>

Goffman (1974/1986) extended Bateson's concept of frames in order to explain more thoroughly the processes through which people create meaning in interaction. He suggested that individuals use information drawn from real experience (so-called "primary frameworks") as frames of reference, and he described framing as the largely subconscious process by which individuals "locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences" and define them in terms of the primary frameworks they are familiar with (1986: 21). He notes that how the play activity of animals Bateson observed

is closely patterned after something that already has a meaning in its own terms - in this case fighting ... Real fighting here serves as a model, a detailed pattern to follow ... the pattern for fighting is not followed fully, but rather is systematically altered in certain respects. In brief, there is a transcription or transportation - a *transformation* ... of a strip of fighting behaviour onto a strip of play.

(Goffman 1974/1986: 40-41, original emphasis)

Goffman (1981) later built on Bateson's notions of meta-message and framing to include in frame analysis the concept of "footing", i.e. the way participants relate to each other, the way they continually (re)position themselves within the ongoing interaction, thereby determining (i.e. framing) how the event unfolds. A key point for Goffman is that these footings are liable to shift and that a change in footing signals a change in the way a speaker positions herself vis-à-vis the interlocutor(s) and what is being talked about. He describes how "a change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up for ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance" (1981: 128). Changes in footing also, at times, indicate a change in the overall frame or the definition of an interaction (e.g. whether it is serious or play, or whether it is a friendly conversation or an argument).

According to Goffman, shifts in frame and footing (i.e. interpersonal alignments) are somehow indicated in the surface structure of the message, and interactants can be seen to react to them. Goffman (1986/1974: 44) linked framing to Hymes' (1962, 1972, 1974) notion of "key" (the tone or mood of a speech event). Goffman defined "keying" as a process of systematic alteration or transformation of a situation that shapes our understanding of what is happening during the speech event is shaped and that affects our interpretation and production of talk or activities within that event.<sup>17</sup> Keying, thus, is a framing procedure. For instance, in conversation, once an argumentative key has been introduced, i.e. once an argument frame has been established, anything we say will be interpreted as contributing to this frame. Likewise, we will orient our contributions to the ongoing interaction towards this frame. In other words, the dispute frame affects the production and

interpretation of conversational contributions. Goffman sees keying as a situated, interactive process, prompted by cues that establish (or bracket) where and when the transformation begins and ends.

Although they approach the idea of framing from different perspectives, Bateson's and Goffman's understanding of interpretive frames and of footing and keying as framing devices can be linked to Gumperz' theory of conversational inference, and in particular his notion of contextualisation cues. Gumperz introduced the notion of contextualisation cues, which he defined as "a system of verbal and nonverbal signs that both channel the progress of an encounter and affect the interpretation of intent" (1982a: 153). They are constellations of surface features of messages by means of which "speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes and follows" (1982: 131). Contextualisation cues are meta-pragmatic signs that serve to construct the contextual ground for situated interpretation, that signal to interlocutors and observes what the current activity is and how the constituent messages are to be understood and any on point in the ongoing interaction. Generally speaking, the class of contextualisation cues comprises all the form-related means, by which participants contextualise language, i.e. place what is being said into the proper context.<sup>18</sup> There is therefore no a priori restriction to the class of contextualisation cues. Speakers communicate and identify meta-messages through such features as, for example, prosodic phenomena (e.g. changes in loudness, intonation, variations in vowel length, stress or accenting, and pitch register shifts); paralinguistic signs (e.g. tempo, pausing and hesitation, conversational synchrony, including latching or overlapping turns and other "tone of voice" expressive cues); code or style switches; choice of lexical forms (such as endearment versus first name) or formulaic expressions; choice among syntactic options; sequential placement of utterances; etc., but also a number of non-verbal signs (e.g. facial expressions, gestures). These aspects of language and behaviour can all have similar contextualising functions.

The central concept of contextualisation theory is conversational inference, the process of interpretation, in which the participants draw situated inferences from contextualisation

cues, which relate what is said to contextual presuppositions, i.e. background knowledge, about the type of interaction they are engaged in, about the interpersonal relationships between participants as well as about what one's interlocutor intends to convey. Gumperz defines conversational inference as "the situated or context-bound process of interpretation, by means of which participants in an exchange assess others' intention, and on which they base their responses" (1982a: 153). Gumperz calls attention to the fact that, in contrast to the retrieval of referential meaning of an element, inferring is only possible within the specific context, in which the element occurs: "Situated interpretations are intrinsically context-bound and cannot be analysed apart from the verbal sequences in which they are embedded" (1992a: 232). Moreover, he emphasises that "our knowledge and use of contextualization cues is a function of shared interactive history and rests on socially based pre-suppositions" (1992b: 50). In other words, the appropriate use and interpretation of contextualisation cues requires both knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions (comprising both grammar and contextualisation), and socio-cultural knowledge, or knowledge of the world, which members of a given community acquire as a result of their interactive and conversational experience. In addition, Gumperz stresses that the result of the process of inference, i.e. the interpretation of the interlocutor's communicative intentions, of what s/he wants to convey or achieve with a specific utterance, cannot be called 'right' or 'wrong' objectively and independent of the context, but can only be assessed in terms of the ensuing progress of the interaction:<sup>19</sup>

What distinguishes successful from unsuccessful interpretations are not absolute, context-free criteria of truth value or appropriateness, but rather what happens in the interactive exchange itself, i.e. the extent to which proffered context bound inferences are shared, reinforced, modified or rejected in the course of an encounter.  
(Gumperz 1982a: 171)

That is to say, any interpretation the listener arrives at, far from being definite, is initially a tentative and temporary hypothesis, liable to revision at any time:

The judgements made at any one time are contingent judgements. They are either confirmed or disproved by what happens subsequently. If they are confirmed, our expectations are reinforced; if they are disconfirmed, we try to recode what we have heard and change our expectations or goals, outcomes and speakers' intent. (Gumperz 1982b: 18)

One of the key points of Gumperz' approach is the assumption that any understanding depends on inferences with regard to the interactional frame of the ongoing talk:

all understanding is framed understanding, ... it ultimately rests on contingent inferences made with respect to presuppositions concerning the nature of the situation, what is to be accomplished and how to be accomplished.  
(Gumperz 1992b: 43-44)

For the description of communicative situations, Gumperz draws on the terms (speech) event and (speech) activity or activity (type), which refer to two different levels of analysis: at the level of ethnographic description, units of verbal behaviour can be treated as speech events. The speech event (a category Gumperz adapted from the ethnography of communication) is an interaction-external category referring to "stretches of interaction bounded in time and space" (Gumperz 1992b: 44), or "longer strings of talk each of which is marked by a beginning, middle and an end."

Unlike (speech) events, which refer to interaction-external labels like "lecture" or "joke-telling," the speech activity or activity type<sup>20</sup> is an interaction-internal category, which accounts for "the constantly changing presuppositions in terms of which interaction is framed and constituent moves are interpreted" (Gumperz 1992b: 44). People constitute such contextual presuppositions "by experiences over time and culturally transmitted knowledge in relation to their shared environment" (1992b: 45). At this level of analysis, then, units of verbal behaviour are treated as "members', and for that matter also analysts' constructs with respect to which the interaction is managed and interpreted" (1992b: 44). Gumperz (1982a: 166) defines the speech activity as

a set of social relationships about a set of schemata in relation to some communicative goal. Speech activities can be characterized through descriptive phrases such as 'discussing politics', 'chatting about the weather', 'telling a story to someone' and 'lecturing about linguistics'. Such descriptions imply certain expectations about thematic progression, turn taking rules, form, and outcome of the interaction, as well as constraints on content.

As this definition implies, the speech activity or activity type comprises a set of structures of expectation,<sup>21</sup> and as such is highly conventional and culture specific and refers primarily to the participants' social relationships: "activity frames basically reflect conventionalized or stereotypical notions of interpersonal relationships" (1992b: 45). It is thus connected to the abstract cognitive concepts scripts and schemata which have been developed in discourse analysis: "the notion of activity is in many ways equivalent to the discourse analyst's schema, defined as knowledge of the world" (ibid, original emphasis). However, the (speech) activity is not a static accumulation of world knowledge like the schema in discourse analysis but a "dynamic process which develops and changes as participants interact" (1982a: 131); it does not presuppose constant contextual presuppositions but leaves room for dynamically changing and emerging contexts.<sup>22</sup>

To sum up so far, one of the key assumptions of Gumperz approach is that "all understanding, whether what is at issue is a word, a phrase or an utterance, rests on inferences made with reference to activity constructs" (1992b: 44). This does not mean, however, that the conveyed content directly depends on the given activity or is determined by it. Rather, the number of possible interpretations is restricted by the participants' expectations with regard to the activity type: "By channelling inferences so as to foreground or make relevant certain aspects of background knowledge and to underplay others" (1982a: 131, original emphasis) "socioculturally based notions of how an activity is accomplished constrain how something is interpreted. They do not deterministically specify the content of what is said" (1992b: 45).

As the prior discussion has shown, the interpretation of contextualisation cues is strongly influenced by the current activity frame. By the same token, the current frame or speech

activity is, at least in part, signalled by contextualisation cues. As discussed above, contextualisation cues guide the interpretation and lead to situated inferences. They enter into the inferential process at several interrelated levels: the global level of framing and the local level of speech acts. At the global level of framing, contextualisation cues signal what the (speech) activity is. They may raise expectations about what an exchange is about and what mutual rights and obligations apply, what is expected at any one point in the interaction, what communicative outcomes can be expected, what can be said explicitly and what is to be implied, what topics can be brought up and when, as well as what types of interpersonal relationships are involved and how they are signalled, (Gumperz 1989: 78; 1992a: 233; 1999: 463). As discussed above, such global expectations provide the grounds against which possible ambiguities, for instance, at the word or sequential level can be resolved.

At the local level, that is, the level of utterance, turn of speaking, interactional move or speech act, contextualisation cues enter into the assessment of illocutionary force of utterance or speakers' communicative intent. This level is concerned with "local inferences concerning what is intended with any one move and what is required by way of a response" (Gumperz 1999: 464). Using CA terminology, Gumperz states that this level deals with "what conversational analysts call 'sequencing'" (Gumperz 1982a: 232). At this level, the sequential context, i.e. the co-text of utterances or actions plays an important part. Gumperz (1982a: 208) notes that the meaning of contextualisation cues is ambiguous and therefore has to be co-constructed by the participants in the course of the interaction:

The mechanisms by which [contextual] information is signalled ... are inherently ambiguous, i.e. subject to multiple interpretations. In conversation such ambiguities are negotiated in the course of the interaction, through the manner in which second speakers respond to what they hear and through the reception that their countermoves receive.

Thus, (the analysis of) interlocutors' inferences about each others' meanings, requires close attention not only to what is said by one

party but also to how it is responded to by another. As Schifffrin (1996: 322) points out, "in fact, it is often the response to an utterance (rather than the utterance itself) that provides the most reliable clue to the interactional importance (as well as the situated inferences) of an utterance."

This view is analogous to what in CA is referred to as the "next-turn proof-procedure" (Heritage 1984; Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998) or the "response-as-understanding perspective" (Bilmes 1993). From this perspective, it is primarily the sequential placement of an utterance or action that reveals its communicative function:

the sequential 'next positioned' linkage between any two actions can be a critical resource by which a first speaker (and, of course, 'overhearing' social scientist) can determine the sense which is made of his or her utterance. (Heritage 1984: 256)

For example, an utterance cannot be identified as an answer (as opposed to a statement, assertion, declarative, proposition, etc.) on the basis of its phonological, syntactical or semantic features but only on the basis of its sequential placement within the interaction, e.g. its placement after a question (cf. Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 299).

As Gumperz points out, in everyday interaction, contextualisation cues operate on several levels of inference simultaneously. For example, in an institutional context like doctor/patient interaction, features of verbal interaction such as the choice of lexical items (i.e. the doctor's use of medical terms), the organisation of turn-taking (i.e. the doctor allocating turns to the patient), the sequencing of actions (e.g. question-answer sequences in the diagnosis part), topical choice and organisation (restrictions on the topics that can be brought up, the doctor initiating most of the topics) lead to situated inferences about the meaning of words, utterances and actions and about appropriate responses, but also about the current activity type (i.e. doctor-patient consultation), the participants' social roles (i.e. doctor and patient; expert and layperson) and the related rights and responsibilities (e.g. who gets to control the turn-taking and the topics of talk, who can say what to whom and when).

To recapitulate the discussion so far, work in interactional sociolinguistics is grounded in the assumption that participants in an interaction use contextualisation cues to put their utterances and actions into context, i.e. to relate what is said to shared background knowledge of social, cultural, linguistic and interactional norms and expectations. Listeners draw on these contextualisation cues to make situated inferences about each others' meanings and to make appropriate contributions to the current interaction. Contextualisation cues operate on various levels of context, pointing to such features as, for instance, the current speech activity, the topic(s) of talk, the meaning of words and utterances, but also the participants' social identities (e.g. gender, age, social status) and relationships (e.g. relations of power) as relevant aspects of context for the interpretation and production of activities. Thus, taking an interactional sociolinguist approach allows us to investigate how participants jointly and interactively accomplish verbal conflicts and (re)construct and negotiate social identities and relationships from a local, sequential perspective, while taking into account more global aspects of context such as activity frames, pre-existing social structures and interactive histories.

Another well-known approach to discourse analysis that looks at the interrelationship of social variables and language use - and that is frequently used in interactional sociolinguistic studies - is Brown & Levinson's (1987) work on politeness.<sup>23</sup> Building on Goffman's (1967) notion of face, i.e. "the positive self-image every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61), Brown & Levinson propose two universal face wants, notably "the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved of in certain respects" (1987: 58), which they refer to as negative and positive face respectively. Brown and Levinson state that "face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (1987: 61). They claim that a person's face concerns can only be sustained by the actions of others, and therefore people generally cooperate (and assume each others' cooperation) in maintaining each others' face. Hence, the way we use language is adapted to balancing one or both of these aspects of face.

Certain kinds of speech acts, however, intrinsically threaten the (negative, positive or both) face of the speaker, hearer or both interactants (1987: 65-68). For example, the hearer's negative face is threatened by acts such as orders, requests, advice, threats, offers, expression of envy or admiration and expressions of strong (negative) emotions toward the hearer. The hearer's positive face is threatened by expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults, contradictions or disagreements, challenges, mention of taboo topics, etc. The speaker's negative face is threatened by acts such as expressing thanks, acceptance of the hearer's thanks or apology, acceptance of offers, and the like, while the speaker's positive face is threatened by apologies, self-humiliation, confessions, etc.

When performing such a face-threatening act (FTA), speakers may select from a range of communicative strategies (i.e. politeness strategies) to minimise the face threat. The more face-threatening an act is considered by the speaker, the more care s/he will take in its execution. Brown and Levinson (1987: 60, 68ff.) list five general categories of politeness strategies, which can be realised in discourse by a wide range of output strategies. These superstrategies are ordered according to their relative degree of politeness: (1) baldly on record, without redressive action; (2) with redressive action, positive politeness; (3) with redressive action, negative politeness; (4) off record; and (5) avoidance of FTA.

Strategy 1 is the least polite way of performing an FTA. This approach involves no attempt by the speaker to acknowledge the hearer's face wants by means of redressive action. For instance, the speaker might express explicit disagreement with the hearer's previous utterance, or state a direct criticism of the hearer, without hedging the utterance in any way. Strategies 2 and 3 involve the use of mitigating devices for FTAs to attend to (an aspect of) the hearer's face wants. Depending on which aspect of face is being oriented to, Brown & Levinson distinguish between (2) positive politeness, which "is approach-based; it 'anoints' the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, the speaker wants the hearer's wants (e.g. by treating him as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and

liked)"; and (3) negative politeness, which "is essentially avoidance-based" and consists in "assurances that the speaker ... will not interfere with the addressee's freedom of action" (70). Positive politeness is thus concerned with demonstrating closeness and positive affiliation (e.g. by using first name or endearment terms to soften criticism) whereas negative politeness is concerned with expressing distance and deference (e.g. using hedges or indirect speech acts (Searle 1969, 1975) to package a request in order to minimise imposition).<sup>24</sup> Strategy 4 (off record) means that there is more than one possible interpretation of an utterance, therefore leaving open a way out for both speaker and hearer, because the speaker can claim never to have done the FTA and the hearer can choose not to interpret it as an FTA but as a neutral remark. For instance, instead of stating a complaint directly (e.g. "You forgot to close the door again!"), the speaker can choose to package it as a neutral noticing ("The door is still open."). Strategy 5 (avoidance of FTA) is not to do the FTA at all. This superstrategy is the most polite. It is chosen when the risk to actually do the FTA is considered too great.

Politeness strategies are not arbitrarily chosen by speakers in interaction; their choice is constrained by contextual features, such as the social distance (D) of the interlocutors, the relative power (P) of the interlocutors, and the ranking (R) of a particular speech act as more or less imposing, and hence more or less face-threatening, by the members of a community (Brown & Levinson 1987: 74 ff.).

Brown & Levinson (1987: 130) propose that, in general, the closer the interactants' social relationship and/or the smaller the power differential between them, the less they will use negative politeness strategies and the more they will use positive politeness strategies, because negative politeness strategies are useful for social distancing and positive politeness strategies are ways of minimising social distance.

Moreover, they suggest that one tends to be more polite to people who are somehow socially superior to oneself or socially important (e.g. one's boss, the doctor, etc.).<sup>25</sup>

One also tends to be more polite to people one doesn't know, people who are somehow socially distant (e.g. strangers, persons

from very different spheres of life). In the first case, politeness tends to be directed upwards in the status hierarchy (social inferiors are generally more polite to social superiors and vice versa), while in the second case, politeness tends to be symmetrically exchanged by both parties.

However, Brown and Levinson (1987: 79) note that each of these socio-cultural dimension is context relative in the sense that situational factors enter into the values for P, D and R, so that the assessed values hold only for S and H in a particular context, and for a particular FTA. They give the following examples: While two American strangers might be socially distant if they met in the streets of New York and would hence treat each other with formality and respect, the social distance between them would be perceived as considerably smaller if they were to meet in the Hindu Kush, and this would be reflected in their mutual use of positive politeness. Similarly, when a speaker passes from her own field of expertise into that of the interlocutor, the relative power of the participants changes along with the roles of expert and layperson.

Brown & Levinson's model has been frequently criticised for its oversimplistic view of the assessment of politeness (Holmes 1995, Mills 2002) and its unidirectional view of the impact of social variables on language use. Regarding oversimplification, Holmes (1995) notes, linguistic forms cannot be said to be inherently polite. For example, while a request like "Do you think it would be possible for you to contact Jean Thomas today?" used by a boss to her/his secretary would be interpreted by Brown & Levinson as polite, since it includes mitigating features to minimise the potential face threat, it might in fact be interpreted as impolite, if the boss and his/her secretary usually have an informal style of communicating, and this is not the first time that the request has been made. Thus, the very features that according to Brown & Levinson seem to indicate politeness may in fact be used to express impoliteness.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the unidirectional influence of social factors on the degree of politeness assumed by Brown & Levinson, several authors (Held 1995; Kasper 1990; Werkhofer 1992) stress the reflexivity of pre-existing social structures and the interactional (re)construction and negotiation of social relationships.<sup>27</sup>

Communicative interaction not only reflects existing relationships, but also defines and recreates them. Thus, social variables such as power and distance are not stable categories but are themselves constituted and negotiated in ongoing interaction. Likewise, positive politeness strategies such as complimenting, joking or teasing not so much presuppose solidarity and rapport as create it (Herbert & Straight 1989; Holmes 1998; Kotthoff 1998; Norrick 1993).

In spite of these drawbacks and although Brown & Levinson's politeness theory does not explicitly focus on the (re)construction and negotiation of social relationships, by bringing together the notion of face (an individual's self-image) and socio-cultural variables (such as power and social distance) and relating them to motivated linguistic strategies, their framework allows us to investigate how speakers position themselves relative to their interlocutor(s): since two of the three factors influencing the level of politeness concern the interactants' social relationship, we can infer degrees of intimacy and of relative power in the participants' relationship from the degree and kind (i.e. positive vs. negative) of politeness used in an interaction. Thus, politeness strategies are an index of (aspects of) social relationships and are therefore analogous to contextualisation cues. Gumperz (1992b: 43) comments on the contextualising function of pronouns of address - which Brown & Levinson list as politeness strategies:

By choosing one or another of the pronouns in question, speakers can mark the interaction as having ... relevant social characteristics. Pronoun usage, in other words, can function like nonverbal signs to determine how the interaction is framed. But framing in this case is more than just a means of separating out one stretch of the interaction, it also conveys presuppositions about the social relationship among participants, and about how they intend their messages are to be interpreted.

Politeness theory ties in with the interactional sociolinguistic framework in two ways. While its manifestations in actual discourse are socially and culturally specific, the universality of politeness is generally corroborated. Therefore knowledge about politeness norms constitutes part of members' shared background knowledge and thus guides participants' production and interpretation of

utterances. In addition, the choice and enactment of individual politeness strategies in verbal interaction signals how speakers position themselves vis-à-vis each other and contributes to the (re)creation of social relationships.

To conclude, the present study operates within an interactional sociolinguistic framework of discourse analysis. It integrates two aspects of context in the analysis of verbal interaction between mothers and daughters: the local, sequential context of talk and the global, socio-cultural context. In terms of methodology, it draws heavily on the analytical procedures and findings of CA. That is, the study includes a micro-analysis of talk-in-interaction, examining the sequencing of actions (e.g. turn-taking organisation, preference organisation and tying techniques) and the design specifics of actions (e.g. syntactic structure, wording, prosody, as well as paralinguistic and non-verbal features). However, it also takes into account macro-level aspects of context such as background knowledge about socio-cultural, linguistic and interactional norms (e.g. norms of politeness) as well as such "supportive ethnographic particulars" (ten Have 1997: 1) as participants' gender, age, social roles and relationships, and interactional history. By combining micro-level analysis of the form, content, and sequential placement of utterances with ethnographic and socio-cultural information, we are able to analyse how verbal conflict is jointly and sequentially accomplished by participants in interaction, how the activity type is contextualised or framed, and how participants (re)construct and negotiate their social identities and (power) relationships in the course of (conflict) interaction.

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## Notes for chapter 5:

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussion of various notions of context cf. C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin (1990); Knoblauch (1995); Schiffrin (1994a), among others.

<sup>2</sup> In Heritage's (1984: 241) words, the central goal of conversation analytic research is "the analysis of the *competences* which underlie ordinary social activities. Specifically it is directed at describing and explicating the competences which ordinary speakers use and rely on when they engage in intelligible, conversational interaction. At its most basic, the objective is to describe the procedures and expectations, in terms of which speakers produce their own behaviour and interpret the behaviour of others" (cf. also Heritage & Atkinson 1984: 1).

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Schegloff (1996) argues that any utterance in conversation goes through "three phases: as (incipient) next (in relation to the preceding utterance), as current, and as prior (i.e. prior to the anticipated following utterance(s))" (97).

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed account of these ideas cf. Drew (1994, 1998); Drew & Heritage (1992b); Heritage (1984); Heritage & Atkinson (1984) Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998); Pomerantz & Fehr (1997); Psathas (1990); Schiffrin (1994a); and Wootton (1981a).

<sup>5</sup> For more detailed discussion of the relationship between conversational organisation and context cf. Garfinkel (1967), Garfinkel & Sacks (1970) Goodwin & Goodwin (1990), and Heritage (1984).

<sup>6</sup> To quote Schegloff: "if some 'external' context can be shown to be proximately (or intra-interactionally) relevant to the participants, then its external status is rendered beside the point; and if it cannot be so shown, then its external status is rendered equivocal" (1992c: 197).

<sup>7</sup> She states that by blinding out socio-cultural categories, conversation analysts only reject their explicit inclusion and relegate them "in die Grauzone des in der Analyse immer schon mitgedachten" (Kotthoff 1994: 77). For a similar argument cf. Depperman (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Zahn (1984: 64) states that "an [exclusively structural] approach to conversation which ignores what communicators are doing with their talk, how they are understanding the content of that talk, and the strategies they take toward conversing in light of the social context in which they find themselves cannot be expected to describe and to explain rich and complex conversational phenomena." Likewise, Mey (1993) criticises CA for its methodological narrowness: "However, restricting oneself to the problems of description that one encounters during the analysis of actual conversation puts a severe limitation on the explanatory potential of one's analysis. A satisfactory account of the realities of conversation relies heavily on the wider context of the conversational interaction, and will not limit itself to strictly linguistic or strictly CA-relevant factors. A pragmatic analysis cannot remain in the object language level, describing "the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts," as the conversational analysts (often implicitly) seem to advocate. A pragmatic explanation requires a meta-level, where the facts and factors of the analysis are placed in an overall framework, and where the analyst him-/herself is engaged beyond the immediate context. This higher level of analysis (often called 'critical') is where societal critique and social action have their places" (271-272).

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<sup>9</sup> Numerous researchers have argued for the combination of detailed sequential analyses and reflections on ethnographic contexts. This kind of micro-macro level study of talk has been variously referred to as "ethnographic discourse analysis" (Gwyn 2002: 26), "ethnographische Gesprächsanalyse" (Depperman 2000, 2001) or "ethnography of interaction" (Wieder 1999).

<sup>10</sup> IS shares this concern with socio-structural aspects of language use with critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1985, 1992, 1995; Kress 1987; Wodak 1989). Within CDA, "the adoption of critical goals means, first and foremost, investigating verbal interactions with an eye to their determination by and effects on, social structures" (Fairclough 1995: 36). In other words, the micro-interactions of everyday life are viewed by critical discourse analysts as the realisations of macro-social structures, so that "the question of how discourse cumulatively contributes to the reproduction of macro structures is at the heart of the explanatory endeavour" (1995: 43). For critical discourse analysts, the micro-event and the macro-social structures are inextricably linked: "'micro' actions or events, including verbal interaction, can in no sense be regarded as of merely 'local' significance to the situation in which they occur, for any and every action contributes to the reproduction of 'macro' structures" (Fairclough 1995: 34). Given this reproductive relationship between everyday interaction and global social structures, Fairclough argues that "it makes little sense to study verbal interactions as if they were unconnected with social structures" (1985: 35, original emphasis).

<sup>11</sup> The concept of contextualisation was introduced by Jenny Cook-Gumperz & John Gumperz in 1976 and further elaborated, above all, by Gumperz in his 1982 monograph and in a number of articles (e.g. Gumperz 1989, 1992a, b, 1999; Gumperz & Cook Gumperz 1981). For detailed discussion of this concept cf. also Auer 1984, 1992; Ericson & Shultz 1977, 1982; Hinnenkamp 1989).

<sup>12</sup> To quote Gumperz (1992a: 230): "I use the term 'contextualisation' to refer to speakers' and listener's use of verbal and nonverbal signs to relate what is said at any one time and in any one place to knowledge acquired through past experience, in order to retrieve the presuppositions they must rely on to maintain conversational involvement and access what is intended."

<sup>13</sup> As Schiffrin (1996: 314) puts it, this is a view of language as a "socially and culturally constructed symbol system that is used in ways that reflect macrolevel social meanings (e.g. group identity, status differences) but also create microlevel social meanings (i.e., what one is saying and doing at a particular moment in time)."

<sup>14</sup> To quote Gumperz: "[Sociolinguists] customarily take gender, ethnicity and class as given parameters within which we create our own social identities, the study of language as interactional discourse demonstrates that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted but are communicatively produced" (1982b: 1).

<sup>15</sup> The multitude of reference points prompted the following remark from Erickson (1992: 365): "The notion of contextualization as presented by Gumperz is eclectic in the best sense of that term. It synthesizes insights from a variety of approaches to studying the conduct of talk." Cf. also the description of influences

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by preceding research, competing approaches and comparable conceptualisations of context in Auer (1992: 21-24).

<sup>16</sup> As mentioned above, Bateson's notion of meta-messages and meta-communication respectively was adopted and elaborated by various researchers approaching the analysis of communication. In *Pragmatics of human communication*, Watzlawick et al. (1967) propose five axioms of communication, of which the second holds that every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter defines the former and is therefore metacommunication. Similarly, researchers working within the framework of relational communication analysis (Millar & Rogers 1976, 1987, 1988; Millar et al. 1984; Rogers 1981; Rogers & Farace 1975; Rogers et al. 1980; Rogers & Millar 1988, 1998; Rogers-Millar & Millar 1979) draw on these two aspects of messages in the investigation of interpersonal communication. Likewise, Tannen's (1986, 2001) builds on Bateson's concept of metamessage in her interactional sociolinguistic approach to interpersonal and intercultural communication: "We react not only to the meaning of the words spoken - the *message* - but also to what we think those words say about the relationship - the *metamessage*" (2001: XVII, original emphasis). She defines the metamessage as "what is communicated about relationships - attitudes toward each other, the occasion, and what we are saying" (1986: 16). Ways of expressing implicit relationship definitions include paralinguistic, prosodic and non-verbal means, modality, modal particles, lexemes with specific connotations, sequential placement of utterances, etc.

<sup>17</sup> The key or mood of an interaction is also referred to as "interaction modality" in the literature (e.g. Kallmeyer & Keim 1996; Kotthoff 1996c, 1998; K. Müller 1992).

<sup>18</sup> To quote Gumperz (1982: 131): "Roughly speaking, a contextualization cue is any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions."

<sup>19</sup> In particular in the case of the class of utterance which in speech act theory has been classified as *indirect speech acts*, such as, for instance ironic statements or indirect directives, the speaker's intention can differ considerably from the proposition.

<sup>20</sup> Gumperz adopts these terms from Levinson (1978, 1992). Levinson's notion of activity type embraces verbal as well as nonverbal activities. It refers to "goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with *constraints* on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions (Levinson 1992: 69). Examples are teaching, a job interview, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party, etc. "The degree of cooperation, the ranking or precedence of topics, and so on are intrinsically related to the nature of the activity in question" (Levinson 1992: 78). "Allowable contributions" include speech, gesture, and other forms of meaningful action. By definition, then, such activities are contextually situated and governed by norms of interaction.

<sup>21</sup> As Tannen so eloquently put it, "people approach the world not as naive, blank-slate receptacles ..., but rather as ... veterans of perception who have stored their prior experiences as 'an organized mass,' and who see events and objects in the worlds in relation to each other and in relation to their prior experience.

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This prior experience or organized knowledge then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms these expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time" (1993b: 20f). The conceptualisation of how we organise our experiences in a way that facilitate the identification and interpretation of new situations has long played an important role in a broad range of disciplines that are concerned with human thinking and behaviour. Tannen (1993) lists cognitive and social psychology, sociology and anthropology, artificial intelligence (AI) research, and linguistics. For this basic concept, the various disciplines have developed various terms, of which the most general is probably that of *structures of expectation*, introduced by Ross (1975). In addition, there are the terms *script* (associated with the work of Schank & Abelson 1977), *schema* (which traces back to Bartlett 1932), and the most widespread term *frame*, which, as discussed above, goes back to Bateson and is used in particular in sociological and anthropological research. A basic distinctive feature of the view of this concept in the different research disciplines is the conceptualisation of structures of expectations as static or dynamic. Some AI-researchers (e.g. Minsky 1974) view frame as a static collection of information about a stereotypical situation. A similar view is put forward in linguistics, for instance in the classic discourse analysis, which developed from speech act theory and pragmatics. Here, frame is conceptualised as an abstract semantic construct, through which world knowledge is applied to the interpretation of an interaction. The basic question is which knowledge a participant has to have, to be able to correctly identify speech acts. By contrast, the ethnographically and sociologically oriented research traditions stress the culture specific, interactive and dynamic character of structures of expectations. An approach that emphasises the interactive character of the frame concept is that of the anthropologist Frake (1977). In his view, which is consonant with that of Gumperz described above, frames are not static cognitive structures that are present in the mind of each individual and simply have to be retrieved by the analyst, but "the key aspect of frames is what the people are *doing* when they speak" (Tannen 1993: 19, original emphasis). For more detailed discussion of the various concepts of knowledge structures cf. Tannen (1993c) and Gumperz (1982: 154ff.).

<sup>22</sup> A related concept that is used in the literature is that of (communicative or speech) genres. Drawing on Bakhtin (1986), accounts of genre within interactional sociolinguistics (IS), systemic functional linguistics (SFL), and critical discourse analysis (CDA), make reference to the socio-cultural and historical contexts embodied by types of texts and explore the ways in which genres function as discursive practices. The concept of genre stems from work in critical literary theory. Bakhtin (1989: 52) defines speech genres as "the typical form of the utterance associated with a particular sphere of communication (e.g. the workplace, the sewing circle, the military) which have therefore developed into 'relatively stable types' in terms of thematic content, style and compositional structure." As mentioned above, he argues that the more complex "secondary" genres of writing (including literary genres) are derived from the primary speech genres. Examples of speech genre include "short rejoinders of daily dialogue," "everyday narration,"

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"business documents" and "the diverse world of commentary" (60). Their structure derives from situations from which they arise such that "even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms, rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic and creative ones. ... We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and when hearing others' speech we guess from the very first words; we predict a certain length and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole. If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible" (78). Bakhtin claims that the lexical, grammatical and compositional structures of particular genres are a reflection of the specific context of communication and he has identified genres as "relatively stable types" of interactive utterances with definite and typical forms of construction.

These particular features of Bakhtin's analysis are echoed in the approach to genre analysis taken by IS. *Communicative genres* are viewed as conventionalised solutions for specific (communicative) problems. They are culture-specific, established forms of talk (and communication in general) - traditions of speaking - which serve as an orientation for participants in the production and interpretation of social meaning. These established patterns map out communicative processes by laying down more or less detailed rules for their components (Luckmann 1986, 1988; Günthner & Knoblauch 1994; Günther & Luckmann 2002). Communicative genres constitute routine knowledge about the form of communicative (inter)action, and members orient towards such underlying knowledge in the production of (inter)actions, thereby (re)producing (knowledge about) communicative genres. Hence, genres are not fixed but subject to change (e.g. telegram vs. short message). Genres are characterised by (1) external factors: communicative milieu (habitual place of communication, shared interactional history); social roles; e.g. family dinner conversation; university lecture; (2) internal factors: linguistic code; choice of variety, prosody, specific syntactic patterns, topics, specific lexical choices, formulaic expressions, non-verbal phenomena (facial expressions, gestures); and (3) the situated level of realisation, which connects the exterior and interior aspects: sequential organisation, participant framework, turn distribution and allocation, topical organisation. Genres are not unidirectionally determined by the context in which they occur; they do not exist independent of the context; rather, they are contextualised in interaction. In the enactment of underlying knowledge about genres, the context is being constituted. For example, on the one hand, teasing is only possible in close social relationships (e.g. among friends); on the other hand, teasing can constitute social closeness. Thus, the realisation of genres is related to the negotiation of specific social identities (cf. Günthner & Christmann 1996; Knoblauch 1995; Kotthoff 1998). Examples of communicative genres in this sense are family dinner conversations (Keppler 1994; Knoblauch 1995); conversational narrative (Blum-Kulka et al 2004; Norrick 2000, 2005; Quasthoff & Kern 2005); conversational argument (Kotthoff 1993a), toasts (Kotthoff 1995, 1999), conversational joking (Norrick 1993; Kotthoff 1998).

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Similarly, in SFL, the term has been used "to describe how people use language to achieve culturally recognized goals" (Eggins & Slade 1997: 24). Genres (e.g. service encounters, narratives) are characterised by obligatory elements of structure, which are realised through specific discourse-semantic and lexico-grammatical patterns, and, as Hasan argues, "the appearance of all these elements in a specific order corresponds to our perception of whether the text is complete or incomplete" (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 61). Other elements which are optional may occur in some instance of the genre and may also occur in other genres. However, these do not occur randomly, and the conditions under which they are likely to occur can be described. Hasan also claims that it is the interactional or generic structure of a text that is defining of a genre, so that texts of the same genre will realise the same obligatory elements of structure. Drawing on this work, Martin defines genre as a "stated, goal oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (1984: 25). More recently, Eggins & Martin (1997: 239) have defined genre as "a theory of the unfolding structure texts work through to achieve their social purposes."

In CDA, genre is defined as "a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity (e.g. interview, narrative exposition)" (Fairclough 1995: 14). Genre is "the abstract constituent of text types" (13). There are the ideal text types which people orient to but do not necessarily conform to, but there are also "texts which closely match ideal types (as well as others which do not), so that people learn them from concrete textual experience" (13). Genres in CDA are seen as social actions occurring within particular social and historical contexts. The similarities in form and discursive function are seen as deriving from the similarity in the social action undertaken. Moreover, in CDA genres are seen as both social and textual categories, no longer fixed and immutable but dynamic and changing. While recognising that there are generic conventions in text, researchers within CDA stress the need to see genres not as fixed and rigid schema but as abstract, ideal categories open to negotiation and change. As Kress argues, "genres are dynamic, responding to the dynamics of other parts of social systems. Hence genres change historically; hence new genres emerge over time and hence, too, what appears as 'the same' generic form at one level has recognisable distinct forms in differing social groups" (1987: 42).

In the ethnography of speaking, genre refers to one component in the complex communicative context of interactions. As the SPEAKING grid (cf. above) shows, Hymes used the term genre to refer to just one component of the speech event. Defining genre as including such categories as joke, story, lecture, greeting, and conversation, he argued that "genres often coincide with speech events, but must be treated as analytically independent of them. They may occur in (or as) different events. The sermon as a genre is typically identified with a certain place in a church service, but its properties may be invoked, for serious or humorous effect, in other situations" (1974: 61).

<sup>23</sup> For alternative conceptualisations of politeness (strategies) cf. R. T. Lakoff's (1973, 1989) *Rules or Politeness* and Leech's (1983) politeness principle.

<sup>24</sup> Brown & Levinson's negative and positive politeness strategies concur with Goffman's (1967) notion of *interpersonal rituals* as means of maintaining face.

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Goffman identifies two types: (1) *presentational rituals*, i.e. those "acts through which the individual makes specific attestations to recipients concerning how he regards them" (71); and (2) *avoidance rituals*, i.e. "those forms of deference which lead the actor to keep at a distance from the recipient" (62).

<sup>25</sup> Correspondingly, Goffman (1967: 10) maintains: "Just as the member of any group is expected to have self-respect, so also he is expected to sustain a standard of considerateness; he is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and the face of others present, and he is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings. Of course, the more power and prestige the others have, the more a person is likely to show consideration for their feelings."

<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Tannen (1986a, 1993a, 1994c) argues that any interactional move can be understood as an expression of solidarity (an attempt to establish rapport) and/or as an expression of power (an act of imposition).

<sup>27</sup> Kasper (1990: 203) argues that despite the attempt to take into account the impact of macro-social factors on politeness enactment, Brown & Levinson's model "remains unsatisfactory in that it suggests an unidirectional effect of social factors on politeness styles, thereby failing to reconstruct the dialectic relationship between communicative activity and social relationships... in other words it is not the case that previously earned social entitlements are simply acted upon but that entitlements are mutually conveyed in conversational (as well as other types of) interaction."

It takes two to tangle. (*Source unknown*)

When one will not, two will not quarrel.  
(*English proverb*)

## **6 The sequential organisation of mother-daughter disputes**

Earlier, I put forward a concept of (interpersonal) conflict as a situated local interactional accomplishment. Conflict progresses in and through the ways in which participants communicate with each other. It is a dynamic interactional process expressed and progressing by way of mutual opposition between two or more people. Since talk is the prime means of communication among human beings, it is also the prime means by which the social activity of conflict is interactionally achieved. Thus, the analysis of the particulars of talk-in-interaction constitutes the principal means of uncovering how conflict is created and conducted by the participants in the local context of the interaction. In the following, I will show how the ongoing, sequential organisation of talk itself constitutes the social practice of conflict.

### **6.1 Opening and progress of verbal conflicts: the crucial role of opposition**

Various studies of conflict interaction have stressed the crucial role of adversative activities such as challenges, contradictions, disagreements, negations, refusals and other forms of opposition (e.g. Antaki 1994; Boggs 1978; Brenneis & Lein 1977; Coulter 1990; Eisenberg & Garvey 1981; Garvey 1984; Genishi & DiPaolo 1982; M. H. Goodwin 1982, 1990; Gruber 1996, 1998, 2001; Hutchby 1996a,b, 2001; Kotthoff 1993a; Maynard 1985a; Messmer 2003; Millar et al. 1984; Muntigl & Turnbull 1998; Pomerantz 1975; Rehbock 1987; Schifffrin 1985; Schwitalla 1987; Shantz & Shantz 1985; Sheldon 1992, 1993, 1996; Spiegel 1995; Vuchinich 1984, 1986, 1987, 1990; Willard 1978)<sup>1</sup>

In one of the earliest studies on naturally occurring conflict, Eisenberg & Garvey (1981: 150) see conflict in terms of what they call an "adversative episode":

the interaction which grows out of an opposition to [an antecedent event such as] a request for action, an assertion, or an action. ... The negating responses or

oppositions include refusals, disagreements, denials, and objections. Thus, an adversative episode is a sequence which begins with an opposition and ends with a resolution or dissipation of conflict.

Although, as we will see below, Eisenberg & Garvey's stress on resolution as the principal way of terminating conflict has subsequently been challenged by other research, their model of adversative episodes is still important because of its emphasis on the way in which argument emerges sequentially out of opposition to some antecedent event, or in Maynard's (1985a: 3) terms "arguable action."

Eisenberg & Garvey identify a range of specific antecedent events that may initiate a dispute, which seems to suggest that the start of an argument can be somehow predicted. By contrast, in his studies of children's arguments, Maynard (1985a) finds that almost any interactional move can in principle contain objectionable features and may become part of a conflict episode if it is opposed. Similarly, in her study of children's disputes Garvey (1984) notes that it was not possible to predict in advance how a conflict would begin: "Almost any remark could be challenged, and even a seemingly innocuous suggestion or request could be opposed" (143-144). That is to say, any action (whether an utterance or some other form of action) can in principle be treated as arguable and, hence, as the basis for starting an argument (cf. also Messmer 2003; Knoblauch 1991, 1995; Schiffrin 1984; Tannen 2001). All these studies put the analytical focus on how verbal conflicts emerge out of opposition, treating argument as a response-centred event: the crucial point is not what a speaker says or does - which is ambiguous - but how what she says or does is taken by the recipient. There are of course actions, utterances or topics that are more likely to spark a conflict than others, but the point is that in principle any activity can with hindsight be the starting point of an argument.

To sum up so far, opposition is the second move in any conflict sequence, and the first move is an antecedent event or arguable action. Accordingly, the initial sequential unit in any verbal conflict is an "action-opposition sequence" (Hutchby 1996a, b). This is illustrated by the following three examples:

**example (1): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of  
131 the valley!  
> 132 MARGARET He's not.  
133 DORIS He is.  
134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
135 DORIS Curious method of parking.

**example (2): Stuck 6b**

121 LULA Mom, I am going to leave someday.  
> 122 MOM You wouldn't do that.  
123 LULA I might!  
124 MOM You wouldn't.  
125 LULA I might, I might, so you die? It's not my  
126 fault. It's not like anyone would miss you.  
127 You've been useless for the last ten years  
128 anyway, so I don't care. I can do anything!

**example (3): Alto I, 2**

31 WANDA He'll find a way if I ask him.  
> 32 FLORENE No, he won't!  
33 WANDA Yes, he will!  
34 FLORENE He'll say yes, and then leave it up to me  
35 to find a way!

In the above segments, each of the utterances with an arrow represents an antecedent event which is treated as an arguable by the recipient, thereby setting up an opposition and constituting the arrowed utterance as the initial part of a verbal conflict. That is, based on the initial opposition, one can identify the antecedent or arguable event. The point is that for an analysis of conflict episodes it is necessary to put the oppositional response of one participant to an initial move by another participant in the centre of attention.

While in the preceding extracts both arguable action and opposition consist of verbal activities, the following two extracts illustrate that both arguables and opposition may consist of verbal as well as nonverbal actions.

**example (4): Avenue**

> 342 OLGA       (*Turns on the radio and switches it fast to*  
343               *different channels.*)  
344 MOTHER     Hey, you're gonna break that radio, switching  
345               it fast like that. Someday I just might break  
346               that radio myself. Don't want nothing in this  
347               house reminding me of that bastard father of  
348               yours. Now what was I saying? Oh. About your  
349               shadow. I finished that, didn't I? Oh, he says  
350               you're too quiet. You need someone to liven  
351               you up.  
352 OLGA        I saw him livening some woman up on liquor  
353               when I passed him on the street.  
354 MOTHER     So, men are men, whiskey and women go  
355               together.

**example (5): My sister 3**

1   MADAME DANZARD   Don't toy with your food, Isabelle.  
2                                It's so disagreeable. Always making  
3                                those little piles.  
4   ISABELLE         I'm not, Maman.  
5   MADAME DANZARD   You mean to tell me I don't see what  
6                                you're doing.  
7   ISABELLE         I'm not toying, Maman.  
8   MADAME DANZARD   (*Coldly.*) Very well, my dear, call it  
9                                what you will.

In these examples, the antecedent event is the nonverbal action occurring prior to the talk, and an opposition is constructed with the first utterance.

Conversely, in the two extracts below, the arguable is a verbal action, and the oppositional move consists in a nonverbal action:

**example (6): Avenue**

128 OLGA        (*Turns on the radio. Mother listens. An up*  
129               *tempo song is playing.*)  
130 MOTHER     Make that louder. I like that song.  
> 131 OLGA     (*Turns it off.*)  
132 MOTHER     You're spiteful and you're always listening

**example (7): Avenue**

181 MOTHER Your father's dead, Olga, the no-good  
 182 sonavabitch is dead and buried.  
 > 183 OLGA (*Gives her a defiant look.*)  
 184 MOTHER Whatsa matter with you? You know it's true.  
 185 We got proof of it. Sometimes you're stupid  
 186 about things.

Approaching verbal conflict as a response-centred emergent event and putting the focus on opposition as the crucial element, enables us to investigate participants' use of locally emergent features of the talk in constructing conflict sequences. For instance, we can examine what types of actions get treated as arguables,<sup>2</sup> and what kinds of norms and values are invoked by speakers in identifying actions as arguables (cf. Maynard 1985b). Similarly, we can investigate what kinds of resources are employed by disputants in building opposition in the light of previous moves in the interaction (cf. M. H. Goodwin 1990; Kotthoff 1993a).

This view does not rule out, however, that people can try to stir up a dispute, for instance, by attempting to provoke or offend an interlocutor, nor does it imply that only recipients can be active parties in treating a turn as arguable. Especially once an argument is in progress, speakers may make strong assertions which they can expect others to disagree with. A similar idea is expressed by Coulter (1990), who places "declarative assertions", i.e. "assertions designed to make some point to be addressed by ... interlocutors" (185), in the centre of his model of argument sequences. According to Coulter, the basic structure of an argumentative exchange is comprised of a declarative assertion, followed by either an agreement (in which case no argument ensues) or a disagreement token or counter-assertion (triggering off a dispute). Yet, even though speakers may try to pick a quarrel by producing a declarative assertion, whether an argument actually emerges still depends on the interlocutor's response. As Antaki (1994) points out, "the first utterance is only latent with argumentative meaning until the second utterance comes along and

decides the issue one way or another" (179). Similarly, Newell & Stutman (1989/90: 157) maintain that "no one act is sufficient to initiate anything. The production of communication episodes is negotiated through interaction." In their analysis of how individuals successfully initiate a "social confrontation episode," they show that the nature of the communication episode initiated by a speech action is not determined by particular qualities or conditions of the action itself but rather depends on how the recipient responds to the initiating action. In other words, the key for a conflict episode lies in the recipient's willingness to treat the speaker's action as arguable - and a recipient may choose to pass over or even agree with a prior controversial claim and thereby neutralise it and forestall an argument.<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, as indicated above, even apparently innocent and essentially non-argumentative statements or actions can be treated as arguables. As Tannen (2001: 20) notes in her study of family discourse, "even the most mundane activity ... can spark a conflict." Likewise, as mentioned above, in his analyses of children's arguments during collaborative classroom work, Maynard (1985a, b, 1986) illustrates how seemingly innocuous actions such as moving a pencil or mispronouncing a word can be responded to in a way that makes them the starting point for extended stretches of conflict talk.

It must be emphasised, however, that disagreement, i.e. a single (arguable) action-opposition sequence, need not eventuate in a full-blown dispute. Initial opposition is a necessary but not sufficient condition for argument because it can be responded to in various ways. For example, opposition may be complied with, ignored, or responded to playfully (cf. Maynard 1985a; M. H. Goodwin 1983). That is, particular interactional work is necessary to transform opposition into a verbal conflict episode: Only if a conflicting response to an initial oppositional move occurs, the first oppositional move retrospectively marks the beginning of the conflict episode. As Maynard (1985a: 8) puts it:

The summary point is that initial opposition does not constitute an argument. An utterance may oppose a prior action, but its status as part of an argument is dependent on whether it is treated as a legitimate repair initiation

or whether it is let pass or whether it is itself counteracted. Thus, in addition to the notion of the "antecedent event," as an arguable utterance or action that can potentially be opposed, we also need a concept of an "argumentative" which would capture how an initial statement of opposition is only contingently turned into an element of an argument or dispute.

This is illustrated by the following example from Maynard (1985a: 5), in which the argument stays potential due to Barb's diplomatic response to Ralph's initial opposition:

**example (8)**

(Ralph and Barb are at the drawing table)

- 1 Ralph: That doesn't look like a duck
- 2 (1.6)
- 3 Duck's are supposed to have a beak
- 4 (2.0)
- 5 Barb: [shrugs] Well, I could make a beak

Ralph's utterance in line 1 comprises an initial opposition which treats Barb's drawing as an antecedent event. Barb's silence in line 2 (during which she presumably considers Ralph's assertion), allows him to resume the floor and back up his claim by explaining how Barb's drawing doesn't look like a duck (line 3). At this point, Barb could turn the interaction into a quarrel. If she produced a counter like "It does look like a duck," or "What do you know?" an argument would be on. However, by treating Ralph's initial opposition to her drawing (line 1) as a legitimate repair initiation and indicating that she will change the drawing, Barb nips the dispute in the bud.

Similarly, in the following extract from my data, Mama averts a potential argument by producing a self-repair in response to Jessie's opposition in line 1080:

**example (9): 'night Mother**

- 1077 MAMA You had those quiet little conversations
- 1078 after supper every night. What were you
- 1079 whispering about?
- 1080 JESSIE We weren't whispering, you were just across

1081                   the room.  
> 1082   MAMA       What did you talk about?  
1083   JESSIE      We talked about why black socks are warmer  
1084                   than blue socks.

Jessie's turn initial utterance "We weren't whispering" in line 1080 treats Mama's prior formulation as an arguable action and thus constitutes an initial opposition. Subsequently, she supports her claim by pointing out that Mama simply could not hear what they were saying because she was "across the room." Mama's following turn is crucial, as it determines whether the interaction will turn into a dispute or not. If she counter-opposes Jessie and insists on her initial formulation, the argument will be on. However, in line 1082, by reformulating her prior question, substituting "talk" for "whisper," she ratifies Jessie's opposition and thereby diffuses the situation. Thus, by treating Jessie's initial opposition as a legitimate repair initiation, Mama precludes a potential argument.

As these extracts demonstrate, an interlocutor's opposition can be taken as a repair initiation in the sense of Schegloff et al. (1977) that provides an opportunity for the party whose utterance or action contains the repairable to remedy the trouble. If that party rejects the initiation, i.e. chooses not to repair the trouble source, a potential repair sequence may develop into an argument. That is, whether an oppositional move is an item in a repair sequence or a conflict sequence depends, in part, on how the recipient of the oppositional move elects to treat it. To quote Maynard (1986: 265):

An initial statement of opposition, even when strongly provocative, may be taken as a repair initiation. It is when opposition itself receives disagreement that a dispute is advanced.

An argument does not begin until two opponents 'square off' and the occurrence of a third move by the initial speaker is crucial for establishing a conflict episode. If she performs any other action than a counter-opposition to the recipient's initial opposition in position 3, no conflict develops.

Thus, we can say that verbal conflicts contain a minimum of three consecutive oppositional moves.<sup>4</sup> Only if the opposed person responds with a counter-opposition, a conflict is fully under way. This tripartite entry-structure has been observed in a number of studies of conflict talk (cf. Antaki 1994, 1996; Coulter 1990; Genishi & DiPaolo 1982; Gruber 1996, 1998, 2001; Hutchby 1996a, b, 2001; Maynard 1985; Millar et al. 1984; Muntigl & Turnbull 1998; Messmer 2003; Newell & Stutman 1989/90; Rehbock 1987; Schifffrin 1984; Shantz 1987; Vuchinich 1984, 1986, 1987, 1990).

In my corpus, the mother-daughter dialogues are rife with such oppositional or "dissent-turn" (Kotthoff 1993a) sequences. Consider the following two extracts:

**example (10): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
 131 valley!  
 > 132 MARGARET He's not.  
 > 133 DORIS He is.  
 134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
 135 DORIS Curious method of parking.

**example (11): 'night Mother**

1373 MAMA I married you off to the wrong man, I admit  
 1374 that. So I took you in when he left. I'm  
 1375 sorry.  
 > 1376 JESSIE He wasn't the wrong man.  
 > 1377 MAMA He didn't love you, Jessie, or he wouldn't  
 1378 have left.  
 1379 JESSIE He wasn't the wrong man, Mama. I loved Cecil  
 1380 so much. And I tried to get more exercise  
 1381 and I tried to stay awake. I tried to learn  
 1382 to ride a horse. And I tried to stay outside  
 1383 with him, but he always knew I was trying,  
 1384 so it didn't work.

Both of these examples exhibit the following entry structure: speaker A puts forward a position in turn 1 that is opposed by speaker B in turn 2, following which speaker A in turn 3 counter-opposes speaker B's initial opposition by either directly contesting

speaker B's oppositional move as in example (10), or supporting the original position as in example (11). Thus, in accordance with the findings on naturally occurring conflict talk, the primary sequential unit of these conflict episodes is a three-step sequence in which the participants exchange oppositional moves to challenge each other's and/or support or insist on their own position, as illustrated in figure (1) below. The typical opening-structure of an argument then is a three-step sequence which comprises the following moves:

**Figure (1): three-step opening-structure of arguments**

- |      |                                      |   |
|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 A: | antecedent event/<br>arguable action | i.e. verbal or nonverbal action                                 |
| 2 B: | initial opposition                   | i.e. disagreement with 1  |
| 3 A: | counter-opposition                   | i.e. disagreement with 2 and/or<br>supporting or insisting on 1 |

These three steps form a minimal unit of conflict, which can be expanded by means of oppositional turns being subsequently treated as arguable actions (i.e. counter-opposed). It is this underlying form of mutual opposition that makes it possible (for conversationalists and observers alike) to recognise when an episode of conflict occurs. In this way, the sequential organisation contributes to the framing (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualisation (Gumperz 1982) of verbal conflict.

To sum up, verbal conflict is a form of social interaction (Simmel 1908/1955) characterised by participants mutually opposing one other in successive turns at talk. A speaker opposes the other person (or something she said or did) in some way; if the opposed person responds with a counter-opposition, then a conflict is fully under way. Verbal conflicts thus contain a minimum of three turns in which the participants mutually oppose each other. Episodes of verbal conflict have recognisable beginnings and endings: they begin with mutually expressed opposition and end with mutual abstinence from opposing moves. The boundaries of a conflict episode are therefore structurally identified by the onset and termination of mutual opposition rather than being determined, for instance, by content factors. For example, rather than centring around one specific problem, verbal conflicts often ramble from one subject to

another, with the opponents talking on and on without finding an agreement (cf. Knoblauch 1991, 1995). Similarly, what appears to start off as an argument about a specific issue such as the use of an object (e.g. a toy) may evolve into a character contest (Goffman 1967), which affects the participants' status in their group (cf. Emihovich 1986; C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin 1990). Verbal conflicts can be acted out in many different ways and are referred to variously by participants and researchers as argument(ation)s, disputes, quarrels, controversies, discussions, debates, fights, rows, spats, squabbles, run-ins, and so on. As we will see below, such episodes may vary in intensity from mild bickering to bitter quarrelling, and their topical content, too, is variable. They may be ritualised or more loosely organised, serious or playful, and they may serve a range of social functions.<sup>5</sup> But within this flexibility there remains a basic discourse structure which allows participants to coordinate their actions. The key element of this structure is that each consecutive turn is an oppositional move.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the definition of verbal conflict that forms the basis of the present study is structural in nature and specifies and locates an occurrence of conflict in successive turns at talk. Verbal conflict is conceptualised as a sequential, interactional process proceeding by means of an action that can be construed as arguable being opposed, with the initial opposition itself being treated as an arguable action in the subsequent turn. Episodes of verbal conflict are thus constituted by means of "chained" (Goffman 1971, 1976) opposition or disagreement sequences. Approaching verbal conflict in this way places the analytic focus directly on the sequential organisation of talk-in-interaction as the framework within which participants accomplish conflict talk. In the following section, I will focus on examples from my data. I will examine how the termination of conflict sequences is interactionally and sequentially achieved by the participants and discuss what this reveals about the potential social functions of mother-daughter disputes.

A quarrel is quickly settled when deserted by one party;  
there is no battle unless there be two.

(Lucius Annaeus Seneca)

Somebody has to have the last word. It not, every  
argument could be opposed by another and we'd never be  
done with it. (Albert Camus, *The Fall*)

## 6.2 Conflict termination

As the prior section has shown, verbal conflict is sequentially and interactionally accomplished by the participants through the reciprocal exchange of oppositional moves in successive turns at talk. Verbal conflicts contain a minimum of three mutually opposing turns. They proceed by means of each opposition being consecutively treated as an arguable action. They end when oppositional turns cease to be produced and other activities are taken up. As I will show in this section, like conflict opening, its termination, too, is collaboratively and sequentially achieved by the participants.

As Vuchinich (1987, 1990) has shown, verbal conflicts are closed in similar ways as discourse units in general, exhibiting a two-slot sequential closing mechanism. Schegloff & Sacks (1973) note that one possible solution to the "closing problem" for the "single conversation" discourse unit involves the use of a "terminal exchange," such as an exchange of "good-byes." The first slot of the utterance pair implicitly proposes that the conversation end; in the second slot the other speaker shows "that he understood what a prior [speaker] aimed at, and that he is willing to go along with that" (297). Through the terminal exchange, consensus regarding termination is displayed and silence or leave-taking can occur without untoward interpretation. In verbal conflict, the closing problem is how to organise the arrival of the opponents at a point where one speaker's oppositional turn will not elicit an oppositional turn from the other. As in ordinary conversation, participants employ the terminal exchange to coordinate the closing of conflict episodes. Vuchinich (1987, 1990) identifies two basic forms of the terminal exchange in verbal conflict. Both have a fundamental two-slot structure: one form displays a dominant/submissive relationship between participants; the other displays consensus on a compromise. In the "submission terminal

exchange," the first slot is an oppositional move; the second slot is assent (i.e. agreement or compliance). Assent placed after the opponent's oppositional turn signals submission. It displays acceptance not only of the validity of the other's prior opposition but also of a subordinate position regarding the dispute.

In the "compromise terminal exchange," the first slot is a concession offering; the second slot is acceptance. This terminating sequence displays a consensus on the terms specified by the concession. The basic two-slot form can be extended to include multiple concession offerings, as concessions offered may not be accepted straight away. In such cases, a concession may serve as a "pre-closing" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973; Levinson 1983) signalling that a participant is ready to close a conflict.

In addition, there are a number of systematic variations of the basic two-slot structure. For instance, participants may avoid the performance of the second slot in a terminal exchange leading to another conflict-termination format - the "stand-off." In these cases, oppositional turns continue until the topic is changed or until the opponents withdraw from participation. The conflict terminates with participants continuing to maintain opposing positions, with neither submitting (nor dominating).

Conflict termination may also occur if one opponent withdraws from the conversational activity or physically leaves the scene. As with the stand-off, in the case of "withdrawal" the conflict ends in a draw with no terminal exchange.<sup>7</sup> The resulting four basic conflict-termination formats are illustrated in figure (1) below:<sup>8</sup>

**Figure (1): basic conflict-termination formats (adapted from Vuchinich 1990: 135)**

	Submission	Compromise	Stand-off	Withdrawal
A:	opposition	opposition	opposition	opposition
B:	opposition	opposition	opposition	opposition
A:	assent	concession offering	topic shift	withdraws
B:		concession acceptance		

In the following, I will illustrate these termination formats with examples from my data and then discuss their possible significance for the mother-daughter disputes under analysis.

As described above, a conflict may be terminated when one participant gives in and accepts the opponent's position. This kind of closing is accomplished by the submission terminal exchange. As the following three extracts demonstrate, submission may be expressed verbally, non-verbally or both.

In the fragment below, Mary Jane and her mother disagree on whose idea it was that Mary Jane should come back home after her divorce. After an initial (though mitigated) opposition, in line 150 Olivia agrees with her daughter's claim that she asked her to come back.

**example (1): Tell me**

147 MARY JANE I'm glad you asked me to come back.  
148 OLIVIA Well, you wanted to. It was your idea.  
149 MARY JANE I think you asked.  
> 150 OLIVIA Okay, I'm wrong I suppose.

In the extract below, the mother and her five-year-old daughter are arguing about whether the daughter should get out of bed again to say her prayers. Following an extended disagreement sequence (lines 70-78), the daughter eventually complies with her mother's command and gets out of bed again and starts to pray (line 79).

**example (2): Tell me**

59 MOTHER Here, give Mama a kiss. That's a good girl.  
60 Goodnight, now.  
61 DAUGHTER Goodnight.  
62 MOTHER Wait a minute. Did you say your prayers?  
63 DAUGHTER Uh huh.  
64 MOTHER On your knees?  
65 DAUGHTER Uh huh.  
66 MOTHER (Pause.) Did you say your prayers?  
67 DAUGHTER (No answer.)  
68 MOTHER Did you say your prayers or didn't you?  
69 DAUGHTER (No answer.)

70 MOTHER        Alright, young lady, out of bed.  
71 DAUGHTER       Mama ...  
72 MOTHER        Out of bed and down on your knees.  
73 DAUGHTER       But it's cold.  
74 MOTHER        It wasn't too cold to come wandering into  
75                 my room asking for a glass of water.  
76 DAUGHTER       But I needed a drink of water.  
77 MOTHER        And now you need to say your prayers.  
78                 Out of bed.  
> 79 DAUGHTER     *(Mumbling.)* "Now I lay me ..."

In the following fragment, the mother and daughter are arguing about whether the daughter should go up to her room. Again, the argument terminates with the daughter's submission, this time in the form of a non-verbal compliance:<sup>9</sup>

**example (3): Tell me**

312 MOTHER        Alright, that's it. That is it. I've heard  
313                 enough. It might be a good idea, young lady,  
314                 if you went up to your room.  
315 DAUGHTER       That's not fair.  
316 MOTHER        Right this minute.  
317 DAUGHTER       Why can't I? Just tell me why?  
318 MOTHER        Because I said so.  
319 DAUGHTER       But all the other kids can, why can't I?  
320 MOTHER        Up to your room, and stay there until you've  
321                 learned not to argue with your mother.  
322 DAUGHTER       Everybody but me! What am I supposed to do?  
323                 And next time they won't even ask me because  
324                 they'll think I can't go. Because I can  
325                 never go anywhere.  
326 MOTHER        Up to your room.  
327 DAUGHTER       But...  
328 MOTHER        Up to bed, young lady.  
329 DAUGHTER       But I...  
330 MOTHER        Not another word. March. *((end of scene))*

In verbal conflict, participants place themselves in symbolic positions that are opposed to one another. As mentioned above,

opposition can take many forms, ranging from stating opposing arguments in a rational debate format to the exchange of personal insults and threats.<sup>10</sup> Whatever form it takes, though, this oppositional positioning establishes preconditions for the display of dominance and submission. Once the oppositional positions have been taken up, one of the participants may give in or submit to the other. Submission by one party marks the superiority of the opposing party (cf. Simmel 1908/1950: 113; Vuchinich 1990: 120). In terms of game theory the dominant participant is the winner and the submissive participant is the loser. This mutual establishment of dominant and compliant parties is one possibility of terminating verbal conflicts. By submitting, a person tacitly accepts the position maintained by the other party.<sup>11</sup> This acceptance dismantles the oppositional discourse structure and usually marks the termination of a conflict episode. The submission not only displays consensus on some controversial issue but also willingness to change the speech activity to something other than conflict. According to Vuchinich (1990), dominant participants usually accept their victory and are willing to move to another speech activity. However, as we will see below, in the middle of a heated dispute, sudden concessions may be rejected as insincere, leading to the continuation of the dispute.

Participants know that once a conflict is under way, there may be winners and losers, and opponents commonly seek to win disputes and evade losing them. In verbal conflicts, social status as well as self esteem is at stake, so there is much to be gained by winning (cf. Goffmans' (1967) description of the win/lose logic of "character contests"). However, the establishment of winners and losers is a possible but not inevitable outcome of conflict.

In the submission format, the termination of a conflict episode is achieved through dominance. Another mechanism for accomplishing conflict termination is the negotiation of a compromise. The crucial move in this kind of negotiation is the concession. As Vuchinch (1990) notes, "in a concession a participant offers a position that is between the opposing positions that define the dispute" (127). Thus, a concession does not give in to the other position but rather establishes a middle ground which moves toward the other position but still opposes it. A concession proposes a compromise position

between the two opposing positions. If the concession offered is accepted by the opponent the conflict episode can terminate. The basic compromise terminal exchange has two slots: (1) concession offering and (2) acceptance of the offering. This basic two-step structure may be expanded to include multiple concessions, and acceptance may be tacit. An important feature of compromise terminations is that none of the participants must lose face, in particular when both opponents make concessions. But even when only one participant makes a concession, it is self-initiated, not externally enforced, and hence face-loss is minimised.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned above, in many cases, a concession functions as a pre-closing (Schegloff & Sacks 1973; Levinson 1983), which signals that one participant is ready to close the argument but is unwilling to submit. The opponent may accept the concession, reject it, or offer a counter-concession. The conflict episode is terminated when a (set of) concession(s) is accepted. Concessions can be direct or indirect; acceptance may be verbal or nonverbal, explicit or tacit. This terminal-exchange format is illustrated by the following two extracts:

**example (4): My sister 9**

22 ISABELLE                    One, two, three ... begin. Maman - that  
23                                    is not fair.  
24 MADAME DANZARD            What's not fair?  
25 ISABELLE                    You started at two.  
> 26 MADAME DANZARD           I did not. I absolutely did not.  
27                                    However, if you insist, we'll start  
28                                    again.  
29 ISABELLE                    One ... two ... three ... start.

In example (4), Madame Danzard and her daughter Isabelle are playing cards. When Isabelle accuses her mother of being unfair (line 23) and having started too early (line 25), Madame Danzard at first vehemently rejects her daughter's blame (line 26). Immediately afterwards, however, she offers a concession, proposing to restart the game. While she does not admit having cheated, her proposal lays the groundwork for the termination of the conflict episode. Isabelle accepts her mother's compromise offer, which she signals by starting

to dole out cards again. In so doing, she collaborates in closing the argument.

In example (5), Mother and Olga are arguing about whether Olga has to change her clothes just because Mother's new boyfriend is (supposed to be) having dinner with them.

**example (5): Avenue**

136 MOTHER Now you fix up nice for tonight.  
137 OLGA Why? I've met him before.  
138 MOTHER This night is special, wear that taffeta dress.  
139 OLGA I don't like it.  
140 MOTHER Then wear something else, something that will  
141 give- give an illusion.  
142 OLGA I don't have to fool anybody.  
143 MOTHER (*Starts applying eyebrow pencil and*  
144 *eyeliner.*) Look, do what I say. I do you  
145 favors. Who bought you that damn piano? You  
146 think it costs peanuts? It took me more than  
147 seven months to get the money for that.  
148 OLGA Yes, I know. Didn't you ever get tired and  
149 sore from all that work?  
150 MOTHER (*Stops activity and looks angrily at her.*)  
151 I'm thinking of two ways to take what you just  
152 said. And if it's the bad way I'm thinking to  
153 be right, you're gonna get a bar of soap in  
154 your mouth.  
> 155 OLGA Can't I wear what I have on?  
156 MOTHER (*Looking at her, slowly.*) All right. ((...))

Following an extended series of disagreements,<sup>13</sup> in response to her mother's threat (line 151-154) Olga offers a concession, asking Mother for permission to keep on the clothes she is wearing (line 155). In so doing, she makes way for the termination of the conflict sequence. By responding with an agreement (line 156), Mother collaborates in closing the argument - or at least this round.

In the two preceding extracts, the conflict episode is closed with a compromise terminal exchange. However, in my data, more often than not, concession offers are rejected by the opponent. Consider the following two examples:

**example (6): Alto I, 2**

11 WANDA Mama, she thinks I ought to take singing  
12 lessons. Can I?  
13 FLORENE What? Lessons? No, Wanda. I don't think  
14 so... How much would that cost?  
15 WANDA Just 3.00 a lesson.  
16 FLORENE That's a lot of money. We just couldn't  
17 afford that right now.  
18 WANDA Mama, I don't see why not. I bet Daddy will  
19 let me.  
20 FLORENE Now, Wanda, you can't jump into something  
21 like that.  
22 WANDA Why not?  
23 FLORENE You just can't. We can't even pay the rent.  
24 WANDA But, Mama, she say's I'm talented!  
25 FLORENE I can't help it. Your daddy's trying to get  
26 established in his career. Once he gets  
27 where he needs to be, then everything will  
28 be different.  
> 29 WANDA It might be too late then. He'll find a way  
30 if I ask him.  
31 FLORENE No, he won't!

**example (7): My mother I, 6**

18 JACKIE (*Panics*). Mummy - she's got to know - I can't  
19 come and visit, with her not knowing I can't!  
20 MARGARET Jackie, darling, we can't go over this  
21 again- you know as well as I do it would be  
22 impossible-  
23 JACKIE I don't believe you!  
24 MARGARET When she's grown up, you can tell her; when  
25 she's sixteen.  
> 26 JACKIE It'll be too late!  
27 (*Silence.*)  
28 Give me back the bags.

In both fragments, the mother submits a concession offer after a series of oppositional turns. In example (6), Florene offers Wanda a compromise, promising her that once her father has established his

career and earns enough money, she will be allowed to take singing lessons (lines 26-28). In example (7), Margaret concedes that Jackie can tell her daughter that she is her mother "when she's sixteen" (lines 24-25). In both extracts, the daughter rejects the mother's offer of compromise on the same grounds, and the dispute continues.

The compromise terminal exchange allows conflict to be closed without loss of face. However, it requires the willingness of one or both participant(s) to modify their own initial position and to accommodate the other's view. This requirement makes compromise a relatively difficult termination to achieve, and in fact, this type of conflict termination hardly ever occurs in my data. The scarcity of compromise closings in the mother-daughter disputes under analysis will be discussed below.

As the preceding discussion shows, conflict termination, like its initiation and continuance, is a joint product. The closing of a dispute sequence has to be mutually accomplished by the participants in a step-by-step fashion. To quote Vuchinich (1990), "a crucial feature of the terminal exchange is that it requires the participation of at least two parties. There is no unilateral terminal exchange" (130). The termination of verbal-conflict episodes may be achieved by establishing a dominance/submission relationship or by negotiating consensus on contested issues in successive turns at talk. But there are other ways of closing off verbal conflicts.

As mentioned above, verbal conflict can also end in a stand-off, with participants continuing to maintain opposing positions, with neither submitting. In a stand-off, the disputants drop the conflict without any kind of resolution; any attempts to induce the opponent into submission or to work out a compromise fail. At some point it becomes apparent that none of the opponents is going to submit and that compromise is not possible. As Vuchinich (1990) maintains, unless the argument displays strong antagonism, participants usually seek an opportunity to get out of a conflict that is not getting anywhere. At the same time, however, neither party is willing to give in. Oppositional turns continue until participants drop the conflict, typically by way of changing the topic. Thus, there is no terminal exchange. Rather, the disputants tacitly agree to disagree and move on to other subjects and

activities. In terms of game theory, a stand-off is a draw, with no winner and no loser. Thus, in a stand-off none of the disputants must lose face through submission (cf. Garcia 1991; Greatbatch 1997; Katriel 1985; Kotthoff 1993; Vuchinich 1990), nor do opponents have to make concessions or engage in the complex negotiation of a compromise position.

In the following example, the two women are arguing about Mother having read Olga's personal notes without permission.

**example (8): Avenue**

306 OLGA (*Putting papers inside notebook.*) How dare you  
307 read my personal property?  
308 MOTHER (*Angry, scared, she has gone too far.*) I  
309 wanted to see what you write. Sometimes I see  
310 you writing, so I wanted to see what it was.  
311 Just a bunch of junk. You'd think you'd write  
312 something good, like them confession stuff. I  
313 read a story the other day about this girl,  
314 just out of high school and she got mixed up  
315 with a bunch of college men and-  
316 OLGA I never look in your drawers!  
317 MOTHER If you did, you'd find nothing silly like that.  
318 OLGA I'd find something like jelly!  
319 MOTHER Watch that tongue, you hear me! It's getting  
320 lazy like you, sleeping all day and thinking of  
321 dirty things to say to your own mother! (*Goes to*  
322 *table, gets cigarette out pocketbook, lights it,*  
323 *sits.*)  
> 324 OLGA You don't love that pig, do you?  
325 MOTHER Now you're always asking questions. I'll tell  
326 you this. We got to get used to each other  
327 first.

In line 324, following her mother's threat, Olga initiates a topic change, by asking Mother if she loves her current boyfriend. In so doing, she provides an opportunity to drop the conflict, which Mother takes in the following turn. The argument closes with neither of the disputants submitting and with no compromise having been achieved on the initial issue.

If a dispute dissipates in this way, the conflict between the parties is not resolved. The conflict structure is dropped without the disputants having reached agreement. Instead, the difference of opinion is put on hold for the time being, as the participants move on to other activities, with the conflict 'waiting in the wings.' Hence, once the contentious issue comes up again, the argument is bound to be resumed (cf. also Dersley & Wootton 2001; Gruber 1996, 1998; Knoblauch 1991, 1995).<sup>14</sup>

Conflict may also be terminated with one participant withdrawing entirely from the interaction. As in the stand-off situation, the conflict is left in a stalemate with no terminal exchange. Withdrawal may occur when an opponent becomes too upset to continue the argument.<sup>15</sup>

In the following fragment, Doris is arguing with her daughter about whether Margaret's boyfriend is about to crush flowers with his car:

**example (9): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
131 valley!  
132 MARGARET He's not.  
133 DORIS He is.  
134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
135 DORIS Curious method of parking.  
136 MARGARET That's typical, you think all Americans are  
137 brash and wear loud check shirts and chew  
138 gum and want to marry English girls. You're  
139 just prej- ...  
140 DORIS Margaret, that's enough! (*Pause.*) After  
141 all, he is going to marry an English girl.  
142 MARGARET Oh Mother, don't look at me like that with  
> 143 your lips pressed together. (*exits.*)

Following an extended disagreement sequence, in the course of which both disputants insist on their respective positions, Margaret accuses her mother of being prejudiced against Americans (lines 136-139). In the following turn, Doris moves to terminate the argument by cutting Margaret off, cautioning her not to pursue her line of

action: "Margaret, that's enough!" (line 140). Subsequently, she issues an assertion, challenging Margaret's prior attribution of prejudice by pointing out that her daughter's American boyfriend does indeed want to marry her (lines 140-141). The dispute sequence terminates with Margaret leaving the scene exasperated, after making a negative remark about her mother's disapproving look. In the following turn, Margaret again counter-opposes her mother. However, since she obviously cannot dispute Doris's claim, she opposes her by challenging her facial expression (lines 142-143). Directly following her reproach, she withdraws from the interaction by leaving the area. Thus, the dispute ends in a stand-off with none of the opponents submitting.

As the extract below illustrates, verbal conflicts may also be closed by a combination of different termination formats:

**example (10): Home**

293 OLIVIA I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
294 MARY JANE I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
295 I guess my plans don't matter. Do they?  
296 The failure daughter comes home but that's  
297 just not good enough for you, I guess.  
298 OLIVIA Just shut up. Shut up.  
299 MARY JANE You shut up. You just shut up forever. How  
> 300 about that? (*She rushes into the bedroom.*)  
301 I'm so sick of this. (*She returns with a*  
302 *suitcase, throws it on the floor. She goes*  
303 *back again and retrieves some clothes and*  
304 *things. She throws them on top of the*  
305 *suitcase.*)  
306 OLIVIA What are you doing?  
307 MARY JANE What's it matter? It so obviously doesn't  
308 matter to you. (*She packs.*)  
309 OLIVIA Okay. Okay. You do what you have to. I'm not  
310 gonna keep you here. Leave your mother to  
311 do everything herself. Just go ahead and go.  
312 MARY JANE I am.  
313 OLIVIA Where do you think you're gonna go?  
314 MARY JANE I don't know.

315 OLIVIA           *(Olivia's up and trying to stop Mary Jane.)*  
316                    Just stop it. *(They fight over the*  
317                    *suitcase.)* Stop it now!  
318 MARY JANE       No!  
319 OLIVIA           Stop! Let go. Be a big girl now.  
320 MARY JANE       Give me my stuff!  
321 OLIVIA           Come on. Let go!  
> 322 MARY JANE     Ma!! *(She gives up and throws the clothes*  
323                    *down. She jumps up and walks away.)*  
324 OLIVIA           *(Quickly unpacks all the clothes and closes*  
325                    *the suitcase.)*

Prior to this fragment, Mary Jane and Olivia were having a fierce dispute in the course of which they repeatedly accused, challenged and shouted at each other. Following an exchange of mutual accusations (lines 293-297), the dispute escalates when mother and daughter tell one another to "shut up" (lines 298-299). Subsequently, Mary Jane moves to close the conflict episode by leaving the room (lines 300) and explicitly stating her unwillingness to continue the argument ("I'm so sick of this." line 301). In fact, by starting to pack her suitcase (lines 301-305), she signals that she intends to leave and thus withdraw completely from the interaction with her mother. However, by asking her to account for her packing (line 306), Olivia manages to draw her back into the conversation, and a few lines later, the women are at each other again, fighting over Mary Jane's suitcase (lines 315-321). When it becomes obvious that Olivia will not let go, Mary Jane eventually gives in. The exclamation "Ma!!" (line 322) and the fact that she throws down her clothes signals high emotional involvement. Moreover, her agitation is displayed by her jumping up and walking away. To sum up, following a first attempt on Mary Jane's part at closing the argument by withdrawing from the interaction in line 300, the dispute is first resumed and eventually terminated by a combination of submission terminal exchange (lines 321-322) and withdrawal.

As we have seen, terminal exchanges can serve as mechanisms for displaying dominance and consensus. While such displays provide a routine basis for terminating arguments, the use of stand-off and

withdrawal formats shows that disputes may well be closed without completed terminal exchanges - and thus without being resolved or settled. In other words, participants can terminate a dispute-speech activity without achieving a consensus on the contentious issue(s). In fact, in my data this is more often the case than not.

As indicated above, the various termination formats are not equally frequent in my data.<sup>16</sup> A large number of the mother-daughter disputes under analysis end in a stand-off. In most cases, the end of an argument occurs when one of the disputants does not tie her talk to the topic of the ongoing dispute, but instead produces an action that shifts to another subject and thus breaks the argument frame and her opponent accepts the shift. Although consensus is not reached, by shifting to non-conflictual talk, the participants cooperate in closing the dispute. However, since the controversy is not resolved, as soon as the contentious issue comes up again, the argument is usually resumed, too. Thus, in closing a conflict episode by means of a topic change, the participants are typically merely taking a breather from the dispute before they continue arguing again. Another relatively frequent termination format in my data is the submission terminal exchange, where one of the parties gives in. Usually, but not always it is the daughter who submits to the mother - especially in those dyads in which the daughter is still under age and financially as well as emotionally highly dependent on the mother, as, for instance, in extracts (2) and (3). Considering the stress on resolution as the principal way of terminating conflict in much of the (especially earlier) literature on conflict, perhaps the most striking finding is that almost none of the arguments under analysis are terminated by compromise.<sup>17</sup> In the mother-daughter disputes portrayed in my data, conflict resolution is a very rare occurrence. In other words, while conversational argument has traditionally been studied within the framework of conflict resolution, in my data disputes frequently terminate without resolution of the issues being argued about. In fact, not only is resolution rarely reached, it is apparently not a goal of the interaction.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that mother-daughter dispute may be a process-oriented rather than a goal-oriented activity.

These findings are consonant with the observations in earlier studies of naturally occurring conflict talk. Previous research on

arguments between both children and adults from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds has revealed that conversationalists do not share the bias against argumentative behaviour that is prevalent in the literature.

For instance, studies of preadolescent urban black children's disputes (C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin 1990; M. H. Goodwin 1982b, 1983, 1990; M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987), as well as studies of upper-middle-class preschool white children's disputes in a classroom setting (Corsaro 1985; Corsaro & Rizzo 1990; Genishi & di Paolo 1982; Maynard 1985a, b), part-Hawaiian children (Boggs 1978), Israeli children (Katriel 1985) found that the children's arguments were often quite protracted and seldom ended in compromise or settlement young children's conflict (cf. also Ross & Conant 1992; Tesla & Dunn 1992). The majority of disputes were terminated without any clear indication that either party had won or lost. They usually ended with one of the disputants shifting the topic of the conversation to an uncontroversial subject and the opponent accepting the shift.

While older children might seem more likely to resolve conflicts, studies have found that most conflict exchanges among adolescent boys are not resolved, and resolution is not even a relevant goal (M. H. Goodwin 1980, 1982, 1993; Kochman 1983; Labov 1972b). According to Vuchinich (1987), Smetana (1989) and Tesla & Dunn (1992), children do not necessarily compromise more or become more sensitive to another's position as they get older. Instead, they often learn to become better arguers in order to maintain their own position. Thus, compromise is not a frequent outcome of disputes between adolescents (cf. Hofer et al. 1993; Pikowsky 1993; Smetana 1989; Smetana et al. 1991; Vuchinich 1987, 1990; Vuchinich & Angelelli 1995).

Numerous researchers have reported similar findings for disputes in families of various socio-cultural backgrounds. For example, Montemayor & Hansom (1985); Vuchinich (1984, 1987, 1990) and Smetana (1989) have shown that family conflicts (especially those involving adolescents) usually end in stand-offs. In Vuchinich's data of verbal conflict during American family-dinner conversations, 66 percent of the conflicts that occurred were

terminated by stand-offs, whereas compromise terminated only 9 percent of the arguments.

Likewise, in a study of arguments among Jewish American couples during dinner conversations, Schiffrin (1984) observed that "very few arguments ended with speakers realigned toward a previously disputed issue. Rather, arguments ended when the topic of talk changes or when a new activity began" (320-321). Kakavá (1993a, b, 2002) reports similar observations for arguments in Greek families. She finds that in intimate contexts, Greek participants frequently engaged in sustained disagreement sequences in order to match their wits and compete for ideas. However, instead of resolving their differences, they agreed to disagree. In his analysis of arguments among British family members, Billig (1989) also observes that rather than trying to resolve their disagreement, the participants can be seen to actively maintain disagreement. Similarly, Keppler (1994) and Knoblauch (1991, 1995) note that in informal discussions during German family dinner conversations, the participants appeared to appreciate arguing for its own sake, rather than striving for the resolution of dissent. The discussions were mostly very lengthy, and instead of pursuing one topic straight away, the speakers continually shifted from one subject to the next (and back again), usually without ever arriving at a consensus on the issues they started arguing about.

Corresponding findings have been reported in previous studies of argumentative sequences between mothers and daughters. In their analyses of elicited argumentative discussions (i.e. verbal conflicts in which the speakers use arguments in order to convince/persuade the interlocutor of their goal/position or to get her to perform the desired activity) between mothers and their adolescent daughters, Hofer et al. (1990a, 1991, 1993) and Pikowsky (1993) note that the mother-daughter conflicts in their corpus frequently terminated without resolution with the participants maintaining their original positions.

Similar observations have been made for verbal conflicts between adults in institutional contexts. For instance, Gruber (1992, 1994, 1996a, 1998) notes that the disputes in his data of Austrian TV-discussions often had no outcome in the sense that the conflict between the parties was resolved. Instead, they were

terminated by means of a topic change, which led to a closing of the dispute sequence but prevented a resolution of the controversy. This sort of termination sine resolution typically resulted in a temporary 'time out' followed by the resumption of the initial conflict in a 'second round' as soon as the controversial topic was introduced again.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have presented data and reviewed research showing that verbal conflicts are often unresolved and rather lengthy, although conflict research has traditionally focused on conflict talk as a tool for conflict resolution. Instead of taking opportunities for resolution, participants can frequently be seen to continue in their efforts to maintain the dispute, and arguments often end in a stand-off with neither party acquiescing and without a compromise having been reached. The paucity of resolution in the mother-daughter disputes under analysis suggests that these intergenerational arguments serve other purposes than the reconciliation of opposing views.<sup>19</sup>

As noted earlier, previous research has shown that verbal conflicts perform a range of important functions other than resolution. In line with Simmel's (1955/1908; cf. also Coser 1956) observation that conflict provides a central force for the constitution of social relations, numerous scholars (e.g. Grimshaw 1990b; Muntigl & Turnbull 1998; Newell & Stutman 1989/1990) posit that while social structure is negotiated in every conversation,<sup>20</sup> verbal conflict is a primary activity in and through which social identities and relationships are enacted and negotiated. Since, as discussed above, power constitutes one of the basic relationship dimensions, verbal conflicts are arenas for the display and negotiation of power.

Power has been conceptualised in various different ways. Building on Weber's (1947: 152) classic definition of power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests," linguists concerned with the study of power and its actual use or manifestation in discourse, interaction and other social practices have defined power as the potential ability of one actor to get her way and to control (influence) another's actions and/or beliefs (cf., for instance,

Brown & Gilman 1960; Fowler 1985; Johnson 1976). This potential is based on participants' access to (a range of different) power resources such as, for example, social status, age, expert knowledge, which they draw on in the course of their interaction to exert control over each other and affect social outcomes. However, since this ability to control others and influence social outcomes can be made manifest only in interpersonal dynamics, power is not a property or an attribute of individuals, but part and parcel of social interaction. Furthermore, rather than a static social category that is predetermined by social structure, power is a flexible relationship that is perpetually reconstructed or changed in and through social interaction. Power relationships, then, are interactional achievements; they are jointly negotiated by the participants in the course of their interaction through the ways in which they communicate with one another. And a major site for this power relationship negotiation process is conflict interaction, i.e. the open collision of control manoeuvres and opposition.

The interconnection of power and conflict has been noted by various researchers. For instance, according to Mack & Snyder (1973), "opposed actions are directed to changing or preserving existing power relations" (36), and "the function of conflict is the clarification and stabilization of power relations" (76). Likewise, Millar et al. (1984) view "conflict as necessarily taking place within the power dimension of relationships" (232).

This view is echoed in numerous empirical studies of conflict talk. One of the most commonly cited meanings of verbal conflict among children and adolescents is the negotiation of status hierarchies. For instance, in their study of children's disputes, Ross & Conant (1992) note that conflict holds a great potential "for the social organization of relationships and group structure" (153).

Similarly, Maynard (1985b: 212) claims that a manifest function of argumentative exchanges among children is the negotiation of local social order, and that this function is achieved independent of conflict resolution:

The reason for the empirical lack of resolution in children's disputes is that a basic function of conflict is to achieve a concrete, particular social organisation through the display of opposition and the constitution of accountable alignment

structures. Such organization is accomplished with or without resolution of a dispute episode. That is, the issue displayed interactionally is not how to resolve conflict, but in what direction will the construction of social organization proceed.

Likewise, in their study of preschoolers' disputes, Genishi & di Paolo (1982) maintain that social negotiation seems to be the primary reason for arguing, rather than resolution. They observe that "the children's goal often seems to be not the fair resolution of the argument but the control of another's behaviour" (66). Their arguments contain many examples of "social control acts" (Ervin-Tripp 1982), which are used to simultaneously manipulate other's actions and enhance the speaker's own status. They conclude that for children, "the act of arguing or negotiation may be more important than its termination" (67).

Goodwin (1980, 1982, 1983, 1990, 1993), too, states that an important aspect of dispute talk among children, and in particular preadolescent boys, is the achievement and negotiation of local social organisational structures, such as hierarchy and authority. Her data from the talk of urban black boys playing in the street demonstrates how through opposition, the participants can interactively construct roles and identities for themselves and others. Dispute talk thus allows boys to negotiate directly their positions of relative power with respect to one another. Following Mitchell-Kernan's (1977) argument, she shows that the formatting and sequencing of directives and reactions to them can be used "to define, reaffirm, challenge, manipulate, and redefine status and rank" (1982: 78).

Correspondingly, in her study of the role of disputes among white and black preschool boys, Emihovich (1986) claims that arguments occur during children's play because children view argumentative talk as "status assertion." In line with Goodwin's observations, she finds that directives serve to challenge one another's status and opposition to these challenges is a means of defending one's status. An important aspect of the boys' disputes was to establish a dominance hierarchy which helped them frame their role (e.g. as the leader) within a group.

Katriel (1985) finds that the ritualised conflict activity brogez ("being in anger") functions as a form of "status competition" among Israeli children who belong in the same "social sphere." Brogez is a type of ritual insult similar to sounding and verbal duelling in African American discourse (Abrahams 1962, Labov 1972b; Kochman 1968, 1970, 1972, 1981, 1983), which allows both boys and girls in same-sex groups to vent their anger and hostility through "ritually constrained interactional channels" (Katriel 1985: 486), and to discover status hierarchies within groups through the competitive display of verbal skills.

Similarly, the negotiation of social order, i.e. relations of power, has been argued to be an important function of conflict between family members, and in particular between mothers and daughters. For instance, in his study of family conflicts, Emery (1992) differentiates between the surface meaning of conflict (i.e. its literal content) and the deep meaning of conflict (i.e. the meaning that the process and outcome of conflict conveys about the structure of the relationship). He maintains that "in terms of deep meaning, conflict serves the normative functions of testing (or asserting) and changing (or resisting change) in the structure of family relationships" (273). Based on the assumption that intimacy (emotional closeness) and power (designated authority and actual social influence) are the two most basic relationship dimensions, he argues that "all conflicts are intimacy struggles or power struggles at their deep level of meaning" (278).<sup>21</sup> Thus, a (family) conflict that is unresolved in terms of content still carries deep meaning as a power and/or intimacy struggle.

Likewise, Vuchinich (1984, 1987, 1990) states that the small number of resolved family conflicts in his data is not surprising, as verbal conflict "accomplishes functions other than resolution" (1984: 219), such as expressing negative emotions (i.e. hostility), clarifying rights and obligations, marking interpersonal boundaries, and establishing and maintaining power hierarchies.

Similarly, in their analyses of argumentative sequences between mothers and their adolescent daughters, Hofer et al. (1991, 1993) and Pikowsky (1993) maintain that based on the conflicting needs of control and autonomy, the relationship between mothers and their adolescent daughters is characterised by a range of everyday

conflicts.<sup>22</sup> Through the enactment of the conflict between the mother's attempts to control her daughter and the daughter's need for individuation the relationship is being restructured and new interaction patterns are established. Conflict interaction thus plays an important part in the negotiation of the mother-daughter relationship - and this process takes place independent of resolution.

To sum up so far, a crucial function of mother-daughter conflicts (and of verbal conflicts in general) is the negotiation of social relationships, and in particular of power relationships. This function is accomplished whether conflict is resolved or not. This explains why, in the mother-daughter disputes in my data, resolution rarely occurs and is apparently not a goal of the interaction.

The function of conflict talk to (re)produce or transform power relationships also becomes manifest when a dispute sequence is terminated by submission. As discussed above, in closing an argument by means of a submission terminal exchange, the participants mutually establish a local hierarchy. Following a series of mutual oppositions, one of the speakers backs away from her position to one that is compatible with the opponent's, thus tacitly marking the superiority of the opposing party. This display of hierarchy, of dominance and submission, is a collaborative achievement, accomplished as much through the actions of the subordinate party as through those of the dominant party. Thus, in terminating a conflict episode by means of submission, the disputants jointly, sequentially establish a local social organisation, thereby reproducing or modifying global social structures - depending on the outcome of the dispute. As this discussion shows, the investigation of the process and outcomes of verbal conflicts between mothers and daughters reveals how the social order of the moment can be formulated, challenged, and reconstituted through talk-in-interaction.

Although social structure is negotiated in every interaction (Bateson 1951, 1972; Berger & Kellner 1964; Berger & Luckmann 1967; R. Brown 1965; Danziger 1976; Duncan 1967; Goffman 1959, 1963; Goldsmith & Baxter 1996; Labov and Fanshel 1977; Mandelbaum 2003; Millar & Rogers 1988; Pomerantz & Fehr 1997; Robinson 1985; Rogers 1981, 1998; Rogers et al. 1985; Rogers & Millar 1988; Tannen 1987, 1993, 2003; Thimm & Kruse 1991; Thornborrow 2002; Van Dijk 1985,

1990; Watzlawick et al. 1967; Wood & Kroger 1991; Wood & Ryan 1991), conflict talk constitutes a crucial activity through which participants (re)produce social organisation and negotiate social relationships. Thus, an understanding of how social structure is negotiated will benefit from an understanding of how arguing is accomplished. By examining closely the ways in which conflicts are mutually and interactionally constituted, sustained and terminated, we can obtain insights into the central role of conflict in the joint accomplishment and transformation of social order.

To conclude, drawing on a model of verbal conflict as a sequential interactional accomplishment, which is jointly constituted by the participants through the mutual exchange of oppositional moves in successive turns at talk, I have examined the ways in which the mother-daughter disputes in my data terminate. I have shown that like conflict opening, conflict termination is jointly and sequentially accomplished by the participants. Verbal conflicts begin and proceed through mutually expressed opposition and end with mutual abstinence from opposing moves. Opposition ceases either because the conflict has been resolved or settled by the participants or because it has been dropped by one or both of them. Despite the stress on resolution as the principal way of terminating conflict in much of the literature on conflict, almost none of the mother-daughter disputes under analysis are resolved. In fact, not only does resolution rarely occur in my data, it is apparently not a goal of the interaction. This finding suggests that the intergenerational arguments in my data serve other purposes than the reconciliation of opposing views. A crucial function of mother-daughter conflicts is the negotiation of power relationships (through the exchange of oppositional moves, i.e. control attempts and resistance), and this function is accomplished whether conflict is resolved or not. Consequently, verbal conflict represents a fruitful site for examining the ways in which participants negotiate their status with respect to one another. By looking at the form and sequencing of actions and their responses we can examine how, within the mother-daughter dyad, the social order of the moment is formulated, challenged, and reconstituted in the course of an ongoing dispute, thereby exploring the interplay of conflict and power. In the following, I will investigate how the sequential

organisation of the mother-daughter disputes in my data differs from other interactional contexts and thus contributes to the framing (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualisation (Gumperz 1982) of this speech activity. I will begin by examining the relationship between various aspects of the sequential organisation of conversation and the procedures by which the adversative character of oppositional moves in my data is highlighted (rather than downplayed). Subsequently, I will look specifically at the types of argumentative actions that occur in my data and the ways in which these actions and their responses are formatted and sequenced to uncover the dynamics of the delicate power play that can take place between mothers and daughters and that is enacted in conflict talk.

Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.  
(Max Lucade)

If you go in for argument, take care of your temper.  
(Joseph Farrell)

### 6.3 Aggravated versus mitigated forms of disagreement

In the previous section, I offered a structural definition of verbal conflicts, arguing that they emerge by means of consecutive action-opposition sequences, in which participants oppose one another in successive turns at talk. This is illustrated by the following two examples.

The first extract from *Tell me* portrays a typical goodnight routine; the mother is putting her daughter to bed:

**example (1): Tell me**

2 DAUGHTER I hear something. There's something in the  
3 corner.  
4 MOTHER Nonsense. There's nothing in the corner.  
5 DAUGHTER But, Mama, I hear something!  
6 MOTHER (*With a sigh.*) Alright, we'll turn on the light  
7 and take a look. There, you see, there's  
8 nothing in the corner.

The daughter's assertion that she hears something and that "There's something in the corner" (lines 2-3), is treated by the mother as an arguable action. By categorising what her daughter has just said as "Nonsense" (line 4), she displays opposition at the very beginning of her turn. Moreover, by negating her daughter's utterance ("There's nothing in the corner.") she reinforces disagreement. The daughter counter-opposes her mother's challenge in the following turn through repeating her initial assertion, "I hear something!" (line 5), reinforcing her claim by raising her voice. Thus, Mother's initial opposition, in which she treats her daughter's assertion as an arguable action, becomes itself an arguable action in the daughter's following turn. In response to her daughter's reassertion, the mother gives in and agrees to "turn on the light and take a look" (lines 6-8), thus terminating the dispute sequence.

As discussed above, in the following fragment from *Alto*, Florene and her daughter Wanda are arguing about whether Wanda might

take singing lessons. After a lengthy series of disagreements, Florene issues a compromise offer, promising Wanda that once her father is financially established, there will be enough money for singing lessons (lines 26-29).

**example (2): Alto I, 2**

26 FLORENE I can't help it. Your daddy's trying to get  
27 established in his career. Once he gets where  
28 he needs to be, then everything will be  
29 different.  
30 WANDA It might be too late then. He'll find a way  
31 if I ask him.  
> 32 FLORENE No, he won't!  
> 33 WANDA Yes, he will!  
34 FLORENE He'll say yes, and then leave it up to me to  
35 find a way! ((...))

In lines 30-31, Wanda rejects her offer of compromise, arguing that by the time her father settles down in business "it might be too late," and claims that "He'll find a way" to make her wish come true if she asks him. Her challenge is counter-opposed by Florene in line 32, who negates the content of Wanda's turn-final utterance: "No, he won't!" The increase in volume signals high emotional involvement and intensifies disagreement. Wanda again counters her mother's challenge by reasserting her own prior claim: "Yes, he will!" (line 33). Her raised voice turns up the emotional heat of the argument even further. In the following turn, Florene issues another counter-opposition, exclaiming that even though her husband might permit Wanda to take singing lessons, it would still be up to her to find a way to finance them (lines 34-35). By this means, she both undermines Wanda's position and at the same time defends her own standpoint. Again, the escalated volume of her voice indicates emotional agitation and reinforces her counter.

These fragments show that, argument sequences evolve from the exchange of mutually oppositional turns. However, this does not capture the whole picture. Apart from the succession of dissent turns, the specifically argumentative character of the preceding extracts can also be located in the ways disagreeing turns are

constructed so as to stress, rather than minimise, their oppositional character. That is to say, the speakers frame (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualise (Gumperz 1982) their talk as an argument not only by selecting specific types of actions (i.e. disagreements) but also by packaging these actions in specific ways that underscore their antagonistic nature.

In Labov & Fanshel's (1977) terms, the speakers in the above extracts are engaging in the exchange of "aggravated" oppositional turns. As Labov & Fanshel have shown, speakers can mitigate or modify speech actions to avoid creating offence or they can use more aggravated forms of speech actions. By the same token, opposition can vary in its intensity: speakers can disagree with one another in mitigated or modulated ways or in a more aggravated or unmodulated fashion, thereby emphasising dissent, as in the preceding examples.<sup>23</sup>

The aggravated nature of opposition in the above fragments becomes most obvious if we look at alternative means that are employed by conversationalists engaging in disagreement. In the following, I will therefore focus on practices that are commonly used in ordinary conversation to mitigate and systematically downplay (rather than emphasise) the oppositional properties of disagreeing turns.

They say that blood is thicker than water. Maybe that's why we battle our own with more energy and gusto than we would ever expend on strangers.

(David Assael, *Northern Exposure, Family Feud*)

Your very silence shows you agree. (Euripides)

### **6.3.1 Preference (for disagreement) order**

Mitigation and aggravation are techniques that function in a broad system in the social use of language, namely that of "preference organisation," as described in the framework of CA.

The concept of "preference" as it is used in CA was developed to characterise a range of phenomena associated with the fact that choices among alternative, but non-equivalent, courses of action which are available to participants are routinely implemented in ways that reflect an institutional ranking of alternatives such that there is at least one "preferred" and one "dispreferred" type of action. Despite its connotations, the term is not intended to refer to the psychological motives of individuals. Rather, it concerns structural features of the design of turns and sequences associated with particular activities, by which participants can draw conventionalised inferences about the kinds of action a turn is performing.

Before I embark on a discussion of the concept of preference, however, it is pertinent to first talk about another key notion in CA, namely that of "adjacency pairs". As discussed above, CA views talk as a structurally organised, orderly form of social interaction. It approaches naturally occurring conversation with the twin aims of (a) describing the structural organisations informing its production, and (b) thereby explicating the methods used by interactants to engage in mutually intelligible courses of action. A basic finding of CA is that conversation progresses by means of speakers taking turns at talking (cf. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). Moreover, conversation analytic research has shown that these alternating turns are sequentially ordered, i.e. they occur one after the other and are linked together into distinct sequences in systematic ways.

According to conversation analysts, the basic type of conversational sequence is the "adjacency pair" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973). Adjacency pairs are pairs of utterances which are (a)

"relatively ordered," i.e. there is a recognisable difference between "first pair parts" and "second pair parts" of a pair, and (b) "type connected," i.e. given first-pair parts require particular (or a particular range of) second-pair parts:

if a party produces a first pair part of some type, such as greeting, question, offer, request, compliment, ... then the party who is going to do a second pair part to that first pair part picks it from the sorts of alternatives that fit the type, i.e. for greetings this involves greetings; for questions, various sorts of answers; for offers, acceptances and rejections; for announcements, congratulations and condolences; and so on. (Sacks 1973/1987: 55-56)

These paired action sequences are called adjacency pairs because, ideally, the two parts should be placed adjacent to each other. Schegloff & Sacks (1973: 295) formulated the basic rule for adjacency pairs as follows:

given the recognisable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type the first is recognisably a member of.<sup>24</sup>

This is, however, an idealised characterisation. The parts of adjacency pairs do not need to be strictly adjacent. There is a range of systematic insertions that can legitimately come between first and second pair parts.<sup>25</sup> But the main point is that on the production of a first pair part, the second part is "conditionally relevant" and expectable and remains so even if it is not produced in the next turn. If such a second pair part does not occur, it is "officially" or "noticeably" absent; and if some other first pair part occurs in its place then that will be heard where possible as a preliminary to the doing of a second part (Schegloff 1968, 1972).

To sum up so far, one aspect of adjacency pairs is that certain first pair parts make certain alternative actions relevant in second position. Examples include offers, which can be accepted or declined; assessments, which can be agreed with or disagreed with; and requests, which can be granted or declined. However, research, most notably by Sacks (1973/1987) and Pomerantz (1975, 1984), has shown that these alternatives are not equivalent. Second-pair parts such as agreements, acceptances, grantings and the like are produced

in systematically different ways than their negative counterparts, and are thus noticeably characterised as “preferred” and “dispreferred” responses respectively, with agreeing responses generally being preferred. As earlier conversation analytic work has shown, preference organisation operates on various levels, and the preferred and dispreferred status of actions respectively is displayed and embodied in talk in a number of ways.<sup>26</sup>

For instance, some first-pair parts (e.g. invitations, offers and requests) can be seen to ‘project’ or ‘invite’ some type of second-pair part as their preferred responses (e.g. accepts or grants) and others as dispreferred (e.g. declines or refusals). For example, Sacks observes how sequence-initial actions can be designed to prefer a particular kind of response or “questioner-preferred answer.” In his paper on the preference for agreement (1973/1987), he looks at sequences with agreeing or disagreeing answers to questions of the yes/no type. He shows that whether a question “prefers” a yes or no response is a matter of the speaker’s construction of it. Thus a question like “You’re going, aren’t you?” is built to exhibit a preference for a yes answer, while “You’re not going, are you?” is built to exhibit a preference for a no answer.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Sacks shows that questioners display an orientation to getting agreement: on sensing an upcoming disagreement, they can be seen to modify their initial question to end up with a form that can be agreed with. This is illustrated by the following examples, quoted from Sacks (1973/1987: 64):

**example (3)**

- 1 A: They have a good cook there?
- 2 ((pause))
- 3 Nothing special?
- 4 B: No, everybody takes their turns.

**example (4)**

- 1 A: Ken you walk?
- 2 (0.4)
- 3 A: Ud be too hard for yuh?
- 4 B: Oh::: darling I don’t know. Uh it’s bleeding a
- 5 little, e’jis took the bandage off yes’day...

In each fragment, speaker A asks a question exhibiting some sort of preference and there is a pause (line 2), i.e. no agreement occurs (or agreement is noticeably absent), after which the speaker revises the original question to exhibit the reverse preference in order to end up with a form that can be agreed with contiguously (line 3). And in response to this modified question, without further delay, she gets an answer in accord with it (line 4).

Sacks (1973/1987: 65) takes these instances as evidence that the preference for agreement is an aspect of an abstract or "formal apparatus" rather than a "matter of individual preferences," since the questioners are designing the questions not to get a personal preference, but are (re)designing the questions with an orientation to getting agreement.

Similarly, in a study of sequences involving invitations, offers, requests, and proposals, Davidson (1984) demonstrates that the producers of such first-pair parts interpret ensuing recipient silence as implicating an unstated dispreferred action (i.e. rejection) and seek to preclude the occurrence of a dispreferred response with a subsequent modified version of the initial action, which provides a further opportunity for a preferred response.

These findings indicate that when a first-pair part invites agreement and the recipient is silent, the silence signals - and is interpreted as - an unstated or as-yet-unstated disagreement. As Bilmes (1988) puts it: "when an invitation is not responded to ... the lack of response is taken to imply or presage refusal" (166). By the same token, as Pomerantz (1984) demonstrates, hesitations, questioning repeats, requests for clarification, weakly stated agreements, and the like, may signal potential disagreement.

Expanding on Sack's observations on agreement following yes/no questions, Pomerantz (1984) finds that, generally, agreement is the preferred response to a first assessment, and that initial assessments can be designed to prefer a particular kind of response:

the proffering of an initial assessment, though it provides for the relevance of a recipient's agreement or disagreement, may be so structured that it invites one next action over its alternative. A next action that is oriented to as invited will be called a *preferred next action*; its alternative, a

*dispreferred next action.* (Pomerantz 1984: 63, original emphasis)

For instance, question tags like *isn't it?* might be appended to an assessment, thereby inviting the recipient's agreement, as in the examples below, quoted from Pomerantz (1984: 61).

**example (5)**

Jo: T's - it's a beautiful day out isn't it?  
Lee: Yeh it's just gorgeous.

**example (6)**

Pat: It's a really clear lake isn't it?  
Les: It's wonderful.

Preference, while operating over much of conversation, has been shown to be context sensitive. For instance, Pomerantz (1978, 1984) observes that although in an overwhelming majority of cases, agreement with a previous utterance is the preferred second-pair part, it is not always the preferred response. She provides evidence that disagreements are expected to occur in certain environments. Whether agreement or disagreement is the preferred response depends in part on the action performed with the initial assessment. For instance, subsequent to self-deprecations and compliments, disagreement is the preferred response. Likewise, several researchers (Atkinson & Drew 1979; Bilmes 1988; Garcia 1991) have shown that, after accusations, denials are preferred. Apparently, in certain types of sequences, the usual preference for agreement is reversed.

As the preceding discussion has shown, the preference for agreement or disagreement is built into the sequence type involved.<sup>28</sup> That is, whether agreement or disagreement is the preferred response is determined (at least in part) by the sequence-initial action. Speakers may thus design first-pair parts in particular ways in order to invite, i.e. prefer, a particular kind of response. To quote Sacks (1973/1987: 57):

if a question is built in such a way as to exhibit a preference as between 'yes' or 'no', or 'yes-' or 'no-' like responses, then the answerers will tend to pick that choice,

or a choice of that sort will be preferred by answerers, or should be preferred by answerers.

However, the preferred or dispreferred status of an activity is also exhibited in the participants' ways of doing a second-pair part. As Pomerantz (1984) maintains, there is an association between an action's preference status and the turn shape in which it is produced, in that "an action, by virtue of how the participants orient to it, will be housed in and performed through a turn shape that reflects their orientation" (64). In other words, speakers display the kind of action they are doing, and the kind of stance they are taking toward what they are doing, in their use of sequential properties and structural devices.

The observation that participants have different ways of enacting a responsive activity can again be traced to Sacks (1973/1987). He notes that speakers' orientation to the preference for agreement is displayed by the different designs of agreeing and disagreeing responses:

If an agreeing answer occurs, it pretty damn well occurs contiguously [to that with which it agrees], whereas if a disagreeing answer occurs it may well be pushed rather deep in to the turn that it occupies. (Sacks 1973/1987: 58)

One way speakers can indicate the dispreferred status of a turn is by starting a turn with components such as "Well," "Um" or "I don't know." Consider, for instance, the following two extracts, the first illustrating a preferred acceptance of an invitation, the second a dispreferred negative response to a yes/no question.

**example (7) (Schegloff 1988: 446)**

- 1 B: Why don't you come and see me some [time.  
2 A: [I would like to.

**example (8) (Sacks 1973/1987: 58)**

- 1 A: You coming down early?  
2 B: Well, I got a lot of things to do before getting  
3 cleared up tomorrow. I w- probably won't be too early.

In extract (7), the preferred acceptance is produced straightforwardly and contiguously (in fact, in slight overlap with the preceding invitation) in one short turn with no accounts or mitigations (line 2). By contrast, in fragment (8), A's first turn appears to indicate that he expects B to be "coming down early" (as the opposite expectation would be conveyed by "You're not coming down early are you?"). The construction of B's incongruent response exhibits two principal features of dispreferred seconds. First, the response is "formed up so that the disagreement is as weak as possible" (Sacks 1973/1987: 58). Notice in particular line 3, where "I w-," which looks like a start on "I won't be too early," is changed into the weaker form "probably won't be too early." Secondly, the actual disagreement is not produced early in the turn, like the agreement in extract (7) but is held off until B has not only produced a "Well," but also has presented an account for why he will not be early (lines 2-3).

Elaborating Sacks' (1973/1987) finding that the preference for agreement operates to shape an answerer's behaviour, Pomerantz (1984) contrasted dispreferred-action turn shapes with preferred-action turn shapes and showed that dispreferred formats commonly display the following "dispreference markers": delay devices prior to stated disagreements like silences, hesitating prefaces, requests for clarification, and/or weakly stated disagreement components, i.e. partial agreements/disagreements.

As Levinson (1983: 307) points out, the structural notion of preference corresponds to the linguistic concept of markedness. Preferred second actions are typically unmarked, while dispreferred seconds are marked by various kinds of structural complexities. For instance, dispreferred seconds may be accompanied by accounts, whereas preferred ones generally are not. Dispreferred seconds may be expressed in attenuated or mitigated form, or even shaped as preferred seconds, but the opposite is not the case. Preferred responses generally are packaged in short turns, or at the very start of longer ones, whereas dispreferred responses regularly come in long complex turns, are placed late within them, and are preceded by various other components such as accounts, excuses, mitigations, attenuations, and apparent offerings of preferred responses. Usually, dispreferred seconds are preceded by some delay component

at the start of the turn (e.g. an initial "Uh," "Well" or "I don't know"), whereas preferred seconds come at the very start. Moreover, when a dispreferred response is delivered, the turn start itself is frequently delayed, either by silence intervening between it and the talk being responded to, or by some other intervening talk, most commonly a "repair" sequence (cf. Schegloff et al. 1977) initiated by a clarification question displaying some "trouble" in hearing or understanding the preceding talk. Some of these characteristic features of dispreferred-action turn shapes are illustrated by the following extract, quoted from Schegloff (1988: 446):

**example (9)**

- 1 Vicky: I called um to see if you want to uh  
 2 (0.4)  
 3 c'm over en watch, the Classics Theater.  
 4 (0.3)  
 5 Vicky: Sandy 'n Tom 'n I,=  
 6 Karen: =She Sto [ops t'Conquer?  
 7 Vicky: [( )  
 8 (0.4)  
 9 Vicky: Yeh.  
 10 (0.3)  
 11 Karen: Mom j's asked me t'watch it with her,h

In this fragment, the dispreferred rejection of the prior invitation is delayed first by a silence after the end of the invitation (line 4), then by a clarification question (line 6), then by another silence after the answer to the clarification question (line 10), and when a response to the invitation is finally delivered, the rejection is so mitigated that, in fact, it is not articulated at all but has to be inferred from an account replacing it (line 11).<sup>29</sup>

As we have seen, when agreement is invited by sequence-initial actions, delay devices prior to stated disagreements and/or weakly stated disagreement components are part of turn and sequence organisations associated with dispreferred seconds. In addition, Pomerantz (1984) emphasises that these turn and sequence shapes not only package disagreements when agreements are invited, "but constitute part of the apparatus for accomplishing disagreements as dispreferred" (75-76, original emphasis). To quote Schegloff (1988), in deploying certain turn shapes, speakers "do the response they do

'as a preferred' or 'as a dispreferred,' rather than doing 'the preferred or the dispreferred response'" (453). The institutionalised design features of preferred/dispreferred actions can be used as a basis for inferences about the kinds of action a turn is performing.

Based on the preceding discussion, we can distinguish that (1) the first pair part of an adjacency pair may be structured in a way that favours (i.e. prefers) some particular next over an alternative; and (2) the second pair part can be structured in a way that it is recognisable as being invited (i.e. preferred) or as being uninvited (i.e. dispreferred).<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to the notions of preference discussed above, Bilmes (1988) defines preference in relation to the CA-concept of "relevant absence" (as discussed above). He argues that certain contexts make relevant some preferred action. When that action is not taken, it is experienced as being relevantly absent. Its absence is noticeable and a basis for inference. Bilmes' view of preference draws on the following principle:

Preference operates with three (or more) alternatives - a preferred (X), a nonpreferred (Y), and no mention of X or Y (N). ... The principle is simply that, if X is preferred, N implies Y, and it is this principle that, in all cases, defines preference. (Bilmes 1988: 165)

Bilmes thus limits preference to cases where participants in an interaction draw inferences based on the presence or absence of certain actions. In line with Sacks (1973/1987), he assumes that for many adjacency pairs, there are alternative but non-equivalent types of second-pair parts available, i.e. one of the types of responses is preferred. For instance, an acceptance is the preferred response to an invitation, so the absence of any response will be interpreted as a refusal. Because acceptance is preferred, an absence of response suggests refusal. By contrast, the inviter could take the lack of a response at face value, that is, simply as no response, and go back and repeat the invitation to force a response. Similarly, after accusations, denials are preferred: "If one fails to deny an accusation, a denial is noticeably absent and is a cause for inference, the most common inference being that the accusation

is true" (167).<sup>31</sup> By extrapolation, he argues that following attributions on a recipient, there is a preference for contradiction:

When someone makes an attribution about you, contradict, unless you want others to understand that you accept the truth of the attribution. When such attribution occurs without contradiction, a contradiction is relevantly absent. ... A reason for this absence is sought. Generally the conclusion drawn is that the recipient is acknowledging the truth of the attribution. (Bilmes 1988: 167)

Thus, Bilmes views preference structure in terms of participants' expectations. Yet, this way of conceptualising preference, too, implies that participants generally perform the expected action in an unmarked way (i.e. straightforwardly and contiguously), and the alternative contrastive action in a marked way. When a participant does not perform the expected action, its absence is experienced as a relevant absence, and co-participants typically make inferences to account for it. As such, the technical preference concept interacts with assumptions on normality. In Antaki's (1994) words, "preference is a normative matter of what is the usual case" (86).

As mentioned above, it has been assumed that there is an association between an action's preference status and the turn shape in which it is produced. However, Bilmes (1988) points out that speakers can and do use dispreference markers, or what he calls "reluctance markers," as a strategic resource in interaction. Drawing on Sacks' (1973/1987) notion of preference as built in the sequence type, Bilmes argues that the preferred status of an activity does not necessarily imply absence of reluctance markers and is not necessarily negated by the presence of reluctance markers.<sup>32</sup> That is to say, speakers might produce a preferred response with a show of reluctance without affecting the preferred status of that response. For example, a speaker might - for the sake of being polite - preface a preferred response such as a contradiction of an attribution (e.g. "That wasn't what I said"), with reluctance markers (e.g. "Well, uh, actually, that wasn't what I said") without implying that the contradiction is not entirely sincere (at least in a non-confrontational situation).<sup>33</sup> Conversely,

a dispreferred response (e.g. "Yes, that's exactly what I said") does not have to be prefaced by reluctance markers. As a result, Bilmes (1988: 176) maintains that the preferred or dispreferred status of a response is neither indicated nor contraindicated by the presence of reluctance markers, "because reluctance marking is a strategic resource available for any speaker to deploy at any time for any reason."

The strategic use of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes to accomplish various interactional goals has been observed in a number of studies. For example, Schegloff (1988) observes that, although generally guesses prefer confirmations and disprefer rejections, bearers of bad news produce rejections as preferred responses (i.e. without delay) in response to too strong guesses in order to gear recipients' guesses in the right direction.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Atkinson & Heritage (1984) suggest that doing a dispreferred response type with the sequential characteristics of a preferred response can have substantial consequences for the occasion and for the relationship of the participants involved in the interaction. For instance, since acceptance is generally the preferred response to an invitation, whatever the speaker's real inclination may be, a delayed refusal of an invitation (e.g. because of a competing obligation) may, as the standard form for a dispreferred action, be treated as opaque concerning the speaker's real disposition. By contrast, an early and unmitigated refusal will give rise to inferences and may be interpreted as revealing the respondent's personal desires and, indeed, as designed to do so. Likewise, Heritage (1984: 267-268) and Goodwin & Heritage (1990: 297) state that, based on the institutionalised design of dispreferred actions, while a prompt acceptance of an invitation is treated as unremarkable rather than as a sign of enthusiasm, a delayed acceptance is often heard as reluctant. Similarly, a prompt or unmitigated or unaccounted-for rejection tends to be treated as indicative of rudeness or hostility. That is to say, departures from the conventionalised patterns for preferred/dispreferred actions are normatively accountable matters and the objects of inferential reasoning. This implies that the institutionalised designs for actions can be exploited by conversationalists to communicate personal dispositions and relational meanings.

As the preceding paragraphs have shown, research in CA has demonstrated that for many adjacency pairs, there are alternative but non-equivalent types of second-pair parts available, i.e. one of the response types is preferred, the other dispreferred. Generally, with the exception of a few sequence types, agreement is the preferred response to the action in prior speaker's turn, so the absence of any response will be interpreted as disagreement. Moreover, commonly, there is an association between an action's preference status and the way in which it is produced, i.e. second-pair parts can be enacted as preferred or dispreferred responses. Thus, a disagreement in response to an assessment is conventionally produced in a dispreferred turn shape, i.e. with dispreference or reluctance markers such as prefaces and delays. However, while such markers are characteristically employed in dispreferred activities, their presence does not necessarily signal the dispreferred status of a response, nor does their absence per se indicate the preferred status of a response. Rather, reluctance markers are a conversational resource that speakers can exploit in talk-in-interaction to accomplish various interactional goals.

The upshot of this is that, in ordinary conversation, speakers may display an orientation to the potential oppositional properties of disagreement by using the dispreferred turn shape (i.e. reluctance markers) to systematically downplay, and minimise the occurrence of, opposition. By the same token, however, the features associated with the production of dispreferreds provide a framework in terms of which disagreements can be upgraded. Since reluctance markers present resources for the avoidance and mitigation of overt opposition, speakers may strengthen their disagreements by declining to use them.

To recapitulate so far, in ordinary conversation, there exists a preference for agreement, which is manifested through various aspects of turn and sequence organisation. With the exception of certain sequence types - notably those initiated by compliments, self-deprecations, accusations and too strong guesses of bad news - disagreement with a prior utterance is described as a dispreferred type of conversational action, displaying structural features like hesitation phenomena, mitigating prefaces and accounts. This yields a picture of disagreement as an activity that is generally performed

in modulated ways that avoid the production of starkly confrontational counter-positions.

The preference organisation as discussed above has been shown to have the following underlying rationale: preferred format responses are normally affiliative actions, which are supportive of social solidarity, while dispreferred format responses are largely disaffiliative actions, which are destructive of social solidarity (cf. Goodwin & Heritage 1990: 297; Heritage 1984: 268-269). Thus, in response to self-deprecations, where agreement would constitute criticism of the other, it is disagreement which is packaged in the preferred format (cf. Pomerantz 1984). By the same token, in response to sequence initial actions that invite agreement, the standard preface and delay features associated with up-coming disaffiliative actions prefigure the actions to come and thus provide opportunities for the about-to-be-disagreed with party to modify their ongoing actions to make them more acceptable. Thus, as Pomerantz (1984) has pointed out, the institutionalised prefacing and delaying of disaffiliative actions is systematically associated with opportunities to minimise occurrences of stated disagreements, while the promptness with which affiliative actions are performed maximises their occurrence. As an institutionalised pattern, this preference organisation then has a bias for affiliative actions.

Sacks (1973/1987) indicates that the preference for agreement is determined by societal expectations. In his words, people "may not like to disagree because they are supposed to not like to disagree" (69). This notion of the preference organisation as a result of a conventionalised underlying attempt to maintain "sociability, support, and solidarity" (Pomerantz 1984: 77) is spelled out by Heritage & Atkinson (1984: 55), who state that

the institutionalized design features of preferred/  
dispreferred actions are ... actively used so as to maximize  
cooperation and affiliation and to minimize conflict in  
conversational activities.

Thus, while the CA concept of preference is thought of as a purely structural phenomenon, which is not related to speakers' motivations, there seems to be a link between what speakers say - or, more precisely, how they say it - and their consideration for

face (Brown & Levinson 1987; Goffman 1967), which is congruent with Goffman's view of deference in conversation and the principles of "face-saving" behaviour or "politeness" as delineated by Brown & Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983).

Goffman's (1967: 47-95, 1971) analysis of face-to-face communication is based on the assumption that displaying deference to others is implicated in the organisation of a range of behaviour that occurs in human interaction. This is accomplished in part through watchful concern that potential discord not emerge as an explicit event in encounters. A similar evaluation of contentiousness can be found in the work of Brown & Levinson (1987: 112-117), who list the strategies "seek agreement" and "avoid disagreement" as positive politeness strategies. These include raising "safe topics," which are conducive to agreement, and using token agreements (i.e. the Yes, but ... strategy). Likewise, Leech (1983: 132) includes in his Politeness Principle an "agreement maxim," according to which one needs to "minimize disagreement between self and other" and "maximize agreement between self and other." While he proposes that his principles have universal validity, he concedes that the weighting of the principles may vary in different cultural, social, or linguistic environments. This suggests that there is a connection between the turn shape of actions and considerations of face. As Heritage & Atkinson (1984: 56) put it:

it may be suggested that the design features associated with the production of preferred/dispreferred activities may inform and may be informed by a logic of "face" considerations (Brown & Levinson 1978; Goffman 1955) at the level of both form and usage.<sup>35</sup>

As discussed above, researchers in conversation analysis have generally considered disagreement a disaffiliative action that threatens solidarity and is therefore something speakers in conversation try to avoid. As Pomerantz (1984) claims, "across different situations, conversants orient to agreeing with one another" (77). However, several studies have shown that a range of contextual parameters such as cultural norms, age, gender, and

situational context, and interactional goals may affect how disagreement is done and interpreted.

For instance, Fox (1974) reports a positive attitude towards disagreement, both in private and public domains, for the inhabitants of Roti island in eastern Indonesia. Israelis are also reported to frequently engage in direct confrontation and express their disagreement straightforwardly. Taking an ethnographic approach, Katriel (1986) describes a speech style called "dugri" (i.e. straight) talk among Sabra Israelis, which is characterised by directness, simplicity, and brevity. Speakers express their intentions as clearly as possible, using simple, laconic types of utterances. According to Katriel, dugri speech does not conform to Goffman's (1967) notion of considerateness, as Sabra Israelis place more emphasis on "true respect - rather than consideration" (177). The assumption underlying dugri speech is that a listener "has the strength and integrity required to take the speaker's direct talk as sincere and natural" (ibid).<sup>36</sup>

Schiffrin's (1984) sociolinguistic study of arguments among Jewish Americans yields similar results. Schiffrin finds linguistic evidence showing that the disagreements that occurred in her data were positively evaluated. This suggests that in this speech community, argument is not an activity that threatens social interaction, but instead a form of sociability (Simmel 1961). In the arguments in her data, the speakers repeatedly disagreed, were constantly non-aligned with each other and competed for interactional negotiable goods (such as the conversational floor or the topic talked about). However, despite sustained and unmitigated disagreement the speakers managed to display and maintain their solidarity and intimacy. Therefore, Schiffrin defines sociable argument as "a speech activity in which a polarizing form has a ratificatory meaning" (331). Her findings, she claims, demonstrate the cultural relativity of notions such as disagreement and dispute.

Kakavá (1993a, b, 1994, 1995, 2002) makes comparable observations in Modern Greek discourse. She finds that family talk, conversations among friends, as well as classroom discourse between members of a Greek speech community display sustained disagreement over the course of various topics. Moreover, in all contexts studied, she observed a preference for disagreement: most of the

time disagreement was foregrounded rather than prefaced with preference markers or postponed. She finds that both in the intimate conversation and the classroom discourse "participants retain their position and keep firing arguments at each other, sustaining their opposing stances over several 'adversative rounds'" (2002: 1557). However, similar to the sociable arguments described by Schifffrin, sustained unprefaced disagreement did do threaten the interpersonal relationships of the participants. Based on these findings, Kakavá suggests that in Modern Greek discourse, disagreement is an interactional ritual that does not necessarily threaten solidarity; rather it constitutes a social practice that is pervasive and preferred because it is expected and allowed.<sup>37</sup>

These studies suggest that participants' attitudes towards and use of disagreement and argument may vary according to cultural norms.<sup>38</sup> Another contextual factor that has been shown to influence how disagreement is used and evaluated is gender.

Several empirical studies on gender and discourse have proposed that male speakers exhibit a competitive style of discourse, while women use a more cooperative and harmonious style of speech (Coates 1994: 72). In addition, studies on gender specific disputing styles have claimed that women tend to avoid offensive arguing, evade direct confrontation, defend their positions less vehemently and show a stronger concern for harmony in the interaction than men (Eckert 1990; Kotthoff 1984, 1992a; Sheldon 1992, 1993, 1996; Tannen 1990, 1994b; Trömel-Plötz 1992, 1996).<sup>39</sup> However, the examination of actual social interaction clearly shows that conflict is omnipresent in the interaction of females. Extended arguments constructed through turns that highlight rather than mitigate disagreements have been observed in the interaction of girls' groups with various ethnic and social backgrounds (cf. Goodwin 2003: 231ff). Similarly, in a study of office-hour interaction, Günthner (1992) notes that in the institutional context of the interaction, the communicative behaviour of female lecturers was both offensive and confrontational. They frequently produced dissent turns without delay and without markers of mitigation.

Several studies have examined specific situational contexts in which disagreements occur. For instance, in psychotherapy groups, Krainer (1988) posits that the expression of discord is expected,

since disagreement, complaints, and dissatisfactions should be discussed in the open. She found both strong and mitigated challenges in her data. The strong challenges were intensified by prosodic emphasis and other intonational features and included overt features of negation, negative evaluative lexical items, etc. The mitigated challenges exhibited pauses, requests for clarifications, and "discord particles" such as "Well."

Moreover, Greatbatch (1992) argues that in the specified context of British television news interviews, the notion of preference is suspended due to the positioning and design of the turn allocation. Since the interviewer controls the turn-taking, interviewees never address each other directly, and this allows unmitigated disagreement to occur. Moreover, he observes that even when interviewees depart from the standard structure of the news interview in order to directly disagree with their co-interviewees, the preference features associated with disagreement in ordinary conversation are not observed: instead of de-escalating their disputes by attenuating their disagreements, interviewees frequently intensify their disputes by entering into direct, unmitigated and unmediated disagreement. These findings confirm Ervin-Tripp's (1976) claim that underlying differences in the continuum of mitigated and aggravated language forms can be attributed to the norms governing situationally appropriate language use.

The interactional context has been shown to be another determinant of the structural form of disagreements. Several researchers have illustrated that in the context of arguments, ordinary preference structures may be removed or even reversed, which is shown by a change of turn formats. Analysis has shown that in dispute sequences, disagreements are frequently enacted as preferred activities, not only in response to specific first-pair parts but in general after opponents' turns, while agreements are produced as dispreferreds.

For instance, M. H. Goodwin (1983, 1988, 1990, 1993), M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987) and Evaldsson (1993) have found that in children's disputes, unprefaced disagreements occur regularly. However, similar observations have also been reported for conflict interaction between adults both in institutional and informal settings.

Hutchby (1996a, b), too, observes that arguments on British talk radio frequently take aggravated forms and are enacted as "confrontation talk." He notes that the absence of markers of reluctance or mitigation represents a means by which participants foreground their opposition and intensify their conflict. Similarly, in a study of controversial TV discussions, Gruber (1996a, 1998) reports that dispute phases of talk display a change in the preference organisation: disagreements no longer show any features of dispreferred seconds and are in fact intensified by means of disagreement markers. In the televised news show *Crossfire*, Scott (1998, 2002) reports that participants engaged in two types of disagreements: "backgrounded" (lengthy, less explicit, calm) and "foregrounded" (direct) disagreement (ranging from collegial disagreements to openly hostile attacks), which seem to range on a continuum of increasing explicitness and escalating hostility.

In a study of discussions between university students and lecturers, Kotthoff (1993a) shows that dispute is typically staged by suspending the conventional consensus expectations of friendly interaction, and that this affects participants' production and interpretation of talk. She finds that in some conversations, once an argument has been contextualised, the preference organisation changes; rather than being modulated, disagreement is stressed and oriented to. This "preference for disagreement order" typically occurs when an argumentative context has been established, in which opponents are expected to defend their positions rather than accept those of their interlocutor, and that it holds more for aggravated than for mitigated disputes. Kotthoff observes that the change of participants' expectations from consensus to disagreement is performed step by step in the process of arguing: while in the beginning of a dispute sequence disagreements usually display features of the dispreferred format, in the subsequent exchange, the participants' show an orientation toward disagreement by expressing dissent in an unmodulated or nearly unmodulated way through reducing reluctance markers.

Similarly, in a study of office-hour interaction, Günthner (1992) reports that in the discussions under analysis, dissent turns are produced without delay and without markers of mitigation. She concludes that for the German participants the interaction is

apparently framed as argumentative by the fact that argumentative actions take a preferred form, in which dissent is focussed on and maximised.

These findings demonstrate that verbal conflict can vary in intensity with disagreeing turns being produced in a more or less mitigated fashion,<sup>40</sup> depending on such factors as, for instance, the situational context and the participants' interactional goals. Especially heated phases of dispute seem to be characterised by a systematic departure from the normal preference organisation.

This confirms Bilmes' (1988: 175) claim about the potentially preferred status of disagreement within the context of an argument - especially aggravated arguments:

The situational context is a possible determinant of preference. In the context of an argument, the preference for agreement may be reversed. If, in the midst of an argument, A makes a significant point and B does not produce a disagreement in response, a disagreement may be noticeably, relevantly absent, and it may be inferred from this absence that B lacks credible grounds for disagreeing. Furthermore, in contentious discussions, it may be agreement rather than disagreement that is marked for reluctance.

While the preceding studies have investigated conflict interaction in institutional settings and between participants that did not know each other very well, similar findings have been reported for casual arguments among intimates.<sup>41</sup>

As discussed above, Schiffrin (1984) and Kakavá (1993a, b, 1994, 2002) have found that in arguments between both Jewish American and Greek friends and family, disagreement is a preferred and expected activity and does not jeopardise the participants' interpersonal relationships. In fact, the enactment of aggravated argument appears to be a way of displaying and maintaining intimacy. Moreover, both researchers note that although the speakers in these intimate settings exhibit a preference for disagreement, they do not use that disagreement to reach common ground. Rather, disagreement seems to be "merely the indispensable medium through which the lively exchange of speech unfolds its attraction" (Simmel 1911/1961: 52). The participants in these settings appear to engage in and

appreciate argument as a process and activity in its own right rather than for its outcome.

Similarly, in his study of American family dinner conversations, Vuchinich (1984, 1987, 1990) reports a high number of conflict episodes, most of which were not resolved but ended in a stand-off. According to Vuchinich (1984: 219), "this should not be surprising, as it is well known that conflict accomplishes functions other than resolution." Following Simmel (1908/1955) and Coser (1956), he maintains that verbal conflict "provides a format for the display and maintenance of social relationships" (ibid). Moreover, his data display a frequent occurrence of unmitigated forms of disagreement.

Likewise, studies of German family dinner conversations have shown that argument is a regular (and even popular) occurrence. For instance, Keppler (1994: 98) notes that in close relationships like friends and family, disputes are by no means an exception: "Konflikte gehören zweifellos zur Familie und zum familiären Beisammensein." She states that particularly in circles of friends and family, difference of opinion has to be managed, and a prominent mode of this management is dispute. Apart from disputes ("Streit"), Keppler also describes controversial discussions ("Diskussion" or "Argumentation") as a recurrent mode of conflict management during family dinner conversations. According to Keppler (1994: 104), discussions differ from disputes in that the participants oppose each other on the content level rather than the interpersonal level:<sup>42</sup>

Der Meinungskonflikt führt hier nicht in eine persönliche Konfrontation. Diskussionen unter Familienmitgliedern sind Kontroversen, bei denen es den Beteiligten gelingt, bei der Sache zu bleiben.

Keppler notes that one characteristic of such discussion sequences is that dissent is not dispreferred but is an important and necessary driving power of the conversation. In fact, however, a closer look at her data reveals that in the family-dispute sequences, disagreement is indeed enacted as a preferred action, whereas the disagreements in the family discussions display a high rate of delaying and mitigating devices such as agreement tokens

("Ja aber") and hedges ("Ja ich mein").<sup>43</sup> Knoblauch (1991, 1995), too, finds that German family dinner talk displays a regular occurrence of a type of argumentative sequence he calls "informal discussions," and that a salient feature of this form of talk (Goffman 1981) is the frequent use of unmitigated disagreements:

Opposing the harmonistic view held by Pomerantz (1984; see also Jacobs & Jackson 1982), which states that disagreement is a 'dispreferred activity,' informal discussions provide one example of the frequent and even cherished use of disagreement. (Knoblauch 1991: 170)

Rather than avoid or mitigate disagreements, speakers seem to stress them. The inherent dynamics of disagreement is the machinery that drives the interaction while maintaining a high degree of sociability. Like Schifffrin, Kakavá and Keppler, Knoblauch (1991: 187) states that rather than striving for the resolution of dissent, the participants in his data "cherish discussion almost for its own sake - and for the sake of maintaining the conversation."

In his analysis of arguments among British family members, Billig (1989) also observes that the interactants frequently disagree and disagree with gusto: in many cases, the speakers do not hesitate to disagree, nor are their disagreements mitigated. Moreover, he suggests that in this argumentative context, when forms of hedged agreement (i.e. "yes buts") are used, they may not indicate a reluctance to disagree but instead may be a device to avoid agreement, and thus to continue the argument. Thus, rather than trying to resolve their disagreement, the participants can be seen to actively maintain disagreement.

Furthermore, while not explicitly addressing the preferred/dispreferred status of disagreement, Tannen (2001) finds that argument is a frequent occurrence in families, and that participants recurrently use direct disagreements, overt criticism and sarcasm.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, several sociological studies of conflict and family interaction respectively have claimed that arguments between intimates, in particular between family, are frequent and are often characterised by a high degree of hostility and intensity. For instance, Sprey (1971: 722) goes so far as to view the family

process per se as "a continuous confrontation between participants with conflicting - though not necessarily opposing interests in their shared fate." Cahn (1992: 1) puts forward a less radical position, maintaining that intimates "are more likely than are acquaintances to engage in frequent and intense disagreements."

As indicated above, the interrelationship between aggravated forms of conflict management and intimacy or closeness was noted earlier by Simmel (1955: 44-45), who contends:

A hostility must excite consciousness the more deeply and violently, the greater the parties' similarity against the background of which the hostility arises ... The more we have in common with another *as whole persons*, however, the more easily will our totality be involved in every single relation to him ... Therefore, if a quarrel arises between persons in such an intimate relationship, it is often so passionately expansive. (original emphasis)

Indeed, Simmel (1955: 47) further states that when

we are certain of the irrevocability and unreservedness of our feelings, ... peace at any price is not necessary. We know that no crisis can penetrate to the foundation of the relationship.

In sum, research on interaction between family and friends has shown that conflict is a frequent occurrence. Moreover, close relationships offer an opportunity to oppose others directly because the disputants know each other very well, and their relationships are stable. If people are on intimate terms, they are less reluctant to produce outright disagreements because the foundation of their relationships is stronger than in less close relationships. In intimate settings, then, arguments do not jeopardise interpersonal relationships, therefore the disagreement can be and often is aggravated without endangering future interaction. This corresponds to Brown & Levinson's (1987) claim that one of the social determinants of the level politeness with which a speaker will address a hearer is social distance between the speaker and the addressee. As Tannen (2001: 75) puts it: "We don't stand on ceremony when talking to family members because we are close."<sup>45</sup>

However, as some studies have shown, disagreement is not always enacted as a preferred action in conflicts between intimates. While Muntigl & Turnbull (1998) and Locher (2004) found both aggravated and mitigated disagreements in arguments between family and friends, they report that in their data, overall, mitigated forms were used more often than unmitigated forms. Both studies assume that forms of disagreement are associated with considerations of face. Locher (2004: 146) claims that the relatively low number of non-mitigated disagreements in her data demonstrates that "the sociability of the event had more weight than scoring points by risking face damage."<sup>46</sup>

As these findings illustrate, conflict between family is a frequent occurrence; in fact it is a constitutive element of family relationships. While the intimacy and stability of the relationship allows for - and may even be conducive to - the production of direct disagreement and the expression of hostility, family conflict, like any other type of conflict, may take more or less aggravated forms, ranging from factual discussions to mild bickering to heated disputes, with disagreeing turns being enacted in a more or less mitigated form.

Against this background I will now consider the ways in which the participants in the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus build their disagreements, in order to trace the seemingly confrontational character of these exchanges.

As indicated at the beginning of this section, when the mothers and daughters in my data oppose one another, they usually organise their talk so as to highlight rather than downplay that opposition. For example, rather than being preceded by delays, turns containing disagreement are commonly produced immediately following the talk they oppose or in overlap with it. Consider the following two extracts:

**example (10): 'night Mother**

1407 MAMA Ricky is too much like Cecil.  
> 1408 JESSIE He's not. Ricky is as much like me as it's  
1409 possible for any human to be. We even wear the  
1410 same size pants. These are his, I think.  
> 1411 MAMA That's just the same size. That's not you're  
1412 the same person.

**example (11): My mother said I, 4**

35 MARGARET It's a serious step you've taken, you've no  
36 idea—  
> 37 JACKIE It was no big deal. It was a relief to get it  
38 over with. I cried afterwards. Then I laughed.  
39 I expect it's better with someone you're in  
40 love with.  
41 MARGARET You could have waited.

In both of these fragments, the disputants oppose each other through the use of unprefaced, unmitigated disagreements. In extract (10), Jessie challenges her mother's assertion with a direct negation: "He's not" (line 1408), and then goes on to add a series of assertions, supporting her position (lines 1408-1410). In the following turn, Mama dismisses her daughter's argument as invalid by disputing that the fact that they wear the same size implies that they also have a similar character (lines 1411-1412). Her turn, too, does not show any features of mitigation. In extract (11), Jackie opposes her Mother's assertion with an unmitigated disagreement ("It was no big deal" line 37). Like Jessie in the preceding extract, she adds a series of assertions supporting her claim (lines 37-40). The oppositional character of her disagreement is further aggravated by the interruptive placement of her turn.

Furthermore, disagreeing turns in my data frequently contain a preface that announces right at the beginning of the turn, characteristically in the first word said, that opposition is being done. For instance, opposition may be signalled immediately through an expression of polarity (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 178) that is used to initiate the turn, as the following three examples illustrate:

**example (12): Alto I, 3**

37 WANDA (*With animation*) I'm coming with you!  
38 There's no reason why I can't! (*She begins*  
39 *to grab clothes from her closet.*) I'll  
40 wear pedal pushers on the bus.  
41 FLORENE Put those things back, Wanda. You're not  
42 going anywhere.  
> 43 WANDA Yes, I am.

**example (13): 'night Mother**

1071 MAMA But you, you knew what he was thinking  
1072 about and you're going to tell me.  
1073 JESSIE I don't know, Mama! His life, I guess. His  
1074 corn. His boots. Us. Things. You know.  
> 1075 MAMA No, I don't know, Jessie! You had those  
1076 quiet little conversations after supper  
1077 every night. What were you whispering about?

**example (14): Alto II, 3**

60 WANDA We'll sing so good we'll bring that time  
61 back, Mama.  
> 62 FLORENE No. I think it's over. Over for good, Wanda.  
> 63 WANDA No. I won't let it be. I'll bring it back.  
64 I know all about it.

In each of these extracts, an expression of opposite polarity is placed at the very beginning of a disagreeing turn. By introducing their turns in this way, the speakers signal that they are starting a turn that opposes the other party in some respect. For instance, in example (12), "Yes" rather than "No" at the beginning of Wanda's turn signals polarity in that Florene's preceding utterances was phrased as negative statement. Conversely, in examples (13) and (14), each of the disagreeing turns is prefaced with "No," indicating right at the beginning that opposition is being produced. The disagreements in these fragments are designed in such a way that they do not delay or disguise the negative alignment the second speaker is taking up with respect to the prior move but instead emphasise opposition.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, disagreeing turns in my data are frequently prefaced by the discourse marker "But." In the literature, "But" has been discussed as a "contrastive" or "cancellative" discourse marker, which "signals a sense of 'dissonance'" (Fraser 1988: 30).<sup>48</sup> As Schiffrin (1987) has illustrated, "But" is a disagreement preface, which "marks an upcoming unit as a contrasting action" (152). It is used, for instance, when speakers issue challenges, i.e. when they initially disagree. Speakers also use "But" to present points which have been interrupted, misunderstood, and/or challenged. Schiffrin shows that individuals strongly expect "But"

to preface disagreements - whether they are disagreements which challenge, defend, or both. Accordingly, by initiating their turns with "But," disputants signal that the following utterance is (in whatever respect) a disagreeing move with something the previous speaker has said or done.<sup>49</sup> Consider, for instance, the following four extracts:

**example (15): Alto I, 2**

20 FLORENE Now, Wanda, you can't jump into  
21 something like that.  
22 WANDA Why not?  
23 FLORENE You just can't. We can't even pay  
24 the rent.  
> 25 WANDA But, Mama, she say's I'm talented!  
26 FLORENE I can't help it. Your daddy's  
27 trying to get established in his  
28 career. Once he gets where he needs  
29 to be, then everything will be  
30 different.

**example (16): Home**

507 MARY JANE It's good to talk like this.  
508 OLIVIA People talk too much these days. They  
509 think it solves the world's problems.  
> 510 MARY JANE But you can tell people what you want.  
511 You can tell me, you know, what's  
512 going on in your head.

**example (17): 'night Mother**

755 MAMA You could keep books. You kept your  
756 dad's books.  
> 757 JESSIE But nobody ever checked them.  
758 MAMA When he died, they checked them.

**example (18): My sister 9**

220 MADAME DANZARD What is the world coming to? I  
221 couldn't believe my eyes.  
> 222 ISABELLE But Maman-  
223 MADAME DANZARD There are no buts involved here.

In each of these fragments, one of the disputants initiate a disagreeing turn with the dissent marker "But." Thus, like the instances above, these turns are designed in such a way that they emphasise rather than delay or disguise opposition. In extracts (15) and (16) "But" is used to initiate a turn that defends or reasserts the speaker's own prior claim, following a challenge on the part of the opponent. By contrast in extracts (17) and (18) "But" is used to preface a challenge to the opponent's prior assertion. In each instance, "But" functions as a disagreement preface, indexing right at the beginning of the turn that the speaker is about to produce an oppositional move. In fact, in example (18), Madame Danzard cuts off her daughter's response with the words: "There are no buts involved here" (line 223), thereby displaying that she interprets Isabelle's turn initiation as signalling disagreement.

Another type of preface that is recurrently used to begin oppositional turns in my data consists of repetition of part of the talk that is being opposed, as in the following three extracts:

**example (19): Raisin III**

27 BENEATHA Wasn't it you who taught me to despise any  
 28 man who would do that. Do what he's going  
 29 to do.  
 30 MAMA Yes - I taught you that. Me and your daddy.  
 31 But I thought I taught you something else  
 32 too... I thought I taught you to love him.  
 > 33 BENEATHA Love him? There is nothing left to love.

**example (20): Home**

250 MARY JANE I was your daughter and you didn't care  
 251 where I ended up.  
 252 OLIVIA That's ridiculous. You didn't care where you  
 253 ended up.  
 254 MARY JANE Oh right, of course, you're Miss Innocent  
 255 again, Ma.  
 > 256 OLIVIA Oh, I'm Miss Innocent? You make one mistake  
 257 after another for 20 years and you never  
 258 took responsibility for one second! You

259 brought babies into this world that you  
260 could barely feed 'cause that husband a  
261 yours couldn't hold down a job.

**example (21): My sister 3**

41 MADAME DANZARD (*She eats with a certain relish.*) Wait  
42 till the Blanchards come to dinner. I'll  
43 have her make her rabbit paté. Won't that  
44 surprise them! The best cook we've had in  
45 years.  
46 ISABELLE Oh I don't know - Marie wasn't so bad.  
> 47 MADAME DANZARD Marie? Please. The way she cooked a pot au  
48 feu - ahhh - It still makes me shudder.  
49 ISABELLE You exaggerate, Maman.  
> 50 MADAME DANZARD Exaggerate? I'm being kind. Marie would  
51 have murdered a veal like this.

Partial repetition of prior talk picks out a particular element of the opponent's preceding talk to be focused on. Other conversational activities in which partial repetition occurs include disagreements with prior speakers' self-deprecations (Pomerantz 1984: 83-84) and other-repair initiation (Schegloff et al. 1977). In these contexts, as well as in oppositional moves, it is used to locate a trouble source in someone else's talk.

However, the instances of partial repetition that occur at the beginning of oppositional moves in my data differ from the partial repeats in other activities in several important aspects. As Schegloff et al. (1977) have shown, other-initiated repair exhibits two characteristic features. Firstly, the discovery of an error is typically modulated through the use of markers of uncertainty. The term singled out for revision is produced with rising intonation, displaying uncertainty and requesting that the prior speaker assist in clarifying what is formulated as a problem. Secondly, locating the trouble source is frequently the only activity performed in the turn. This is illustrated by the following example from Schegloff et al. (1977: 377):

**example (22) GTS1: II:2:54**

Ken: 'E likes that waider over there.

> Al: Wait-er?  
Ken: Waitress, sorry.  
Al: 'At's bedder,

In this extract, the activities of locating the trouble and providing a remedy are separated into distinct turns performed by distinct individuals. Although Al points to something problematic in Ken's talk, Ken is allowed to do the correction himself. By restricting the activity in his turn to locating the error, Al proposes that Ken has the competence to repair it himself, and provides him with an opportunity to do so in the following turn.<sup>50</sup>

By contrast, if the partial repeat is used as a disagreement preface, as in the preceding extracts, rather than standing alone in a turn, the partial repeats are characteristically immediately followed by further talk which explicitly opposes what the prior speaker has said.<sup>51</sup> In extract (19), subsequent to the partial repeat, Beneatha issues an assertion which openly challenges Mama's prior assumption that Beneatha should love her brother; in example (20), Olivia issues a series of accusatory claims, which portray Mary Jane's behaviour as irresponsible; and in extract (21), directly following the partial repeats, Madame Danzard issues assertions which directly counter Isabelle's prior statements.

Another aspect in which the partial repeats in my data differ from those in other-initiated repair is in terms of the intonation patterns used. In contrast to the instances of partial repetition discussed by Schegloff et al. (1977), in the extracts above, the discovery of a trouble source is not modulated with markers of uncertainty such as a tentative, rising intonation. Instead, disputants employ contours that not only focus on a particular aspect of the prior speaker's talk as constituting a repairable but also call into question that speaker's competence. The sequential placement of the oppositional turns within the context of disagreement suggests that the partial repeats are spoken with a falling-rising contour (Gunter 1974: 61), which closely resembles the intonation patterns of the opposition prefaces in children's disputes discussed by M. H. Goodwin (1990), in which a subsequent speaker repeats part of prior speaker's talk. Following Ladd (1980: 150), Goodwin argues that this intonation contour may be used to

contradict or question the prior speaker's assumptions. In addition, she claims that the use of such an intonation contour enables the speaker both to display a particular affective reaction, such as offence or incredulity, at what the other has just said and to caricature the opponents by portraying their actions as ridiculous or inappropriate.<sup>52</sup> Hence, in prefacing their turns with a partial repeat produced with such intonation structures the disputants not only signal that disagreement is going to follow but also actively challenge what the prior speaker has just said.<sup>53</sup>

As the preceding discussion shows, rather than tone down disagreement in order to (re)establish consent, the mothers and daughters in my data utilise the preferred/dispreferred turn shape to highlight disagreement. The absence of reluctance markers in oppositional turns is then one way of interactionally accomplishing a heated dispute. By the same token, the exchange of unmitigated disagreements is a contextualisation cue (Gumperz 1982), framing (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) the ongoing interaction as an aggravated conflict episode.

As mentioned above, once a dispute is in progress, the participants are expected to oppose each other and defend their respective positions. This change in expectations may be displayed in a structural preference for disagreement. This orientation towards disagreement may also be revealed in the way disputants respond to non-disagreeing turns. The following extracts from *Avenue* exemplify how the dispute frame affects participants' expectations and interpretations of utterances.

The following episode occurs after Mother has told Olga that she has bought a fortune gum which said: "Every dog has its day," and claimed that this is a happy omen. Olga's initial reaction is scepticism and incredulity but then she gives up and acquiesces to Mother's interpretation of the situation:

**example (23): Avenue**

- 253 MOTHER My day is coming. I mean it has to according  
254 to my fortune.  
255 OLGA But what if somebody else got the fortune?  
256 It would be theirs.  
257 MOTHER Yeah, cause they bought the gum. So what's

258                   new about that?  
259 OLGA            (*Disgusted; weary.*) Never mind.  
> 260 MOTHER        Go on, you started something, explain it.  
261 OLGA            Let's forget it.  
> 262 MOTHER        You're always backing down on things.  
263 OLGA            Let's forget it, the gum, the fortunes, the  
264                   stars, tea-leaves.

Mother has just told Olga about the fortune gum and what it said. When Olga does not show any interest in (let alone enthusiasm about) her mother's revelation, but instead expresses her scepticism about the applicability of the saying to human beings, Mother defends her position by pointing to the figurative meaning of the saying, and an argument ensues about the validity/meaning of the fortune. In lines 253-254, Mother once more puts forward her interpretation of the fortune, stating: "My day is coming. I mean it has to according to my fortune." But Olga opposes her again, arguing that the fact that Mother got this particular fortune is pure coincidence (lines 255-256). In the subsequent turn, while she concedes that Olga is right ("Yeah, cause they bought the gum." line 257), Mother challenges the relevance of her claim, arguing that what she said is not newsworthy ("So what's new about that?" line 257), and, thus, beside the point. However, instead of defending her objection, in line 259, Olga signals her withdrawal from the argument by saying: "Never mind." When Mother realises that Olga is about to retreat from her involvement in the quarrel, she tries to bring her back to it by prompting her to account for her prior objection ("Go on, you started something, explain it." line 260). But Olga refuses to elaborate on her utterance, and suggests that they let the matter rest: "Let's forget it" (line 261). In the sequential context of a dispute, Mother expects Olga to produce a disagreement and, hence, does not accept her sudden capitulation. Apparently, she assumes that Olga's concession is not sincere. As a result, not only does she refuse to accept her concession but she also criticises her for not defending her opinion, claiming that she is "always backing down on things" (line 262). But her attempt to draw Olga back into the argument fails. Instead of contesting her mother's allegation, Olga

reasserts her prior utterance ("Let's forget it. ..." lines 263-264).

A few lines later in the same conversation a similar instance occurs: in the context of the ongoing dispute, Mother apparently expects Olga to defend herself against her attacks. Hence, as her reactions reveal, she does not interpret her sudden (if qualified) agreements as sincere concessions but rather as sarcastic remarks.

**example (24): Avenue**

411 OLGA I won't sit at the table with that slob!  
412 MOTHER (*Rises, crosses back to bureau to put perfume*  
413 *spray back.*) Just because you mess around  
414 with your food, you find time to pick at  
415 everyone's faults. You got nothing good to  
416 say for nobody, nothing good to say for  
417 yourself.  
418 OLGA Guess not.  
> 419 MOTHER Even when you agree with me, I can just  
420 strangle your scrawny neck. Something about  
421 your manner I never liked. You better change  
422 your ways.  
423 OLGA It's going to be hard for me to adjust to  
424 him.  
425 MOTHER You better or else you can just get out and  
426 get your own place. You go out and work and  
427 learn what it is to get money. (*Crosses to*  
428 *kitchen table, takes out a gaudy ribbon from*  
429 *pocketbook.*) This is pretty, but too bad you  
430 can't wear it, cause your hair's not set.  
431 (*Puts ribbon back in pocketbook.*)  
432 OLGA Ribbons are for dogs.  
433 MOTHER (*Sits down, looks in face mirror to recheck*  
434 *eyes.*) You mean dogs that win contests.  
435 You're funny, you are and so stupid.  
Sometimes  
436 I think I got more sense than you and I  
437 hardly been educated.  
438 OLGA Maybe you have.  
> 439 MOTHER There you go agreeing with me again.

Prior to this extract, Mother and Olga have been arguing about whether Olga has to get dressed up because Mother has invited her new boyfriend for dinner. In line 411, Olga refuses to have dinner with the man in question at all ("I won't sit at the table with that slob!" line 411). Apart from constituting yet another rejection of her mother's request to prepare for their guest, her utterance expresses criticism of Mother, by presenting her as someone who is having a relationship with a "slob." In the following turn, Mother responds to this attack with a series of counter-accusations, arguing that Olga is quarrelsome simply because she is unhappy with herself: "Just because you mess around with your food, you find time to pick at everyone's faults. You got nothing good to say for nobody, nothing good to say for yourself." (lines 413-417).<sup>54</sup> Instead of defending herself against Mother's imputations, in the subsequent turn, Olga issues a downgraded agreement, replying "Guess not." (line 418). But rather than accepting her daughter's concession as an offer to terminate the dispute, Mother's subsequent turn reveals that she does not receive Olga's reply as an appropriate response to her prior turn. Her meta-communicative statement: "Even when you agree with me, I can just strangle your scrawny neck." (lines 419-420), which explicitly remarks on the communicative function of Olga's activity, indicates that she has not anticipated agreement and is not prepared to accept her daughter's consent. In the course of the following turns, the topic of the argument gradually shifts from Olga's attitude to her looks and then to her intellect. In lines 435-437, Mother first attacks Olga, characterising her as "funny" (presumably in the sense of odd) and "so stupid," and then claims that despite her inferior education, apparently she "has got more sense" than Olga. Again, instead of contradicting her mother's attributions, Olga issues a downgraded agreement ("Maybe you have." line 438). And again, Mother's subsequent turn reveals that she apparently does not hear Olga's reply as an appropriate response to her prior turn. As in lines 419-420, her meta-communicative utterance: "There you go agreeing with me again" (line 439) displays that she is reluctant to accept her daughter's consent. Mother's reactions to Olga's concessions in the two preceding fragments clearly show that in the context of an already established controversy, the participants in my data expect each other to

disagree. Apart from the design of disagreements as preferred actions, this orientation towards dissent is evidenced by the disputants' reluctance to accept sudden agreements as sincere concessions.<sup>55</sup> To quote Levinson (1992: 79):

the structural properties of specific activities set up strong expectations. Because there are strict constraints on contributions to any particular activity, there are corresponding strong expectations about the functions that any utterance at a certain point in the proceedings can be fulfilling.

Thus in the middle of a heated dispute, in which participants are expected to produce disagreements and defend their positions, sudden agreements are not taken to indicate sincere concession and are not accepted as appropriate contributions.

To summarise the main points of my discussion, I have presented claims being made about the status of disagreement in ordinary conversation. Following Goffman (1967), recent work in sociolinguistics has proposed that certain universal principles of face-saving or polite behaviour underlie human communication, and that interactants show a concern for the avoidance of open discord. Correspondingly, within the analytical framework of CA, (with the exception of certain sequence types) disagreement as a response to a prior assessment is generally viewed as a disaffiliative action which may be destructive of social solidarity, and which thus emerges as a structurally dispreferred turn. The underlying principle of this preference organisation is that, since disagreement is an action that may create conflict, it is not to be expressed, or when expressed, it is mitigated.

However, the data presented here provide evidence of an orientation toward an alternative conversational mode. In contrast to the stereotype of face-saving, agreement-oriented interaction (especially among women), in the mother-daughter interactions portrayed in the plays under analysis, conflict is not at all uncommon. Rather than organising their talk so as to display deference to each other, the women in my data frequently seek opportunities to display and realign the social organisation of the moment through mutual opposition. Moreover, the oppositional turns

in my data are not structured so as to minimise opposition. Disagreements are not delayed sequentially by means of hesitation, nor are they pushed back in the construction of turns through the use of initial agreement tokens. In fact, rather than mitigate their disagreement through the use of reluctance markers, the women in my data emphasise the oppositional character of their turns by prefacing their utterances with various dissent markers.

From a structural standpoint, the mother-daughter disputes under analysis are characterised by suspending the preference for agreement order of ordinary conversation. In terms of the interpersonal level of interaction, they are framed by suspending the politeness caveats of friendly interaction suggested by Brown & Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983). Rather than display an orientation towards agreement and consent, participants exhibit an orientation to the expectation of disagreement and "impoliteness" (Culpeper 1996, Mills 2003: 121-164), "rudeness" (Kienpointner 1997; Tracy & Tracy 1998) or "verbal aggression" (Infante & Wigley 1986).

As the preceding discussion has shown, like all speech activities, heated disputes are governed by specific structural principles, obligations and expectations, which participants orient to (cf. also Antaki 1994; Eisenberg & Garvey 1981; Mack & Snyder 1973).<sup>56</sup> In contrast to friendly interaction or factual discussions, aggravated arguments are characterised by an orientation toward the expectation of disagreement, and this noticeably affects participants' production and interpretation of talk.

Participants require a sense of 'what we are doing here' in order to construct appropriate turns in talk. As they interact, they establish some common ground as to what it is they are doing. The speech activity in which participants are engaged is usually not overtly labelled. Speakers rarely state "we're having an argument" by producing "formulations" (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970). Instead, they use contextualisation cues (Gumperz 1982) to coordinate the speech activity. That is to say, their definitions of the ongoing interaction are displayed by their behaviour and are thus available to researchers as well. As the preceding discussion shows, unmodulated disagreement functions are such a contextualisation cue for both participants and analysts, framing the ensuing talk as a heated dispute. In other words, the construction of disagreeing

responses displays to both conversationalists and analysts what kind of speech activity or activity type the participants are engaged in: apparently, the very absence of markers of mitigation represents a means by which the participants in my data foreground their opposition and intensify their conflict thereby contextualising their exchange as an aggravated dispute. However, the use of aggravated disagreements is not the only way in which the ongoing talk is framed as confrontational. In the following section, I will look at another structural means by which the speakers in my data accomplish aggravated argument, namely the use of interruptions.

You have not converted a man because you have silenced him. (John Morely)

### 6.3.2 (Competitive) turn-taking patterns

In the preceding section, I focused on the function of preference caveats in the accomplishment of aggravated oppositional turns/disputes. I showed that the verbal conflict sequences in my corpus are characterised by a change in the preference organisation, and that participants display an orientation towards the structural preference for disagreement in the construction of argumentative turns. This context-specific preference structure thus provides a conversational resource by means of which participants can frame (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualise (Gumperz 1982) an ongoing activity as a heated dispute.

In this section I will examine another structural feature of the argument sequences in my corpus. I will show that in addition to the departure from the standard preference organisation, the mother-daughter disputes in my data are characterised by a change in the standard turn-taking mechanisms as described by Sacks et al. (1974).

In their seminal paper on the organisation of turn-taking in conversation, Sacks et al. (1974) stated that in ordinary conversation, "overwhelmingly one party talks at a time" (705), speaker change is coordinated around "transition-relevance places" (i.e. possible completion points of the talk that occupies the current turn), and that "transitions (from one turn to a next) with no gap and no overlap are common. Together with transitions characterized by slight gap or slight overlap they make up the vast majority of transitions" (708).

By contrast, in the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus, speakers can frequently be seen to start up on a turn at talk at points which are not identifiable as transition relevance places. Oppositional turns are regularly done in the sequential form of what is commonly referred to as "interruption:" disputants start up at non-transition places, i.e. in "interjacent" (Jefferson 1986) positions, to do argumentative actions. This suggests that the activity of cutting one's opponent short is somehow related to the accomplishment of aggravated opposition and, as a consequence, to the escalation of arguments. It is this relationship between cutting

in on another's talk with a counter and the aggravation of opposition that will be at the centre of this section.

The relationship between interruption and conflict escalation has been noted before in the literature. For instance, in his analysis of the notorious Bush-Rather encounter on U.S. TV,<sup>57</sup> Schegloff (1988-1989) remarks on how the confrontational trajectory of the encounter seems often to be marked precisely by the interruptive verbal behaviour of the antagonists. Likewise, in his analysis of the televised 1992 vice presidential debate between Vice President Dan Quayle, Senator Al Gore and retired Admiral James Stockdale, Bilmes (1999) notes that the exchanges were "sharp and confrontational, with frequent overlap" (215). A related point is made by Greatbatch (1992) in his study of the management of disagreements between antagonists in panel interview broadcasts. He states that one of the ways in which interviewees commonly escalate their disputes is by producing their talk interruptively, thereby intensifying disagreement. Similarly, in a study of TV-discussions, Gruber (1996, 1998) observes that in dispute phases of talk, discussants regularly produce disagreements immediately when propositions in the current speaker's turn occur which they find easy to counter, i.e. at what he calls "disagreement relevance points." In their analysis of a contentious TV debate, Kallmeyer & Schmitt (1996) also note a rather competitive turn-taking pattern, characterised by the frequent occurrence of simultaneous talk, interjections and interruptions. Also, Hutchby (1992; 1996a) observes that in argument sequences in call-in radio shows, argumentative actions such as challenges, rebuttals and ripostes are frequently done in the form of interruptions. Harris (1989) notes that in courtroom interaction, "interruptions tend to cluster in portions of the data where hostility is evident" (148). Similarly, Kotthoff (1993a) states that in discussions between university students and lecturers, overlapping talk and interruption can occur if tension is heightened. Recurrence of simultaneous speech and interruptions has also been observed in Mexican parliamentary discourse (Carbó 1992) and conflict talk between labour and management (O'Donnel 1990).<sup>58</sup>

This connection between cutting in on another's talk and dispute escalation may be grounded in the fact that interruptions

are at heart incursive actions. Both analysts and laypersons make a distinction between normal turn exchange and interruption, and consider interruptions as untoward and offensive, i.e. as interferences with another's speaking rights. As James & Clarke (1993) note, the "the word 'interruption', both in ordinary usage and in the usage of most researchers, has a negative connotation, implying violation of another's right to speak" (237). In Talbot's (1992) words, "interruptions are appropriations of a right to speak. In interrupting a speaker claims a turn" (458). Technically speaking, to interrupt is to start a turn at talk in a place that is not a transitional-relevance place, i.e. to start to speak while someone else is speaking and before that speaker's turn has reached a projectable completion point.

Moreover, interrupting challenges the right of a current speaker to take her turn to such a completion point. According to West (1984: 55), "an interruptive speaker is engaged in violation of the current speaker's right to be engaged in speaking."<sup>59</sup> Jefferson (1983: 6) describes the nature of this violation as "starting up 'in the midst of' another's turn at talk, not letting the other finish." Interruptions therefore tend to be viewed as rude and disrespectful acts, indicative of indifference, aggressiveness or hostility towards the victimised speaker and/or the issues, values, and perspectives embodied within what was being said.

Concomitantly, interruptions have been assumed to be attempts at exerting control over both the discourse - of the turn and/or topic - and its participants by pressuring the current speaker to relinquish her turn, and thus control of the ongoing talk. Thus, interruptions have been claimed to be involved with the establishment or maintenance of power in interaction, particularly in what are taken to be asymmetrical encounters such as those between lay and professional persons (Davis 1988; West 1984), or, more generally, between men and women (West 1979; West & Zimmerman 1977, 1983; Zimmerman & West 1975). For instance, West & Zimmerman have claimed that men interrupt women more frequently than the other way round, and this is linked to a more general claim that men occupy a position of power vis-à-vis women. Interruptive behaviour is equated with dominance, as interruptions are considered "a way of doing power in face-to-face interaction" (1983: 111). Interruptions

are viewed not just as a reflection of asymmetrical relations of power (e.g. between women and men), but as enactments of these asymmetrical relations. As Watts (1995: 51) puts it: "interruptive behaviour is indicative of an attempt by one member to exercise power over another."<sup>60</sup>

The activity of interrupting, then, appears to have both a sequential and an interpersonal dimension: It is offensive both on the structural level of turn-taking and on the interpersonal level of interaction. This dual function is the basis for Brown & Levinson's (1987) classification of interruptions as both positive and negative face threatening acts. Inasmuch as they restrict a speaker's freedom of action (i.e. the possibility of speaking uninhibited), they are threats to the speaker's negative face; since in the case of oppositional interruptions the speaker's opinion is disregarded, they are also threats to the speaker's positive face. Therefore, it is argued, interruptions "intrinsically threaten both negative and positive face" (67).<sup>61</sup>

To summarise so far, interruption is commonly distinguished from normal turn taking. It is negatively evaluated, and conversationalists, it is assumed, will generally avoid doing it. It would seem, then, that interruption is by definition not only a structurally disruptive, but also an intrusive, even hostile activity, implying (attempted) violation of the interrupted party's speaking rights. As the following paragraphs will show, however, this is an oversimplified view.

While at one point, all overlapping speech was thought of as interruptive (e.g. Wiens et al. 1965), researchers have known for some time that not all overlaps constitute violations of another's speaking rights. For example, "backchannel" utterances (Yngve 1970; S. Duncan 1974), which are not aimed at taking the floor or disturbing the flow of the original speaker's talk, are not considered interruptive. In addition, at least since the paper by Sacks et al. on turn-taking (1974), analysts have differentiated between overlap and interruption on structural grounds. Mid-utterance overlaps are distinguished from those occurring at a point where the end of the utterance is projectable. Only the former are regarded as interruptive. As Schegloff (1987: 85) puts it, "'interruption' is ... reserved (roughly) for starts by a second

speaker while another is speaking and is not near a possible completion."

Attempts at formalising this distinction and operationalising the concept of "interruption", however, (e.g. West & Zimmerman 1977, 1983; Ferguson 1977; Roger et al. 1988) have been widely criticised, in particular, for treating interruptions as a "sub-class of speech overlap" (Drummond (1989: 150).<sup>62</sup> In the operationalist approach, technical definitions of interruption build the basis for the categorisation of instances of overlapping speech as 'interruptive.'

However, as Bennett (1981) points out, overlap and interruption are categories of logically different types. While overlap is a descriptive term referring to the observable coincidence in time of contributions by two speakers, interruption is an interpretive category, reflecting speakers' interpretations of "prevailing rights and obligations" in the interaction. Hence, the question of whether an overlap is an interruption, i.e. an obstructive device, is not merely a matter of determining its relation to some structural feature of talk. Researchers also have to take into account the participants' own displayed orientation to the interruptive (i.e. invasive) character of particular overlaps.<sup>63</sup> As Drummond (1989: 152) suggests, "there may be no stable message form that fits the label 'interruption'" (original emphasis). Besides, even if all interruptions were of a certain formal type, this would not mean that any specific instance of that type would be perceived or treated as interruptive by participants.

In fact, discourse analytic research has shown that participants' reasons for finding a piece of talk interruptive are by no means entirely based on considerations of formatting. Speakers that are overlapped in mid-utterance may not feel interrupted in any substantial way if, for example, they think that they have already got their point across. On the other hand, participants may claim that they have been interrupted, even if the overlapping talk is not sequentially disruptive, i.e. if it occurs at what might well be taken for a speaker-transition point. This suggests that the speaker's right to an unimpeded turn and the listener's obligation to ensure this right is not the only code around which conversation is organised. Instead, it appears that conversationalists make turn-taking decisions based upon a variety of factors, including their

own and other's rights, obligations, and wants as well as contextual requirements.

For instance, Jefferson (1983, 1984, 1986) notes that there are various conditions (some of which will be discussed in more detail below) under which the production of overlapping talk is systematic and warranted, and therefore not interruptive in a violative sense. Similarly, Murray (1985) finds that members perceive an instance of overlap as a more or less severe violation of a speaker's "completion right" based on a wide range of factors, including distributive justice in allocation of speech (i.e. how long/often the interrupted party has spoken), the number of points made in a speaking turn, and special rights to be heard (e.g. following a question, or an attack).<sup>64</sup> Thus, he concludes that "simultaneous speech is neither necessary nor sufficient for the recognition of 'interruption' by interlocutors. ... There are no absolute syntactical or acoustical criteria for recognizing an occurrence of 'interruption' available either to those involved in a speech event nor to analysts" (31).

In addition, contrary to the postulate that one of the basic rules of conversation in our society is that "not more than one party should speak at a time" (Sacks 1992, vol. 1: 633) and occurrences of more than one speaker at a time tend to be brief, it has been observed that particularly in interactions involving more than three people, even in relatively formal speech events, frequently more than one party talks at a time - and not necessarily briefly (cf. Dunne & Ng 1994; Edelsky 1981).<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, some overlaps may convey rapport, cooperation, or camaraderie with the overlapped speaker rather than hostility and intention to control the conversation (cf. Bennett 1981; Coates 1989, 1996; Edelsky 1981; Ervin-Tripp 1979, Herman 1995: 113; Kennedy & Camden 1983; Tannen 1981, 1983, 1984, 1994; Watts 1991; Yule 1996: 74). Such cooperative overlaps have been found to occur primarily in the context of friendly conversation between colleagues and friends, and appear to be prompted by - and indicate - the overlapping speaker's enthusiastic interest and active involvement in the discourse.<sup>66</sup>

For instance, in her analysis of a dinner table conversation among friends, Tannen (1981, 1983, 1984, 1994) describes what she

calls speakers' "high involvement style," which is characterised by abrupt changes of topic, a high speech rate, fast speaker changes, and a high rate of cooperative overlaps and repetitions with the prior speaker's utterances.<sup>67</sup> She proposes that the participants in this exchange try to establish or maintain a positive relation to each other, which is expressed by means of these features: "rapid rate of speech, overlap, and latching of utterances are devices by which some speakers show solidarity, enthusiasm, and interest in other's talk. The resulting fast pace greases the conversational wheels when speakers share expectations about use of these devices" (1984: 77).

Coates (1989, 1991, 1994, 1996) reports similar results in her analysis of "gossip" and friendship talk among female friends. She distinguishes several types of simultaneous speech, which the model of turn-taking put forward by Sacks et al. (1974), cannot account for. She observes that in all-female conversation, talk is viewed as a collaborative enterprise, which is displayed by the recurrence of overlapping talk and shared turns, or "conversational duets" (Falk 1980). Rather than fighting for the floor, women engaged in single-sex talk with friends are sharing the floor, and this sharing signals intimacy. According to Coates, these marked turn-taking strategies accomplish and consolidate friendship by expressing positive politeness.

In terms of Jefferson's (1984, 1986) categorisation of overlapping talk, most of Coates's and Tannen's examples of overlapping speech classify as "recognitional onsets," i.e. instances where a recipient recognises what the current speaker wants to say and starts her own turn prior to a transition relevance place. The overlapping speakers always express the same view of the topic under discussion as overlapped speakers. In addition, the overlapped speakers do not seem to interpret incursions as floor-competitive. The result is a shared or collaborative floor (Edelsky 1981; Coates 1989, 1991, 1994, 1996), characterised by more-than-one-at-a-time rather than one-at-a-time. Apparently, in these conversational exchanges, overlapping speech serves to indicate that participants share the same background knowledge and appreciate what the other is talking about thus signalling interpersonal involvement and rapport.

As the preceding discussion has shown, interruptions may take various forms, originate from a variety of sources and serve a variety of purposes. Hence, a priori interpretations of turn-incursive overlaps as unequivocal signs of hostility, power, control or dominance are unsustainable. Speakers who produce utterances that on the purely sequential level interrupt another's speech may on the interpersonal level be performing either affiliative or disaffiliative actions. In the face of the multiple triggers for and functions of interruption, several researchers have looked for ways to distinguish between different types of interruptions.

For instance, Goldberg (1990) differentiates between interruptions that are "relationally neutral" and those which are "power-oriented" or "rapport-oriented" on the basis of the presumed motivations of their producers. Power- and rapport-oriented interruptions are further distinguished based on the coherent-cohesive ties between the interrupting and interrupted utterance.

Relationally neutral interruptions, address the immediate needs of the communicative situation. They typically initiate a side, or repair sequence or they may address an external event that requires immediate attention before the conversation can continue. Once completed, the discourse is returned to its pre-interruption state, thereby permitting the interrupted speaker to continue where she left off.<sup>68</sup> They are not intentionally face-threatening, nor do they appear to be intended to wrest control of the discourse from the interrupted speaker.

Power-type interruptions, on the other hand, are designed to wrest the discourse from the speaker by gaining control of the conversational process and/or content, thereby threatening the current speaker's negative face. They are generally heard as rude, impolite, intrusive and inappropriate, conveying the interrupter's antipathy, aggression, hostility, dislike etc. towards the interrupted speaker and/or the talk at hand, and are treated as acts of conflict, competition, or as indicators of lack of involvement. In addition, they tend to be off-topic, or to re-introduce topics, and contain few (if any) coherent-cohesive ties with the interrupted utterance. They typically involve topic change attempts accomplished by questions, requests or assertions whose propositional content is unrelated to the specific topic at hand.

By contrast, rapport-type interruptions strive to bolster the interrupted speaker's positive face. They are generally understood as expressions of empathy, affection, solidarity, interest, concern etc., and are viewed as acts of collaboration and cooperation. They stay on-topic, encourage and contribute to the development of the speaker's talk by inserting (typically short) informative or evaluative comments or by requesting the speaker to supply such remarks. The interrupter's contribution is hearable as a cooperative gesture sharing the speaker's wants regarding the success of the speaker's initiated topics, issues or goals. The participants jointly develop a common topic, displaying as they do so their joint enthusiasm for, involvement with, or understanding of the other and the issues or goals at hand.<sup>69</sup>

Goldberg concedes, however, that there is no clear-cut distinction between power-type and rapport-type interruptions.<sup>70</sup> An interruption that is considered as display of power in one case may be interpreted as a display of rapport in another. Also, the interrupter's intention and the interrupted speaker's perception (as displayed in her reaction to the interruption) may fail to coincide.

In addition to the above, Goldberg identifies competitive interruptions. These exhibit features of both power- and rapport-type interruptions: like rapport interruptions they stay on topic; like power-type interruptions they transgress the speaker's negative face wants by virtue of cutting in on her turn. Competitive interruptions, Goldberg suggests, typically occur in stretches of talk in which "each party strives to get the other to acknowledge her own particular beliefs, accomplishments or experiences in some sense "superior" to those of the other" (896).

Hutchby (1992, 1996a) also differentiates between interruptions that are legitimate actions by virtue of their immediate interactional relevance, such as conveying better or additional information, warnings and extraordinary noticings, on the one hand, and cooperative and "confrontational" or "hostile" interruptions on the other. Similar to Goldberg, he sees interruptions as having both a sequential dimension, which refers to the degree to which an interrupting turn is incursive with respect to the ongoing talk, and an interpersonal, or, as he calls it, "moral" dimension, which focuses on the kind of activity an interruption is being used to do

in the local interactional context, i.e. a cooperative/affiliative/supportive versus a confrontational/disaffiliative/hostile action. Turns which are interruptive in the sequential sense are not necessarily (perceived as) interruptive in the moral sense. Consider, for instance the following passage from ordinary conversation, quoted from Hutchby (1992: 346, 1996a: 78):

**example (1)**

1 Nancy: He's just a re:al sweet GU:y. .h .t  
 2 [.hhh  
 3 Emma: [WONderful.  
 4 Nancy: So: we were [sitting in  
 5 Emma: [YER LIFE is CHANG [ing  
 6 Nancy: [EEYE::AH

Although Emma's turn in line 5 is clearly interruptive in the sequential sense, as she starts up well before Nancy's utterance has reached a possible completion point, it is not (treated as) interruptive in the moral sense. In fact, it is an affiliative action, expressing her pleasure at the fact that Nancy has found a new boyfriend. And Nancy's unhesitating and enthusiastic response in line 6 displays her recognition of the utterance's affiliative character.

There are, however, instances where the sequential and moral aspects of interruption coalesce, as, for instance, when an incoming speaker starts up at a non-transition relevance place to do an argumentative move, resulting in a confrontational or hostile interruption, as in the following extract from a call-in radio show quoted by Hutchby (1992: 349):

**example (2)**

1 Caller: .hh But I expect tuh get a lot mo:re.  
 2 Host: So?  
 3 Caller: .h Now the point is there is a  
 4 limi [t to ( )-  
 > 5 Host: [What's that got tuh do- what's  
 6 that got tuh do with telethons though.  
 7 Caller: hh Because telethons yesterda:y (0.6)  
 8 e::rm wuz appealing tuh people, (.) to:  
 9 send in fo:r various things.

In this fragment, the host starts in on a turn in a sequentially interruptive position, i.e. at a place where the current speaker is clearly embarked on a turn(-component) which is not finished, and thus not transition ready. In addition, he is starting up in this interjacent position to do an argumentative interactional move, cutting off the caller's utterance "Now the point is there is a limit ..." to do a challenge, "What's that got tuh do ... with telethons though."

Hutchby's hostile interruptions as well as Goldberg's power-type and competitive interruptions respectively resemble the instances of interruptions in my corpus. Consider, for example, the following three extracts:

**example (3): Neptide II, 3**

33 JOYCE I saw a solicitor about you.  
37 CLAIRE But Mum, I already have a solicitor.  
38 JOYCE I know that, don't I? This one specialised  
39 in custody, you should have got one who knew  
40 all about it in the first place.  
41 CLAIRE (*Through clenched teeth.*) I have got one who  
42 deals with custody.  
43 JOYCE Yes, normal custody. Not one who deals with...  
44 you know... special circumstances.  
45 CLAIRE (*Firmly.*) It's too late now Mum.  
46 JOYCE (*Sighs.*) I just wish...  
> 47 CLAIRE (*Cutting her off.*) It's no good bloody  
48 wishing, is it? Please get on with it.  
49 JOYCE The solicitor I saw was a specialist in...  
> 50 CLAIRE In special custody cases. Yes, you said that.  
51 JOYCE And on top of that, she was one of your lot  
52 as well.

**example (4): My mother said I, 4**

17 MARGARET You can get pregnant the first time, you know.  
18 JACKIE Thanks for telling me now.  
19 MARGARET Well if you'd come to me and said-  
> 20 JACKIE Well I did say I wanted to have a talk with  
21 you, actually, and you said "Tell me while we  
22 go round the garden centre," don't you

23                   remember? (*Slight pause.*) Anyway, you can't  
 24                   scare me, because I'm on the pill, OK?  
 25 MARGARET       Since when?  
 26 JACKIE          Since before Neil and I went away at half  
 27                   term. You knew that because you've been  
 28                   reading my diary.  
 29 MARGARET       (*Momentarily caught.*) Well I've no idea, you  
 30                   might be on drugs, anything! (*Collects*  
 31                   *herself.*) I know I'm going to sound like an  
 32                   old fuddy duddy,... but... (*Stuck.*) It's a  
 33                   serious step you've taken, you've no idea—  
 > 34 JACKIE        It was no big deal. It was a relief to get it  
 35                   over with. I cried afterwards. Then I laughed.  
 36                   I expect it's better with someone you're in  
 37                   love with.  
 38 MARGARET       You could have waited.

**example (5): My mother I, 7**

1 DORIS           I'll be glad when they put an end to clothes  
 2                   rationing. These sheets are quite threadbare  
 3                   in the middle. (*Sound of light aircraft*  
 4                   *going overhead. Doris studies the sky.*)  
                   R.A.F.  
 5                   from the base at Padgate.  
 6 MARGARET       They're B29s, not Lancasters!  
 7 DORIS           I'll be glad when they're gone.  
 8                   (*Disdain.*) Americans.  
 9 MARGARET       Mother! Without them we couldn't have won  
                   the—  
 > 10 DORIS         Are you going to help me fold this sheet, or  
 11                   are you just going to stand there all  
 12                   afternoon identifying aircraft!  
 13 MARGARET       (*Staring at the sky.*) Maybe one of them's  
                   Ken.  
 14 DORIS           (*They hold the sheet by the corners and tug.*)  
 15                   I don't see how it can be, if he's calling in  
 16                   half an hour.

In each of these fragments, the incoming speaker (Claire in example (3), Jackie in example (4), and Doris in example (5)) starts up in a

sequentially interruptive position to perform an oppositional activity. In extract (3), Claire cuts her mother short twice. In line 47, she cuts off Joyce's utterance "I just wish ..." to do a challenge, "It's not good bloody wishing, is it?"; In line 50, Claire begins her turn in a position that Jefferson's (1984, 1986) has classified as recognitional onset. That is, she recognises what Joyce wants to say ("The solicitor I saw was a specialist in ..." line 49) and starts her own turn before her mother's utterance has reached a possible completion point. In contrast to the instances of recognitional onset in Jefferson's data, however, Claire's turn appears to signal impatience and/or irritation rather than enthusiasm and/or interest in what her mother is saying. Firstly, she has already made clear that she considers her mother's endeavours futile: "It's too late now, Mum" (line 45). Furthermore, her utterance implies that Joyce is providing redundant information ("In special custody cases. Yes, you said that.") and, therefore, is irrelevant. Similarly, in extract (4), Jackie interrupts her mother twice in mid-utterance, and both times, she uses the sequential form of interruption to produce a counter to what Margaret has just said ("Well I did say ..." in line 20, and "It was no big deal" in line 34). Finally, in extract (5), Doris cuts off her daughter's assertion: "Without them we couldn't have won the-" with a rebuke: "Are you going to help me fold this sheet, or are you just going to stand there all afternoon identifying aircraft!" (lines 10-12). In contrast to the interruptions in extracts (3) and (4), Doris's turn is not even related to the content of her daughter's prior utterance. It is an attempt at changing the topic and does not contain any coherent-cohesive ties with the interrupted utterance. Hence, it qualifies as a power-type interruption in the sense of Goldberg (1990). Moreover, the increased loudness signals emotional involvement and probably irritation and contributes to the antagonistic character of Doris' interruption.<sup>71</sup>

These extracts show how, in the context of a dispute, disagreement and interruption can work together, in the sense that participants can be seen to reinforce opposition by invading the interlocutor's conversational floor-space, trying to cut her short - in a word, by interrupting her with an argumentative action. The

very organisation of turn-taking in these fragments contributes to our hearing of these stretches of talk as aggravated arguments.<sup>72</sup>

The confrontational character of the interruptions in my data is even more obvious in the following two passages:

**example (6): 'night Mother**

1425 MAMA Ricky isn't through yet. You don't know how  
1426 he'll turn out!  
1427 JESSIE (*Going back to the kitchen.*) Yes I do and so  
1428 did Cecil. Ricky is the two of us together  
1429 for all time in too small a space. And we're  
1430 tearing each other apart, like always,  
1431 inside that boy, and if you don't see it,  
1432 then you're just blind.  
1433 MAMA Give him time, Jess.  
1434 JESSIE Oh, he'll have plenty of that. Five years  
1435 for forgery, ten years for armed assault...  
> 1436 MAMA (*Furious.*) Stop that! ((...))

**example (7): Neptide I, 2**

239 CLAIRE Did you ever enrol for those brass rubbing  
240 classes, Mum?  
241 JOYCE Oh, that's just typical of you, stick your  
242 lead in the sand, hear no evil, see no  
243 evil, but (*She stops herself.*) I tell you  
244 this much: a social worker had never so much  
245 as put a finger on the doorbell until...  
> 246 CLAIRE (*Harshly.*) Mum, leave it out, please.  
247 JOYCE It's all very well you saying, "Mum,  
248 please," but that won't solve anything.

In these fragments, the sequential form of interruption is used to package meta-communicative imperatives, which demand that the other stops pursuing her line of arguing. These turns then are not only incursive in a sequential sense, but also explicitly challenge the recipient's speaking rights, and this combination of interruption and "inhibiting moves" (Linell 1990) reinforces the aggressive nature of these contributions.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, both the escalated volume (example 6) and the angry, irritated tone of voice of the

interrupters signal negative emotional involvement and contribute to the confrontational character of these turns (cf. French & Local 1986). In sum, in these extracts, the interrupters not only obstruct the opponent's flow of speech, but also emphasise the invasive nature of their activity, thereby reinforcing opposition.

By contrast, speakers can expressly orient to the potential hostility of an interjacently positioned turn by formulating what they are doing as 'interrupting,' and thereby prospectively neutralise the negative implications which may attach to the production of such an interruptive bid for turn-space. For instance, a speaker starting to talk in the midst of another's ongoing turn may use a component such as "Can I just interrupt you" in order to exhibit an orientation to the possibility that this move may be negatively evaluated by the other, and to display that no offence is intended. Consider the following example from Hutchby (1992: 348; 1996a: 79):

**example (8)**

- 1 Caller: I'm actually phoning in: support of the  
2 stu: dents, .hh and also be[ cus I::  
3 Host: [Wuh e-ca- can  
4 I just interrupt you, wu- [were] w- were=  
5 Caller: [Yes]  
6 Host: =you actually on the demonstration yesterday?

The host starts up a question in a sequentially incursive position (line 3), but immediately interposes a request for permission to interrupt: "can I just interrupt you." And the caller, a moment later, acknowledges the host's displayed orientation to the interruptiveness of his turn and consents to his taking the floor with "Yes" (line 5).

Requesting permission to interrupt, as in this fragment, is one way of exhibiting an orientation to the other's speaking rights (and their potential violation by the incoming speaker). Other ways in which interactants can "do interrupting" (Bilmes 1997) is by incorporating an apology for one's incursive turn-start into the interruption such as "Sorry to interrupt, but...", or by explicitly distancing oneself from the potentially offensive nature of the interjacent onset, e.g. "I hate to interrupt, but..."

Interactants, then, may exhibit that they recognise that they are interfering with another's utterance, and that they may be committing a violation of speaking rights in so doing. As we have seen, by incorporating some special work which constitutes a display of interruptiveness, speakers can neutralise, or at least tone down, the negative implications of their activity. By contrast, in the mother-daughter dispute sequences in my data, speakers who produce sequentially incursive acts, rather than mitigating the disruptive nature of their activity, stress the obstructive quality of their contribution, by explicitly challenging the recipient's completion right, as illustrated in extracts (6) and (7), and thereby contribute to the escalation of the dispute.

In my corpus there are numerous other examples of disputants aggressively inhibiting an opponent's talk by using the sequential form of interruption to package an overt completion-right challenge. Consider, for instance, the following two extracts:

**example (9): Raisin**

20 RUTH Fresh - just fresh as salt, this girl!  
 21 BENEATHA (*Drily.*) Well- if the salt loses its savor-  
 > 22 MAMA Now that will do. I just ain't going to have  
 23 you 'round here reciting the scriptures in  
 24 vain- you hear me?

**example (10): Tell me**

308 MOTHER One more word and up to your room.  
 309 DAUGHTER But...  
 310 MOTHER Another word, and up you go.  
 311 DAUGHTER But Mom...  
 > 312 MOTHER Alright, that's it. That is it. I've heard  
 313 enough. It might be a good idea, young lady,  
 314 if you went up to your room.

In each case here, the incoming speaker interrupts another's ongoing speech with a meta-communicative remark that aims at terminating the other's utterance, thereby stressing, rather than moderating, antagonism. The obstructive character of these activities is clearest in extract (10), where the mother cuts off her daughter's

turn before she can make a point, thus severely violating the girl's completion right (cf. Murray 1985).<sup>74</sup>

As this discussion shows, focusing on what it is that a speaker is doing with an interruption in the local context of the interaction provides further insights into how the impression of confrontation in the above dispute sequences is accomplished by the participants.<sup>75</sup> This does not capture the complete picture, however, as it neglects a vital aspect of the interaction. To gain a full understanding of how the sense of altercation in the mother-daughter dispute-sequences under analysis is interactively achieved with the aid of interruptions, in addition to looking at how interruption gets done by incoming speakers, we also have to examine how interrupted speakers react to being cut short.

This view is also advocated by several other researchers. For instance, Hutchby (1992: 344) argues that we have to "take into account, the participants' own displayed orientation to the 'interruptiveness' of particular overlaps - as evidences, for instance, by the ways overlapped speakers might show (tacitly or overtly) that they are treating another's bit for the floor-space as illegitimate." And Bilmes (1997: 511-512) insists that in order for an event to count as an interruption "there must be some ... signal of violation by one of the participants though it need not be verbal or explicit;" that is to say, the event "must be displayed and handled as violative within the interaction" (original emphasis).

As the careful word choice in these quotations indicates, participants' ways of exhibiting their evaluation of an instance of incursive overlap may be more or less clear-cut, ranging from tacit/non-verbal to overt/explicit perception displays. Therefore, we have to look for as much evidence as possible in the participants' overall behaviour for their interpretations of events in the local context of the interaction. As Watts (1991: 92) states, "although participants rarely accuse one another openly of interrupting, various features of the interaction in which the interruption has occurred can be interpreted as revealing that this is how the interrupted, possibly also the interrupter, has perceived the event." It is these potentially revealing features of the interaction that will be the focus of the subsequent paragraphs.

In the following spate of talk, the dispute between mother and daughter seems to become progressively more aggravated. From line 264 onwards, there is an extended sequence of overlapping turns, and this stretch of overlapping talk appears to mark an increasing degree of antagonism between the disputants, as each tries to "out talk" - even "out shout" - the other to drive the argument home. In the following, I want to examine how the ways in which participants both do interruption and react to being interrupted play a crucial part in framing this spate of talk as a heated dispute.

**example (11): Home**

257 OLIVIA           You make one mistake after another for 20  
258                   years and you never took responsibility  
                      for  
259                   one second! You brought babies into this  
260                   world that you could barely feed 'cause  
261                   that husband a yours couldn't hold down a  
262                   job.  
263 MARY JANE        That's such a lie! How could you say that?  
> 264 OLIVIA        (*Overlapping.*) Oh, keep your voice down.  
> 265 MARY JANE       (*Overlapping.*) He got laid off that time,  
266                   Ma! Laid off!  
267 OLIVIA           (*Jumps up and shuts the windows.*)  
> 268                   (*Overlapping.*) You don't have to broadcast  
269                   it to the world.  
> 270 MARY JANE       (*Overlapping.*) And we woulda paid back  
271                   every penny of that money but Daddy said  
272                   it was okay not to. Okay not to! You hear  
273                   me, Ma?  
> 274 OLIVIA        (*Overlapping.*) The whole neighborhood can  
275                   hear you!  
> 276 MARY JANE       (*Overlapping.*) So don't you ever bring  
                      that  
277                   up again!  
> 278 OLIVIA        (*Overlapping.*) You should be ashamed of  
279                   that fresh mouth of yours.  
280 MARY JANE        That's all you care about, isn't it? What  
281                   the neighbors think and where the  
282                   neighbors are moving to.

This extract contains a relatively long series of successive sequentially interruptive turns that are used to package oppositional actions (lines 264-279). And we can see how each disputant employs these interruptions in an attempt to either pursue her own line of arguing in face of continuing resistance, as in Mary Jane's case, or to close the other down and terminate the dispute sequence, as in Olivia's case.

Prior to this fragment, Mary Jane and her mother have been arguing about whether Olivia has been taking enough interest in her daughter's life. Mary Jane has repeatedly accused her mother of neglecting her, while Olivia has persistently denied her daughter's allegations. At the beginning of this sequence, Olivia issues a series of accusatory claims, which portray Mary Jane's behaviour as irresponsible (lines 257-262), thus shifting the blame back to her. In the following turn, Mary Jane disputes the truth of her mother's prior claim, maintaining that what Olivia has just said is a lie ("That's such a lie!" line 263). Subsequently, she issues a blame-implicative question ("How could you say that?"), which construes Olivia's prior utterance as an offence and obliges her to account for her claim in the subsequent turn.<sup>76</sup> But before she can finish her turn, in line 264, Olivia interrupts her with a meta-communicative directive, telling her to "keep [her] voice down." Mary Jane's reaction to this takes a particular form: she apparently refuses to cede the floor once her mother's interruption is under way. In other words, as Olivia interrupts her, she responds by carrying on with the overlapped utterance. In lines 265-266, she elaborates on her initial opposition, by producing a counter to Olivia's allegation that her husband "couldn't hold down a job" (line 261), shouting: "He got laid off that time, Ma! Laid off!" In addition, rather than comply with her mother's demand, she even increases the volume. The interruptive placement combined with the raised voice and self-repetition signals negative emotional involvement and aggravates opposition even further. In line 268, Olivia interrupts her again with a challenge that mirrors her own prior interruptive challenge: she issues another meta-communicative remark that expresses disapproval of Mary Jane's verbal demeanour and implicitly demands that she lower her voice: "You don't have to broadcast it to the

world." This exchange of largely monological, interruptively placed oppositional turns continues through the end of the excerpt.

To sum up, in this fragment, there are several instances where the current speaker is interrupted before she is ready to stop talking. On each occasion, the interrupted speaker chooses to continue her own line of talk at the same time as the interrupter at a higher volume and/or pitch. The fact that neither disputant pulls back leads to extended simultaneous oppositional talk, which lends this stretch of conversation its confrontational nature.

The disputants' discursive behaviour in the above sequence markedly contrasts with the behaviour of conversationalists in friendly conversations. In non-confrontational interactional environments, it is usually the case that speakers who are interrupted quickly drop out of competition for the floor (Jefferson 1986; Jefferson & Schegloff 1975). For instance, in the following extract, the interjacently overlapped speaker readily cedes the floor soon after the onset of overlap.

**example (12): (quoted from Hutchby 1996a: 82)**

- 1 Zoe: an' he sorta scares me, h  
2 Amy: Have you seen 'im?  
3 Zoe: .hhh We:ll I(m) I've met 'im,  
4 Amy: .hhhh Well uh actually: [when she's-  
> 5 Zoe: [an' the way the:y  
6 pla:y. Oh:-  
7 (.)  
8 Amy: Serious huh?  
9 Zoe: .h Yah,

The speaker who is overlapped, rather than attempting to finish her utterance, abandons what she is saying in mid-phrase. Dropping out of competition for the floor like this is one routine way in which participants orient to the minimisation of overlap in ordinary conversation (Jefferson & Schegloff 1975; Sacks et al 1974; some other techniques are discussed in Schegloff 1987).

By contrast, in the extract from *Home*, this basic characteristic of overlap in conversation, i.e. its brevity, is noticeably absent. Rather than display a concern to minimise overlap and show willingness to cede the floor, we find mother and daughter

mutually "talking over" one another in a simultaneous attempt to drive home their respective points.

Moreover, although the overlapping speaker mentions something slightly disjunctive from what the current speaker seems about to say, in extract (12), the overlapped speaker does not overtly sanction her co-participant for engaging in an illegitimate activity. Indeed, once the speaker has dropped out, she subsequently comments on the other's utterance with a short remark ("Serious huh?" line 8), which prompts the overlapping speaker to resume the floor and elaborate on her utterance.

By way of contrast, in the example from *Home* above, the speakers' continuing mutual competition for the floor in tandem with the production of unmitigated oppositional turns and an increase in volume signals negative emotional involvement and displays their orientation to the argumentative nature of their current interactivity.

Similar instances (and effects) of handling interruptions in this way have been observed in conflict sequences in institutional contexts. For instance, Hutchby (1992; 1996a: 84) finds that in argument sequences on talk radio, refusal to cede the floor to an overlapping speaker highlights the combative nature of interruptions and thus contributes to the framing of a strip of conversation as "confrontation talk." And in an analysis of televised political debates, Bilmes (1997) finds various "being-interrupted displays" (519), i.e. verbal and non-verbal displays of annoyance, of determination to hold the floor, of being obstructed, on the part of interrupted speakers. These include, for instance, the "act of continuing to talk in overlap" in tandem with a show of insistence and/or annoyance, involving, for example, "facial expressions, gestures, grammatical devices, repetition, and raised voice" (520, my emphasis).

This is exactly what we have observed in example (12): Instead of displaying an orientation to the minimisation of overlap, both speakers continue to talk in overlap, with self-repetition and increased volume ("Laid off!" in line 266 and "Ok not to!" line 272) conveying anger and exasperation. In addition, this extract illustrates another technique for "doing being interrupted" Bilmes mentions, namely "ignoring what the interrupter has said, thereby

treating the interruptive utterance as illegitimate, null, and void" (521). As we have seen, up to line 280, rather than address her mother's repeated interruptive meta-communicative remarks, Mary Jane simply continues with her line of arguing. By ignoring Olivia's interjections, she construes them as out-of-place actions.

The upshot of this is that the spate of talk in example 11 is argumentative not only in terms of its content (and preference structure), but also in terms of its turn-taking structure. Apparently, talking interruptively and reacting to another's talk as interruptive contributes to the framing, or contextualisation, of a sequence of talk as a dispute.

So far I have shown how the interplay of interruption and aggravated opposition accounts for the sense of antagonism in the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus. In the following, I will focus on the use of particular forms of interruption as devices for exacerbating opposition in these dispute sequences. The first device I will look at involves the use of interruption to block the development of the opponent's line of argument.

For example, in the extract from *Avenue* below, we find Olga cutting in on Mother's turn in a particular sequential position, which Jefferson (1986) has referred to as "post-continuation":

**example (13): Avenue**

307 OLGA     How dare you read my personal property?  
308 MOTHER   (*Angry, scared, she has gone too far.*) I wanted  
309           to see what you write. Sometimes I see you  
310           writing, so I wanted to see what it was. Just a  
311           bunch of junk. You'd think you'd write something  
312           good, like them confession stuff. I read a story  
313           the other day about this girl, just out of high  
314           school and she got mixed up with a bunch of  
315           college men and—  
> 316 OLGA     I never look in your drawers!  
317 MOTHER   If you did, you'd find nothing silly like that.

After having answered Olga's accusatory question ("I wanted to see what you write." lines 308-309), Mother embarks on a lengthy explanation of her behaviour, which then changes into derogatory

comments on her daughter's writing ("Just a bunch of junk." line 311) and eventually develops into a report of another story she has recently read (lines 312-315). In line 316, Olga produces a sequentially interruptive turn, shifting the talk back to the original topic, namely her mother's transgression: "I never look in your drawers!" In addition to the sequentially incursive placement, the escalated volume her voice signals emotional agitation and reinforces her challenge.

As mentioned above, Olga interrupts her mother in a sequential location, which has been identified by Jefferson (1986) in her work on the systematics of overlapping talk as a standard position for the onset of turn-incursive overlap, namely "post continuation onset." In line 317, to quote Jefferson's (1986: 159) description, Olga starts to speak "just after the current speaker [i.e. Mother] has produced a clear indication of going on, following a possible completion." As Jefferson (1986: 160) remarks, post continuation seems "a reasonable enough place to 'interrupt'. For example, if what has been - adequately, and syntactically possibly completely - said so far is something to which a recipient wants to respond, and now it looks like the speaker is at least continuing and perhaps moving on to other matters, then one might want to get in now, while the initial matter is still relevant, even if it means interrupting." Accordingly, post-continuation is a systematic and warranted place for overlapping talk and the incoming speaker thus may not be perceived as violating the other's speaking rights/performing an illegitimate/offensive action. Jefferson (1986: 159-160) gives the following two examples to illustrate this type of interjacent onset:

**example (14)**

1 Amy: All thetu stuff Maryou:? requires a  
 2 lo:tta spa:ce. Ah me [a:n ih .hhh  
 > 3 Marylou: [Specially if  
 4 yer gonna have it open fuh the public,

**example (15)**

1 Emma: cz you see she wz: depending on: hhim  
 2 takin'er in tuh the L.A. deeple s:-  
 3 depot Sundee so ['e siz  
 > 4 Lottie: [Ah:'ll take'er in:

In these sample passages, the second speakers' turns are interruptive in that they begin one or two syllables into what is clearly a continuation on the current speaker's part, following the completion of a sentence or phrase. However, these sequentially interruptive turns both package supportive actions. In extract (14), Marylou produces an agreement with Amy's prior assertion, and in extract (15), Lottie's overlapping turn is an offer of help with the trouble encountered by Emma's daughter in getting to "the L.A. depot Sundee." Thus, in these extracts we again find overlaps which are interruptive in the sequential sense (i.e. they are to some degree incursive), but do not appear to be interruptive on the interpersonal level of interaction.

By contrast, in extract (13), Olga employs post-continuation interruption to do an argumentative action. In line 316, Olga uses this sequential form to challenge the account Mother provided at the beginning of her turn, but from which her line of talk seems to be moving away. As described above, following an explanation for her having read Olga's writing, Mother goes on to talk about a story she has recently read, thereby shifting the talk away from the issues of her transgression. But the attempted topic-shift is blocked by Olga as she butts in with an interruption that effectively prevents this possible digression to preserve her mother's behaviour as the topic of talk.<sup>77</sup>

The following sample passage provides a slightly different example of a disputant argumentatively interrupting her opponent in post-continuation position. Olivia interrupts a clear continuation on Mary Jane's part to cut off her line of talk, having identified an arguable action which, by virtue of Mary Jane possibly moving on to some other issue, might be about to lose its relevance:

**example (16): Home**

243 MARY JANE You were always like this. Always like  
244 this. I was 19 years old and you coulda  
245 stopped me from going to California with  
246 Jimbo to begin with and my life woulda-  
> 247 OLIVIA Nobody coulda stopped you.  
248 MARY JANE You didn't even try! I was your daughter  
249 and you didn't care where I ended up.

Prior to this extract, Olivia has informed her daughter that she has made arrangements to sell her house. At the beginning of this fragment, Mary Jane attacks her mother with a series of accusations. The extreme formulation "always" (line 243) serves to both intensify and legitimise her criticism, by construing Olivia's behaviour as a recurring offence rather than a single instance. Moreover, self-repetition ("Always like this." lines 243-244) stresses Mary Jane's position and thus reinforces her criticism. In the remainder of her turn, Mary Jane elaborates on her blame, by citing a concrete example of Olivia's perceived failures as evidence for her claim (lines 244-246). But before she can finish her turn, Olivia interrupts her with an outright denial: "Nobody coulda stopped you" (line 247). In the subsequent turn, Mary Jane counter-opposes her with another accusatory claim: "You didn't even try!" (line 248). Her raised voice signals high emotional involvement and further escalates the dispute. In the remainder of her turn, Mary Jane expands on her accusation, claiming: "I was your daughter and you didn't care where I ended up" (lines 248-249).

The confrontational nature of the interruptions in extracts (13) and (16) is further emphasised by the fact that the amount of talk that goes by following a possible completion point in the current speaker's turn before the opponent's interruption is substantially more than in examples (14) and (15). In extract (16), Mary Jane completes a sentence in lines 245-246 with "with Jimbo." It is only after she has produced seven more complete words that Olivia comes in with a counter. Example (13) is even more graphic in this regard, as Olga does not interrupt Mother with her counter (line 316) until she has embarked on a lengthy turn.

The argumentative and aggressive nature of the post-continuation interruptions in my data can thus be put down to two basic characteristics. Firstly, they differ from Jefferson's examples in terms of the amount of talk that the interrupter lets pass by before making her bid for the floor. The resulting 'deep incision' into another's turn lends these instances a greater sense of interruptiveness and contributes to the sense of intensity of these dispute sequences. In addition, the opponent interrupts a continuation by the other in order to obstruct the line of talk, to respond to an arguable action which the continuation puts in

possible danger of losing its local contextual relevance. By this means, disputants are able to maintain the relevance of contentious points, and thereby to sustain the ongoing argument sequence.

As the above discussion suggests, in heated phases of dispute, participants have to place their counter as early as possible after the occurrence of an arguable action on the opponent's turn in order to preserve the relevance of their contribution. This accounts for the sense of quick pace and the relatively high frequency of interruptions in my data.

There is an additional explanation for the frequent recurrence of interruptions in the disputes under analysis. Olivia's interruption in the preceding extract relates to an observation by Murray (1985), as I already noted above. Murray finds that members' evaluation of an instance of overlap is based on a range of factors. He proposes, for instance, that special rights to be heard, e.g. following an attack, override completion rights, and may thus warrant an interruption of the attacked speaker's part. Murray's findings are concordant with Bilmes' (1988: 167) observation that following accusations - and, by extrapolation, attributions, there is an expectation of immediate, even interruptive, denial:

when A attributes some action or thought to B in B's presence, there is a preference for B to contradict A *interruptively or immediately following the turn in which the attribution was produced*. In other words, following attributions on a recipient, there is a preference for contradiction. (my emphasis; cf. also Garcia 1991: 821)<sup>78</sup>

From this perspective, Olivia's interruptively placed denial in line 247, confrontational as it is, is both expectable and warranted given Mary Jane's preceding attack on her. This may, in part, explain why it is not sanctioned as being out-of-place by Mary Jane in her following turn - although her raised voice ("You didn't even try!" line 248) may signal that she is angry about her mother's denial and/or her interruption.

In the following extract from *My mother*, we can see a similar instance of a counter being interposed in a turn performing a negative attribution:

**example (17): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
131 valley!  
132 MARGARET He's not.  
133 DORIS He is.  
134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
135 DORIS Curious method of parking.  
136 MARGARET That's typical, you think all Americans are  
137 brash and wear loud check shirts and chew  
138 gum and want to marry English girls. You're  
139 just prej-...  
> 140 DORIS Margaret, that's enough! (Pause.) After all,  
141 he is going to marry an English girl.

The excerpt starts with Doris complaining to Margaret that her American boyfriend is about to crush her flowers (lines 130-131). This triggers a sequence of mutual contradictions with the two women mutually negating each others' assertions (lines 131-135). When Margaret starts attacking her mother, and accuses her of being prejudiced (lines 136-139), Doris cuts her off with an inhibiting move, as discussed above ("Margaret, that's enough!" line 140). The sequentially interruptive placement of her counter in combination with the volume increase displays a negative affective reaction (i.e. anger) at what Mary Jane has just said and aggravates opposition.

The two preceding examples again show how argumentative actions, such as accusations and denials, and the sequential form of interruption collaborate in the local interactional accomplishment of dispute phases of talk.

As mentioned above, interruptions are often thought to be involved with the establishment or maintenance of power in interaction. As West & Zimmerman (1977: 527) put it: "The use of interruptions is in fact a control device, since the incursion ... disorganizes the local construction of a topic." As the following examples will show, disputants can indeed exert a form of discursive control through the use of a particular technique involving what Jefferson (1981) has called "post-response-initiation" interruption. As we will see, disputants may use post-response-initiation

interruption as an arguing device to constrain the opponent's participation options.

Jefferson notes some uses of post-response-initiation interruption as a way of following up a prior statement or question. In particular, she observes that it seems to be used in dealing with "unfavourable" responses on the part of recipients. Jefferson's central phenomenon is the "post-response pursuit of response": a device whereby speakers "attempt to elicit revision of a problematic response by proposing, in effect, that the response did not occur and response is due" (1981: i). The following extract from a psychiatric interview is an example:

**example (18) (quoted from Jefferson 1981: 10)**

- 1 Dr. F: I understand (0.8) ( ) that you're not  
2 feeling very well.  
3 Mary: Yea::h well that is [the opinion ]  
> 4 Dr. F: [Is that correct?  
5 Mary: of Doctor Hollmann.  
6 Dr. F: Uh [huh  
7 Mary: [But it isn't mine.

This form of asking for a response after a response has been initiated is, Jefferson (1981: 13) suggests, "an attempt to counter, override, interrupt an unfavourable response-in-progress." Mary's response is unfavourable because it is not the response the doctor was after: he can interpret Mary's "Yea::h well ..." (line 3) as indicating an upcoming disagreement (as described in the preceding section) with his description of her condition as "not feeling very well," i.e. as in a condition possibly to be readmitted to the psychiatric hospital (cf. Bergmann 1992).

In a similar way, the participants in my data can be seen to use this form of countering, or overriding a response-in-progress to deal with unfavourable responses. This device provides a conversational resource that can be used as a means of constraining the options open to the opponent in formulating a response - in particular a counter or a defence - to a preceding assertion or challenge. Consider the following two sample passages:

**example (19): My sister 9**

220 MADAME DANZARD What is the world coming to? I couldn't  
221 believe my eyes.  
222 ISABELLE But Maman-  
> 223 MADAME DANZARD There are no buts involved here.  
224 ISABELLE Maybe she didn't know, Maman.  
225 MADAME DANZARD (*Gathering up the cards.*) Of course she  
226 knew. She deliberately put it on and  
227 wore it.

**example (20): Stuck 6b**

57 LULA But, see, sometimes, I still think about  
58 doing something with my life, you know,  
59 maybe even going to college-  
60 MOM Oh no, you're too old to go to college now.  
61 LULA People go-  
> 62 MOM And you might not get in. No, you probably  
63 wouldn't. Why torture yourself like that?  
64 Life is disappointing enough.  
65 LULA I could just go to San Francisco - maybe?

In both these extracts, the mother cuts into a response-in-progress because she judges from what she has heard of the response so far that it is somehow unacceptable. In example (19), Isabelle's "But Maman-" (line 222) signals that she is about to produce some kind of disagreement with her mother's prior utterance. This is not acceptable for Madame Danzard, and in line 223, she cuts her off before she has had the chance to make her point to explicitly sanction her response as inappropriate: "There are no buts involved here." In reaction, Isabelle issues a mitigated version of her prior objection ("Maybe she didn't know, Maman" line 224), which is then again strongly contested by her mother in the next turn: "Of course she knew. ...". In extract (20), Mom cuts into Lula's statement that she is thinking about going to college, arguing that she is "too old" for that (line 60). However, her turn does not constitute an interruption in the strict sense, since she starts up at a position in Lula's utterance that could well be taken as a possible point of completion; rather, Mom's disagreement seems to be produced latchingly. Her next turn, however, is clearly both argumentative

and sequentially interruptive: in line 62, she cuts off Lula's counter-in-progress to expand on her own preceding oppositional turn, adding further reasons why she questions Lula's plan to go to college. Like Isabelle in the preceding extract, Lula's reaction to her mother's interruption does not show any signs that she perceives her activity as a breach of speaking rights. Indeed, in line 61, she seems to ratify her mother's objections, when she suggests that she might go to San Francisco (instead of going to college).

In each of these sample passages, the mother cuts her daughter short in mid-utterance, displaying - either explicitly, as in extract 19, or implicitly by simply ignoring what the other is saying, as in extract 20 - that the response she is about to give is unacceptable. And in each case, instead of rejecting the mother's interruption as illegitimate, the interrupted speaker adjusts her response to some degree.

As these fragments show, countering or overriding a response-in-progress by means of an oppositional move packaged as an interruption provides a conversational resource that disputants can exploit to restrict the options available to the opponent for developing a response that is perceived as unfavourable to the interrupter's position. In this way, interruptions-cum-challenges (or, as we might call them, argumentative interruptions) can be employed to exercise control over both the structure and content of the ongoing interaction.

In the two preceding fragments, we have seen how disputants can use interruption as a control device, by cutting into an unacceptable response-in-progress in order to press for a (more) acceptable response. This does not mean, however, that this control manoeuvre is always effective. In the following extract from *'night Mother*, for instance, Mama's aggressive interruption of her daughter's response to her suggestion does not prompt Jessie to abandon her stance:

**example (21): 'night Mother**

720 MAMA     Good time don't come looking for you, Jessie.  
721             You could work some puzzles or put in a  
722             garden or go to the store. Let's call a taxi  
723             and go to the A&P!

724 JESSIE I shopped you up for about two weeks already.  
 725           You're not going to need toilet paper till  
 726           Thanksgiving.  
 > 727 MAMA   (*Interrupting.*) You're acting like some little  
 728           brat, Jessie. You're mad and everybody's  
 729           boring and you don't have anything to do and  
 730           you don't like me and you don't like going out  
 731           and you don't like staying in and you never  
           talk  
 732           on the phone and you don't watch TV and you're  
 733           miserable and it's your own sweet fault.  
 734 JESSIE And it's time I did something about it.

Prior to this exchange, Jessie has tried to explain to her mother why she intends to kill herself. At the beginning of this sequence, Mama tries to dissuade her from committing suicide, by telling her that she has to take control of her life (lines 720-721) and proposing several activities she could engage in to keep herself busy and make her life more attractive (lines 721-722). She closes her turn suggesting that they call a cab and go shopping in the local supermarket (lines 722-723). In the following turn, however, Jessie declines her mother's suggestion - and thus also her attempts at distracting her from her plan to put an end to her life - claiming that she has already done the shopping and has even built up an abundant supply of household items (lines 724-726). The stark contrast between her remark on such trivial matters as the stock of toilet paper she has bought (lines 725-726) and the preceding discussion about the highly sensitive issue of her suicidal intentions generates a clash of frames or scripts and thereby humour (cf. Norrick 1986; Raskin 1985), more specifically gallows humour. While at the content level of interaction Jessie's utterance provides Mama with information about the amount of toilet paper she has at her disposal, at the interpersonal level her remark signals that she is not willing to discuss her plan to commit suicide any further. In addition, the humorous key suggests that she does not take the conversation or her mother's concerns seriously. This prompts Mama to attack her, and to do so as quickly as possible. Before Jessie has finished talking, Mama butts in with a harsh

criticism. By formulating what Jessie is doing as “acting like some little brat” (lines 727-728) she rejects her daughter’s behaviour as inappropriate, offensive, immature and irresponsible.<sup>79</sup> The sequentially interruptive placement of her counter signals her indignation and serves to further aggravate opposition. In the remainder of her turn, Mama elaborates on her criticism, providing a detailed description of her daughter’s misdemeanour (lines 728-733). As in the two preceding extracts, Jessie does not sanction her mother’s interruption as out-of-place talk, nor does she reject her criticism or put up a defence. In fact, in line 734, she confirms Mama’s assessment of the situation, and argues that it is time she “did something about it.” In so doing, she implies that her plan to kill herself is but a logical consequence of the situation Mama has just described, and thereby uses Mama’s own argument against her.

In the extract from *Avenue* below, too, Mother cuts into her daughter’s challenging response with a negative categorisation, and, like Jessie in the preceding example, Olga insists on her critical stance towards her mother’s boyfriend, thereby maintaining the dispute sequence:

**example (22): Avenue**

160 MOTHER Try to look decent and neat. (*Crosses to*  
161 *bureau drawer, rummages around, takes out*  
162 *pair of stockings.*)  
163 OLGA You think he looks so neat. One time he had  
164 no buttons on the sleeves of his shirt.  
165 One time the zipper on his fly was broken.  
166 And one time there were wine stains—  
167 MOTHER (*Crosses R., sits in chair, starts to put*  
> 168 *on stockings.*) You're too nosy, that's what  
169 you are. He needs a woman to fix everything  
170 up for him.  
171 OLGA His first wife ran out on him. Ha!

In line 163, Olga rejects her mother’s prior request to try to dress up for the upcoming dinner with her (mother’s) boyfriend, by disputing the assumption underlying Mother’s utterance that he is worth the effort: “You think he looks so neat. ...” (lines 163). She

produces a whole list of the man's failures to substantiate her claim, but in line 167, Mother cuts her off with a negative categorisation ("You're too nosy, that's what you are."), thereby simultaneously challenging the validity of Olga's prior activity as well as her personality. As in the extract above, the interplay of sequential interruptiveness and aggravated opposition contribute to the aggressive nature of her contribution. But, instead of backing down, in her subsequent turn, Olga keeps up her oppositional stance - and thus also the argumentative nature of the sequence - and counters her mother's claim that her boyfriend "needs a woman to fix everything up for him" (lines 169-170).

As the above discussion has shown, while disputants may draw on post-response-initiation interruption to exercise control over the ongoing talk, by cutting off an opponent's undesirable response-in-progress to push for a (more) satisfactory response, this control manoeuvre is not always successful. Although the interrupted speakers in the two preceding examples do not openly object to or resist being interrupted, following the interruption they do not back down from their oppositional position either. Rather than issue some mitigated version of their earlier interrupted response (as in extracts 20 and 21), the interruptees in extracts (22) and (23) produce some kind of counter to what the interrupter has said in their interjacenty positioned turn, and thereby sustain the dispute sequence.

To sum up so far, the ways in which conversationalists do interruption as well as how they react to being interrupted play an important part in the local interactional accomplishment of dispute talk. For example, in my data, interrupters can be seen to stress rather than mitigate the disruptive nature of their activity (e.g. by explicitly challenging the recipient's completion right), thereby reinforcing the confrontational nature of their activity and aggravating opposition. Moreover, disputants have a range of interruption formats at their disposal which they can exploit as devices for sustaining and exacerbating opposition. For instance, on having identified an arguable action in the opponent's talk, speakers may use post-continuation interruption to block the development of the opponent's line of argument, in order to counter that arguable action, which the continuation puts in possible danger

of losing its local contextual relevance. This form of interruption enables disputants to maintain the relevance of contentious points and thereby sustain the ongoing argument sequence. Furthermore, disputants may use post-response-initiation interruption as an arguing device to constrain the opponent's options for developing a response that is perceived as unfavourable to the interrupter's position and thereby to exercise control over the course of the ongoing interaction. In addition, rather than show an orientation to the minimisation of overlapping talk, interrupted speakers may refuse to cede the floor to an incoming speaker, while simultaneously displaying insistence and/or annoyance (e.g. by means of repetition and/or raised voice), thus emphasising the antagonistic nature of the interaction.

As noted above, similar uses of and reactions to interruptions have also been found in naturally occurring arguments, especially in conflict sequences in institutional settings. Interestingly, however, another way in which interactants can display that their turn at talk has been improperly interrupted that has frequently been noted in the literature on interruptions is noticeably absent in my data. In the remainder of this section, I will consider a possible explanation for the conspicuous absence of this type of "being interrupted display" in my corpus.

In their studies of arguments on talk radio and televised political debates, Hutchby (1992, 1996a), Bilmes (1997; 1999) and Schegloff (1988/89) find that one way in which interrupted speakers may exhibit that they perceive another's turn-incursive bid for the floor as inappropriate is by claiming that one has been interrupted, has not been allowed to finish, or the like as in "Let me finish this"; "... you keep interrupting"; "Would you stop interrupting me"; etc. Consider, for instance, the following example from Hutchby (1992: 354, 1996a: 78), in which a speaker responds to another's interruption by rebuking her for having made an illegitimate bid for the floor:

**example (23)**

- 1 Caller: As you can imagine I wuz absolutely::
- 2            =livi [d(h)
- 3 Host:            [Well did you- did you then ek-
- 4            explain that yoou- un:derstood. that,



directed to an overhearing audience - the audience in front of the TV or radio or the friend who is listening to the couple's story.

For instance, adopting Goffman's (1981) participant roles, Gruber (2001: 1825) states that the discussants in TV talk-shows produce their talk not only for an addressed recipient (i.e. their immediate interlocutor), but also for some other unaddressed ratified recipients (i.e. the other participants of the discussion) as well as for an unratified recipient (i.e. the overhearing audience). Bilmes (1999, 2001) assigns the audience an even more central role in the ongoing interaction. He states that "[political campaign] debates are talk for an audience" (2001: 160), and that they are different from conversational arguments "in that the objective is not to convince one's interlocutor but to convince the audience and thereby win votes" (1999: 216).<sup>80</sup> The participants thus extend beyond the physical presence of their interlocutor(s) to include the overhearing (TV, radio and/or studio) audience as addressee of their utterances. The audience is then both overhearer and addressee to be persuaded about the superiority and/or credibility of a position and the person putting forward that position. As Bilmes (1999: 236, fn6) puts it, candidates in political debates are "trying to favorably impress the audience and to create an unfavourable impression of [their] opponent."

This multi-directedness of talk has a crucial bearing on participants' actions in so far as they may orient not only to the immediate addressee in producing and shaping their turns but also to the unaddressed ratified participant(s) in the interaction (e.g. to get supported by them and thus gain an advantage in the situation) as well as to an overhearing audience (e.g. to impress them for personal and/or political reasons).<sup>81</sup> In fact, as research on talk in institutional contexts has shown, the audience-directed nature of the talk-in-interaction in these settings may give rise to the 'strategic' use of conversational resources such as, for example, specific types of questions (Gruber 2001; Heritage 2002a) and formulations (Atkinson & Drew 1979; Heritage 1985).

By the same token, speakers may use being-interrupted claims as a device to present themselves in a good and others in a bad light: by claiming that they have been illegitimately interrupted, speakers are able to construe themselves as victim and the other as invader

in an attempt to gain the overhearing audience's support and or sympathy.<sup>82</sup>

This relates to Goffman's (1959) concept of "impression management." As noted above, Goffman adopts a dramaturgical perspective to illustrate how social reality is formed through interactions and performances. Interaction is viewed as a "performance," shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with "impressions" that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor (17). Goffman is concerned with how convincing the performance was to the audience. Our ability to carry off a convincing performance, to make people believe that we are who we say we are, we mean what we intend, and that the definition of the situation is what we have claimed by implication, is the means to our impressing ourselves and others. To portray a particular identity and prevent embarrassment and disruption of our performance in order to obtain particular outcomes in an interaction, we often engage in what Goffman refers to as impression management. This refers to the ways in which we supervise our own as well as others' performances. For instance, if we say or do something unsuitable to our performance, we may seek to redeem ourselves quickly by saying or doing something to re-harmonise it. Similarly, interruptions and contradictions are disruptive of an individual's performance, and may thus prompt the interruptee to employ different techniques of impression management to re-establish order and restore her identity.

To summarise so far, the use of overt claims of being interrupted in the exchanges analysed by Bilmes (1997, 1999), Hutchby (1992, 1996a), Schegloff (1988/89) and Talbot (1992) may indicate the speaker's orientation to an overhearing audience in an attempt to get their support and/or sympathy. By contrast, in the mainly dyadic mother-daughter disputes in my data, there is usually no such audience the speakers might appeal to with such a claim (on the character level that is), which may account for the absence of this type of interruption display therein.

Another possible explanation of the lack of explicit being-interrupted claims in my data draws on the notion of sequential organisation of dispute sequences as a possible source of interruption. As noted above, members' evaluation of an instance of

overlap is based on a range of factors. For instance, special rights to be heard, e.g. following accusations, attributions and other kinds of attacks, after which there is a preference for immediate contradiction, override completion rights, and may thus warrant an interruption on the addressee's part. Against this background, both the frequent occurrence of argumentative interruptions and the lack of complaints about such interruptions in my data might, at least in part, originate from the fact that the interactivity of disputing consists to a large extent in the exchange of these very kinds of activities.<sup>83</sup> This suggests that once a dispute frame has been established, participants are expected to disagree and to do so emphatically and quickly.

As we have seen, in the above examples of mother-daughter disputes, turn-incursive overlaps are common. Disagreement is regularly placed immediately at or shortly after a point in the opponent's turn, where an arguable action has been identified/is projectable. The recurrence of such argumentative interruptions indicates that during heated phases of dispute, when the current speaker has produced what can be construed as an arguable action, opponents do not/cannot wait for a possible completion point to occur.

In my data the opponents produce an oppositional turn as soon as they recognise an arguable point in the current speaker's utterance. Apparently, in heated phases of dispute, the need to contradict as soon as possible is more important than adhering to the one-at-a-time rule, and overrides completion rights.<sup>84</sup> This expectation of instant disagreement results in the temporary departure from the standard turn-taking structure and quick pace that characterise the conflict episodes in my corpus.

In addition, in contrast to the argumentative exchanges in institutional settings discussed above, the participants in my data do not show an orientation towards the potential illegitimacy of incursively placed disagreements. If we assume that participants display in their responses to each other (and the analyst) what are allowable contributions in the activity type (Levinson 1992) at hand, this lack of interruption and being-interrupted displays in my data suggests that interruptions are a constitutive element of

heated phases of disputes between mothers and daughters (and presumably between intimates in general).<sup>85</sup>

To conclude, besides a change in the preference organisation, the mother-daughter disputes in my data are characterised by a departure from the standard turn-taking mechanisms. The disputants frequently start up on a turn at talk at points which are not identifiable as possible completion points. While sequentially interruptive turns may display rapport on the interpersonal level of interaction, the interruptions in my data are always used to package argumentative actions. As we have seen, interruption is a means of intensifying opposition: disputants can stress their disagreements by initiating them in the midst of, rather than at the possible completion of the opponent's turn. This turn-incursive positioning reinforces disagreements in that it involves the deliberate interruption of a turn in progress.

Interrupting is thus one interactional resource by which participants may accomplish aggravated opposition. Apparently, apart from exchanging unmitigated disagreements, participants make the ongoing talk recognisable (both to each other and observes) as a heated dispute by packaging these disagreements in the sequential form of interruptions, placing them immediately at or shortly after a point in the opponent's turn at which an arguable action has been identified. This requires that the disputants monitor closely what the opponent is saying. Apparently, dispute talk is a highly structured activity progressing through the finely tuned coordination of opposing turns. Another aspect of this detailed sequencing of oppositional turns will be the focus of the next section.

### 6.3.3 (High degree of) formal cohesion

So far, I have focused on the function of unmodulated disagreements and interruptions in the accomplishment of aggravated forms of verbal conflict. I have shown that heated phases of verbal conflict are characterised by a change in both preference organisation and the organisation of turn-taking. I have demonstrated that unmitigated disagreements and the interruptive placement of oppositional turns are practical resources with which participants may frame (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualise (Gumperz 1982) a current interaction as an adversarial argument.

In this section, I will focus on another structural device, which disputants can utilise in building aggravated oppositional moves, and thus in making the ongoing talk recognisable (both to each other and the analyst alike) as an aggravated argument. I will show that heated disputes display a noticeably high degree of formal cohesion between successive utterances: references to the opponent's as well as the speaker's own prior turns are explicitly marked by a number of cohesive devices, namely structural and word repetition.

Close analysis of the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus reveals that in producing subsequent argumentative moves, disputants regularly tie not only to the type of action the opponent's prior utterance performs but also to various (structural and lexical) features it exhibits. In the following, I will demonstrate how the disputants in my data construct counters to the opponent's preceding talk by exploiting and manipulating that very talk. This technique of building an oppositional move from the materials supplied by the talk it opposes I will label 'contrastive mirroring.'

In the literature on discourse and pragmatics, the surface linguistic form of utterances (i.e. their syntactical and lexical format) has often been distinguished from the actions they embody (i.e. their communicative function or illocutionary force), and the sequencing of utterances in conversation has been argued to occur primarily on the level of action. For instance, Labov & Fanshel (1977: 25) maintain that "sequencing rules do not appear to be related to words, sentences, and other linguistic forms, but rather form the connections between abstract actions such as requests, compliments, challenges, and defenses."<sup>86</sup> As M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987) and M. H. Goodwin (1990) have pointed out, one

consequence of this position is that sequential and discourse phenomena like speech acts are treated as distinct and separable from the phonological, syntactic, and semantic phenomena traditionally analysed by linguists. There is however, ample evidence that approaching sequencing exclusively from the perspective of speech acts fails to see much of the work participants in conversation are doing. As Sacks's (1992) work on tying techniques has demonstrated, much of the interconnection between turns in everyday conversation is achieved through systematic syntactic operations. His observations shed light on a range of phenomena that are fundamental to the use of language in dispute sequences. As the following discussion will show, such tying procedures are essential to the (sequential) organisation of conversational argument.

As mentioned above, in producing subsequent oppositional moves, disputants can frequently be seen to link their contribution not only to the type of action contained in the opponent's prior utterance but also to a range of features involved in its construction. Consider the following example:

**example (1): Home**

243 MARY JANE You were always like this. Always like  
this.  
244 I was 19 years old and you coulda stopped  
245 me from going to California with Jimbo to  
246 begin with and my life woulda-  
> 247 OLIVIA Nobody coulda stopped you.  
248 MARY JANE You didn't even try! I was your daughter  
249 and you didn't care where I ended up.  
> 250 OLIVIA That's ridiculous. You didn't care where  
251 you ended up.

A closer look at Olivia's oppositional turns in relation to Mary Jane's preceding talk reveals that they are not only closely tied to the particulars of what her daughter has just said, repeating many of the exact words she used, but that they in fact constitute systematic modifications of Mary Jane's prior contributions. In line 247, the skeleton of the previous utterance is retained, and only the pronouns are changed so that Mary Jane's accusation "you coulda

stopped me" is transformed to the denial "Nobody coulda stopped you." Similarly, in lines 250-251, both the structure as well as the wording of Mary Jane's turn-final utterance is taken over, and the pronouns are adapted to reverse the agent of the alleged action, and thus the participant framework. In building her oppositional moves, Olivia makes precisely those modifications that are necessary to transform her daughter's talk into a counter to that very talk. Mary Jane's own words then are almost literally used against her.

The way in which the lexical format of Mary Jane's utterances is mirrored in Olivia's counters relates to a point Atkinson (1984) made about the effectiveness of symmetry in contrastive devices in his work on rhetoric in public speech-making. In speeches, contrasts occur regularly as strategies to elicit the audience's applause (cf. also Heritage & Greatbatch 1986). Atkinson (1984: 395) shows that "for a contrast to work effectively in eliciting an immediate or early audience response, the second part should closely resemble the first in the details of its construction and duration." By the same token, the symmetry between the sets of lexical items in which the critical contrast between Olga's claims "you coulda stopped me" and "you didn't care where I ended up" on the one hand and her mother's counters "Nobody coulda stopped you" and "You didn't care where you ended up" on the other is framed gives that contrast maximum salience, and thus emphasises and aggravates opposition.

This extract clearly shows that if we confine analysis of oppositional moves to such aspects as the types of speech acts they perform, their propositional content, or the presuppositions they embody, we miss a crucial aspect of the organisation of argumentative exchanges.<sup>87</sup> As we have seen, Olivia's replies are particularly effective responses to what Mary Jane has just said by virtue of the way in which they exploit that very talk to build an aggravated counter to it.

Similar phenomena have been noted in studies of non-scripted conflict talk. For instance, M.H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987) and M. H. Goodwin (1990: 177ff) describe various types of "format tying" in African American working-class children's disputes. Such linking devices have also been shown to be characteristic of role-played white middle-class children's disputes (Brenneis & Lein 1977; Lein & Brenneis 1978), and arguments of part-Hawaiian children (Boggs 1978:

329). While these findings are limited to children's arguments, corresponding phenomena have also been observed in adults' disputes, both in informal conversation (Coulter 1990; Knoblauch 1991, 1995) as well as in (semi-)institutional contexts such as TV-debates (Gruber 1996a, 1998),<sup>88</sup> arguments on talk radio (Hutchby 1996a), mediation hearings (Spranz-Fogasy 1986) and controversial discussions between university lecturers and students (Kotthoff 1990, 1993a). The kinds of tying techniques observed in the literature on conversational argument vary considerably in the ways they make use of prior talk to shape a counter. Therefore, instead of giving a detailed overview of the different types of techniques that have been observed by other conflict researchers, in the following, I will refer to the relevant findings in the literature at the appropriate places in my analysis.

As mentioned above, contrastive mirroring can take various different forms. The following extracts provide examples of one of the simplest ways of establishing a close cohesive link to the opponent's previous utterance, namely, reversing the polarity of the opponent's preceding utterance (from positive to negative or vice versa). Consider the following extract from *My sister*:

**example (2): My sister 12**

15	MADAME DANZARD	I want you to wear it Friday when we
16		go to the Flintons'.
17	ISABELLE	But it won't be ready in-
> 18	MADAME DANZARD	( <i>Interrupting.</i> ) It will be ready. She
19		hardly has anything to do.

In line 18, Madame Danzard sharply contradicts her daughter's prior claim. She constructs her counter simply by deleting the negation in Isabelle's utterance. As a result, Madame Danzard's turn-initial utterance consists of almost the same words as Isabelle's (with the exception of the contrastive discourse marker and the negation).<sup>89</sup> By means of repeating both the syntactic structure and the wording of her daughter's utterance, she is able to establish a close cohesive link to Isabelle's prior turn while at the same time stressing opposition at the content level by means of negation. Moreover, alter-repetition signals interpersonal involvement (Tannen 1984,

1989) and serves to aggravate opposition. Madame Danzard further emphasises the confrontational character of her disagreement by packaging her response in the sequential form of an interruption.

Conversely, in the two sample passages below, the speakers build their counters simply by negating the opponent's prior assertion.<sup>90</sup>

**example (3): 'night Mother**

2216 MAMA        You said you wanted to do my nails.  
2217 JESSIE      (*Taking a small step backward.*) I can't.  
2218              It's too late.  
> 2219 MAMA      It's not too late!

**example (4): Stuck 2**

37    LULA        It's not mine.  
38    MOM        It will be!  
> 39   LULA        It will not!

The practice of polarity reversal is a very efficient technique, since it allows the speakers to express maximal contrast while making only minimal changes. In addition, in the extracts above, the parallel structure of the ensuing counter in tandem with the increase in volume signals interpersonal involvement (Tannen 1984, 1989) and serves to aggravate opposition.

Besides reversing the polarity of the opponent's preceding utterance within a following oppositional move, the prior speaker's talk can also be transformed simply by means of verbatim repetition (and contrastive stress on pronouns) of what the other has just said:

**example (5): Home**

293   OLIVIA      I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
> 294   MARY JANE   I can't believe you're doing this to me. I  
295                    guess my plans don't matter. Do they? The  
296                    failure daughter comes home but that's just  
297                    not good enough for you, I guess.  
298   OLIVIA      Just shut up. Shut up.  
> 299   MARY JANE   You shut up. You just shut up forever. How  
300                    about that? (*She rushes into the bedroom.*)  
301                    I'm so sick of this.

In line 294, Mary Jane constructs a counter to what Olivia has said in the preceding turn by using the exact words Olivia herself has just used.<sup>91</sup> It is important to note, however, that although the syntactical structure and the words in both turns are the same, Mary Jane's action is a reciprocal one, not an identical one. Due to the change in speakers (and, thus, the participant framework), features of the opposing utterances, such as who is referred to by the pronouns in them, change: In line 293, "I" and "me" refer to Olivia, while "you" refers to Mary Jane. By contrast in line 294, it is the other way around. In other words, the agent and the recipient of the action are switched. By maintaining the linguistic form of her mother's utterance (presumably with contrastive stress), Mary Jane reverses the participant framework created by Olivia's prior contribution, thus establishing a very close cohesive link between the two utterances at both the structural and word level of the interaction, while at the same time highlighting opposition at the content level.<sup>92</sup>

The dispute escalates in lines 298-299, when the women tell each other to "shut up." Mary Jane's turn in line 299 exemplifies a more complex type of contrastive mirroring than the one just discussed. Similar to line 294, she builds her counter by repeating her mother's prior utterance. But in contrast to her own prior turn, here, by prefacing her repeat with the pronoun "You" (presumably with emphatic stress to signal the reversal, as with contrastive stress in previous turns), she creates a new utterance that includes Olivia's prior talk as a built-in component, while simultaneously reversing the agent of the proposed activity.<sup>93</sup>

Incorporating (a part of) the prior speaker's utterance is a frequent way of taking the words of the opponent and using them against her in a reciprocal action. Consider the following sample passage, in which Olivia reuses both the structure and wording of Mary Jane's turn-initial complaint as the scaffolding of her counter-complaint:<sup>94</sup>

**example (6): Home**

62 MARY JANE You'd think you'd be a little happier to  
 63 hear me talk like this. Here I am coming  
 64 home after all this time and looking for a

65 nice husband.  
 > 66 OLIVIA You think you'd be a little more concerned  
 67 with someone else once in a while-

In this example, Olivia employs contrastive mirroring to shape a counter-complaint to her daughter's prior complaint. By contrast, in the extract from *Neaptide* below, Joyce recycles a part of her daughter's prior assertion and incorporates it in her counter-assertion.

**example (7): Neaptide II, 3**

229 CLAIRE If there's one thing I've learnt from you it's  
 230 stand my ground and fight.  
 > 231 JOYCE And if there's one thing I didn't teach it was  
 232 to sink.

As the three preceding examples have illustrated, disputants frequently employ the practice of incorporating the opponent's talk in building a reciprocal action. However, this technique can also be used to build various types of counters. For instance, in the following extract from *Home*, Olivia transforms her daughter's accusation into a challenge to her competence. This is achieved by taking up the formulaic expression "turning my life upside down" from Mary Jane's utterance, reformulating it and prefacing it with an assertion. As a result of this operation, Mary Jane's utterance is incorporated in her mother's counter:

**example (8): Home**

283 MARY JANE That's all you care about, isn't it? What  
 284 the neighbors think and where the neighbors  
 285 are moving to. This is my second chance.  
 286 I don't know where I'm gonna go now. You're  
 287 turning my life upside down.  
 > 288 OLIVIA You don't have any idea what it means to  
 289 have your life turned upside down.

Mary Jane's accusation is thus converted into a challenge to her ability to make the claim she is making.

Another way of transforming the opponent's preceding talk to shape a counter is by means of what Halliday & Hasan (1976: 146) call "substitution." In using this technique, the speaker builds her oppositional turn by repeating the opponent's prior utterance but replacing one item therein with another having a similar structural function.<sup>95</sup> By preserving the sentence frame while substituting a specific element, the speaker makes use of the opponent's utterance to focus on a difference. This practice is illustrated by the following two examples:

**example (9): Tell me**

- 143 DAUGHTER There's something in the corner of my room!  
> 144 MOTHER (*Absolutely exasperated.*) There is nothing  
145 in the corner of your room!  
146 DAUGHTER Mama, there's something in the corner of my  
147 room, and I'm scared.  
> 148 MOTHER There's nothing in the corner of your room,  
149 do you hear? Absolutely nothing. There's  
150 nothing to be frightened of. Now I've had  
151 just about enough, young lady, now you go to  
152 sleep!

In this extract from *Tell me*, the mother opposes her daughter's claims by repeating the child's utterances, while substituting the absolute "nothing" for the pronoun "something." By this means, she establishes a close link both at the level of structure and wording, while stressing disagreement at the level of content. Aggravation is also signalled by the paralinguistic features of her turn. In lines (144-145) the volume of her utterance and the exasperated tone of voice indicate high emotional involvement and intensify opposition. In addition, the repetition of the extreme case formulation "There's nothing" in combination with the intensifier "absolutely" (line 149) and the raised voice further emphasises disagreement.

In the sample passage below, Mama builds her counter to Jessie's prior attribution by repeating her daughter's turn-final utterance while substituting the utterance-final comparative clause.

**example (10) 'night Mother**

1082 MAMA What did you talk about?  
1083 JESSIE We talked about why black socks are warmer  
1084 than blue socks. Is that something to go  
1085 tell Mother? You were just jealous because  
1086 I'd rather talk to him than wash the dishes  
1087 with you.  
> 1088 MAMA I was jealous because you'd rather talk to  
1089 him than anything!

Mama's oppositional turn in lines 1088-1089 maintains a structure parallel to that of Jessie's prior turn-final utterance with two major exceptions: firstly, the change of pronouns and verb form, reversing the agents of the respective actions, and secondly, the replacement of the phrase "wash the dishes with you" with the extreme formulation "anything." As in the preceding example, the escalated volume of her utterance signals emotional agitation and intensifies opposition.<sup>96</sup>

In the mother-daughter disputes under analysis, contrastive mirroring is frequently accomplished by means of substitution. The structural and lexical repetition involved in contrastive mirroring frames the substituted term so that it becomes accentuated as a noticeable element. Contrastive mirroring and substitution thus act in concert in the construction of oppositional moves, with the parallel structure and wording of two opposing moves provided by contrastive mirroring lending particular salience to the replacement term in the subsequent utterance, thus highlighting opposition.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to reiterating the prior speaker's utterance and replacing a specific element, disputants can tie an oppositional move to the other's preceding utterance by means of repeating only a part of the talk being opposed. For instance, as discussed above, partial repetition of the prior speaker's talk may be used as a preface to begin oppositional turns, as illustrated by the following four sample passages from my corpus:

**example (11): Raisin III**

33 MAMA I thought I taught you to love him.  
> 34 BENEATHA Love him? There is nothing left to love.

**example (12): Home**

206 MARY JANE I just can't believe this. There's no  
207 reason for this.  
> 208 OLIVIA No reason? Tell my friends that.

**example (13): My sister 14**

37 ISABELLE Maman- wait.  
> 38 MADAME DANZARD Wait? What for?

**example (14): Tell me**

443 DAUGHTER Mom, it's not that bad.  
> 444 MOTHER Not that bad!

Since I have already examined the use of partial repeats in prefacing oppositional moves, I will not look at this phenomenon in detail here, except to note that as an argumentative technique, it achieves several things. Firstly, partial repetition enables the speaker to focus opposition on a particular element of the other's preceding talk. In addition, by virtue of the aggravated nature of its intonation contour, it allows the speaker to display a particular (commonly negative) affective reaction to what the other has just said and to caricature the opponent by portraying her action as ridiculous or inappropriate. Finally, by signalling an oppositional stance right at the beginning of the turn, and thereby framing the ensuing talk as a counter, partial repetition provides the speaker with a very broad scope of action, permitting her to add all kinds of follow-up moves subsequent to the disagreement preface such as, for instance counter-assertions as in extract (11), directives as in extract (12), or demands for explanation as in extract (13).<sup>98</sup>

Besides using partial repeats in utterance-initial position to preface oppositional turns, disputants may also repeat a specific expression in the opponent's previous utterance and incorporate it as a built-in component in their counter. As we have seen, in the case of polarity reversal, verbatim repetition, incorporating and substitution, disputants typically repeat the whole utterance they disagree with, making only minimal alterations, such as changing the polarity or the personal pronouns of the turn they refer to. By contrast, in the following type of contrastive mirroring, which I

will call refocusing, speakers repeat only a rhetorically important word or phrase of the utterance they disagree with. Consider the following two extracts from my data:

**example (15): Neptide II, 3**

37 CLAIRE But Mum, I already have a solicitor.  
38 JOYCE I know that, don't I? This one specialised in  
39 custody, you should have got one who knew all  
40 about it in the first place.  
41 CLAIRE (*Through clenched teeth.*) I have got one who  
42 deals with custody.  
> 43 JOYCE Yes, normal custody. Not one who deals with...  
44 you know... special circumstances.

Prior to this sequence, Joyce has informed Claire that she has consulted a solicitor about her daughter's marriage problems (line 33). In line 37, Claire challenges her, arguing that she already has a solicitor, but Joyce dismisses her objection, claiming that the one she consulted is an expert on custody (lines 38-40). When Claire objects that her solicitor in fact deals with custody, Joyce opposes her again in the following turn. Firstly, she qualifies Claire's claim by picking up the term "custody" and modifying it with the adjective "normal." She then goes on to elaborate on her opposition by re-using the phrase "who deals with" but negating it and replacing "custody" with "special circumstances." By this means, she is able to establish a close structural link between the two contingent utterances while producing a pronounced contrast regarding their propositional content. Through maintaining part of the formulation of Claire's preceding contribution while specifying the point of reference, Joyce exploits her daughter's utterance to focus on a difference in content, while at the same time challenging the relevance of her argument.

Similarly, in the segment from *'night Mother* below, Mama shapes her counter-assertion by repeating and reinterpreting an important point in Jessie's preceding argument:

**example (16): 'night Mother**

1407 MAMA Ricky is too much like Cecil.  
1408 JESSIE He's not. Ricky is as much like me as it's  
1409 possible for any human to be. We even wear the  
1410 same size pants. These are his, I think.  
> 1411 MAMA That's just the same size. That's not you're  
1412 the same person.

In line 1408, Jessie contradicts Mama's prior assertion that her son Ricky closely resembles his father, and subsequently produces a counter-assertion, claiming that, in fact, Ricky resembles her more than anyone else. She then issues a series of supportive assertions, citing the fact that she and her son take the same size trousers as evidence for her claim (lines 1409-1410). In the following turn, Mama counters her daughter's assertion by using her own words against her. While she does not dispute Jessie's claim, she weakens her argument by repeating the phrase "the same size," but toning it down with the particle "just" (line 1411). Subsequently, she expands on her opposition by denying the relevance of Jessie's claim to the issue at hand. She issues a negative declarative, repeating the structure "the same X," but substituting "person" for "pants" (lines 1411-1412). Word repetition allows her to tie her utterance to Jessie's prior contribution, while focussing on a difference in content.

The preceding two extracts show the step-by-step construction of a counter via word repetition. By way of verbal shadowing, oppositional moves are tied together and the resources of the opponent's preceding turn are exploited to construct a counter. An important point in the opponent's argument is picked up and re-evaluated to advance the speaker's own point. Verbal shadowing is used to establish a close link between subsequent turns at the level of wording, while creating a marked contrast at the level of content.<sup>99</sup> In addition, retaining the opponent's formulation while specifying the point of reference, allows the speaker to accentuate a difference in content and simultaneously to challenge the relevance of the opponent's prior argument.

As we have seen, contrastive mirroring (in all its various forms) is a very potent rhetorical device that disputants may use to

turn the opponent's prior claim against itself by means of exploiting the lexical and structural choices the other made in formulating her argument. Moreover, the preceding discussion has shown that rather than being independent from the speech actions they perform, the cohesive techniques that occur in the dispute sequences under analysis play an essential part in the construction of argumentative moves. Although it is possible to escalate an argument with a subsequent action that is structurally unrelated to the utterance it opposes (for instance by issuing a threat),<sup>100</sup> the oppositional moves in the preceding extracts constitute aggravated disagreements with what the other has just said by virtue of exploiting that very talk and transforming it to their advantage. What they achieve is essentially turning the opponent's claim against her. In fact, there is a close interplay between the activity of sharply disagreeing with a preceding move and escalating a dispute on the one hand and the structural features of the utterance that accomplishes this activity on the other. In sum then, contrastive mirroring provides an interactional resource that can be employed by participants to emphasise dissent, signal interpersonal involvement and, thus, to aggravate a dispute.<sup>101</sup>

Different types of contrastive mirroring can also be combined in a single argumentative exchange. To illustrate this technique let us look again at some of the examples discussed above:

**example (17): Raisin III**

27 BENEATHA Wasn't it you who taught me to despise any  
 28 man who would do that. Do what he's going  
 29 to do.  
 > 30 MAMA Yes - I taught you that. Me and your  
 daddy.  
 31 But I thought I taught you something else  
 32 too... I thought I taught you to love him.  
 > 33 BENEATHA Love him? There is nothing left to love.  
 > 34 MAMA There is always something left to love.  
 35 And if you ain't learned that, you ain't  
 36 learned nothing.

**example (18): Home**

288 MARY JANE You're turning my life upside down.  
> 289 OLIVIA You don't have any idea what it means to  
290 have your life turned upside down.  
291 MARY JANE That's ridiculous. That's so utterly  
292 ridiculous.  
293 OLIVIA I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
> 294 MARY JANE I can't believe you're doing this to me. I  
295 guess my plans don't matter. Do they? The  
296 failure daughter comes home but that's  
just  
297 not good enough for you, I guess.  
298 OLIVIA Just shut up. Shut up.  
> 299 MARY JANE You shut up. You just shut up forever. How  
300 about that? (*She rushes into the bedroom.*)  
301 I'm so sick of this.

In these sample passages, a variety of argumentative actions, i.e. counter-assertions (extract (17), lines 30, 33, 34), competence challenges (extract (18), line 289-290), counter-accusations (extract (18), line 294), and return-directives (extract (18), line 299), are organised into a dispute sequence through various techniques of contrastive mirroring, i.e. refocusing (extract (17), lines 30-32, partial repetition (extract (17), line 33), substitution (extract (17), line 34, verbatim repetition (extract (18), line 294), and incorporation (extract (18), lines 289-290, 399). These extracts clearly demonstrate the constitutive power of the cohesive procedures discussed above, and the crucial part such mirroring techniques play in the emergent, sequential construction and organisation of conversational arguments.

If we conceptualised what happens in these exchanges simply as sequences of speech acts, we would neglect the immense potential of the surface linguistic structure of the talk in these extracts to provide for the sequencing of oppositional moves, and thus miss a crucial aspect of the interaction. As we have seen, in producing subsequent oppositional talk, disputants closely attend to and exploit the structural details of preceding utterances. Consequently, in order to capture the complexities of argumentative interaction, analysts, too, must attend to the structural details of

the talk it involves. As M. H. Goodwin & Goodwin (1987: 226) have so eloquently put it:

Trying to describe how participants in conversation move from one utterance to another without close attention to the details of their talk is like trying to describe the work that a musician does while ignoring the music being played.

The ways in which the participants in my data jointly produce and maintain dispute sequences by making use of the immediately preceding talk to build a counter to that very talk display a close structural similarity to the procedures involved in such speech activities as "sounding," "verbal duelling" or "ritual insults" (Abrahams 1970; Dundes et al. 1972; Edwards & Sienkewicz 1990; Fox 1977; Gossen 1976; Katriel 1985; Kochman 1968, 1970, 1972, 1981, 1983; Kotthoff 1992b, 1995; Labov 1972a,b, 1974; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Tolosana 1978). In these activity types, in order to build an appropriate response, the recipient of an initial ritual insult (i.e. an insult about the target recipient known not to be literally true)<sup>102</sup> must use the scene described in the prior speaker's talk to produce a second description which turns the initial insult on its head and is even more outrageous. As Goffman (1971) has noted, "the structure of these devices establishes a move that is designed to serve as a comparison base for another's effort, his object being to exceed the prior effort in elegance or wit" (179).<sup>103</sup> A successful return insult leaves the other party with nothing more to say and is typically responded to with laughter (Labov 1972a: 325). In other words, in ritual-insult sequences, the point is not to negate or contradict a prior statement but to take a feature of the prior speaker's talk and build upon it in a subsequent move. So far, ritual insults have only been shown to occur in children's interaction. However, as the preceding discussion indicates, they do not constitute an activity type that is completely different from other, less ritualised exchanges. As we have seen, the mother-daughter argument sequences discussed above display a close structural resemblance to the ritual insults described in the literature, through the ways in which participants in both speech activities use the resources of prior talk to construct return actions.<sup>104</sup> Like the ritualised exchanges discussed in the literature

on children's disagreement sequences, mother-daughter disputes involve a range of formalised procedures which participants habitually employ in the construction and sequencing of subsequent oppositional moves.

Argumentative talk is frequently evaluated negatively and viewed as being "disorderly" (cf. Briggs 1996) conversation or disruptive type of interaction.<sup>105</sup> The above discussion, however, has demonstrated the orderliness with which disputes are conducted. As we have seen, the mother-daughter disputes under analysis are accomplished through a process of very elaborate coordination between the opposing parties. In fact, as the preceding analysis shows, the more aggravated opposition is at the content level, the more finely tuned the disagreeing moves are to those of the adversary both at the structural and the lexical level of interaction. This delicate adjustment requires that the participants closely follow what the other is saying at a range of linguistic levels. That is to say, while at the content level of interaction, opposition is stressed and reinforced, at the structural level of talk, there is strong formal cooperation in these sequences of conflict talk. In other words, the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus are both highly confrontational and cooperative at the same time.<sup>106</sup> From this perspective, conversational argument resembles a martial arts fight, in which the antagonists mutually attack each other, while at the same time following some kind of arguing choreography.<sup>107</sup>

In the preceding paragraphs, I have examined various ways in which disputants build aggravated oppositional moves from the materials supplied by the opponent's preceding talk. As we have seen, contrastive mirroring is a very potent rhetorical device that disputants can use to turn the opponent's prior claim against itself by means of exploiting the lexical and structural choices the other made in formulating her argument. The various types of contrastive mirroring are dialogical dispute devices in that they always relate locally to the opponent's preceding utterance, and therefore - despite the pronounced contrast they establish between participants' positions - display cooperativeness on the structural plane of interaction.<sup>108</sup>

By contrast, another practice of building oppositional moves that recurs in my data does not relate to the opponent's preceding utterance but to a prior utterance of the current speaker herself. As Pomerantz (1975: 24) has noted, "in a disagreement the disagreed with party has the option in next turn of reasserting or reaffirming his prior position." An oppositional move following a previous action may thus prompt the prior speaker to recycle her initial action. This is exactly what can be observed in the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus: In heated phases of arguments, disputants frequently construct subsequent argumentative moves by simply repeating their own utterance more or less verbatim several times. While contrastive mirroring mainly serves to intensify the opposition between the disputants' positions, this practice of 'standing pat' is a monological arguing device, which primarily serves to reinforce the speaker's own point of view, and typically adds no new substantial information to the interaction.

This procedure of recycling one's own prior utterance has also been described in studies of naturally occurring disputes, where it has generally been referred to as "insisting" - a term that I will adopt in the following. For instance, Eisenberg & Garvey (1981) find that in children's disputes, "speakers may repeat an utterance (exactly or by paraphrasing it without increasing or decreasing directness) or reinforce it with a simple Yes or No" (159). Similarly, in a study of controversial TV debates, Gruber (1998: 490-491) notes that speakers frequently repeat their own utterance verbatim (or nearly verbatim) several times, in order to stress and underscore their own point of view.<sup>109</sup> In fact, Spranz-Fogasy (1986: 81) notes that in his corpus of mediation hearings, the emphatic and repeated insistence on a formerly held position was the most frequent reaction to opposition. The examples below illustrate some of the instances of this argumentative device in my data.

In the following extract from *Avenue*, despite her mother's threat in lines 516-517, Olga repeats her prior insult word by word (line 518). Self-repetition and the raised voice signal high emotional involvement, and together with the sing-sang tone of voice serve to aggravate opposition. The dispute sequence culminates in Mother carrying out her threat, punishing Olga with a slap.

**example (19): Avenue**

514 OLGA (*Crosses C. to prepare for "slap."*) Too cheap  
515 to buy protection!  
516 MOTHER Take that back, don't let me hear you say that  
517 again.  
> 518 OLGA Too cheap to buy pro-tec-tion!  
519 MOTHER (*Rises, crosses U. The slap is deliberate, a*  
520 *punishment, not in anger.*) You deserve worse  
521 than that. (*Sits.*)

In the sample passage below, Olga employs self-repetition to reinforce her prior refusal to comply with her mother's request:

**example (20): Avenue**

260 MOTHER Go on, you started something, explain it.  
261 OLGA Let's forget it.  
262 MOTHER You're always backing down on things.  
> 263 OLGA Let's forget it, the gum, the fortunes, the  
264 stars, tea-leaves.  
265 MOTHER Hey, I ain't never gone to no tea-leave reader.  
266 OLGA That's encouraging.

Olga refuses to comply with her mother's demand to elaborate on a preceding utterance by saying "Let's forget it" (line 261). When Mother challenges her, claiming that she is "always backing down of things," instead of contesting her mother's allegation, Olga simply repeats her own prior utterance (line 263). Following the self-repeat, however, she elaborates on her directive, listing the issues she does not want to go into ("the gum, the fortunes, the stars, tea-leaves.").<sup>110</sup> In contrast to the preceding example, here, by listing the topics she would rather not talk about, Olga provides her mother with something to zero in on in her following counter. In the subsequent turn, Mother picks out the term "tea-leaves" in Olga's prior utterance to focus on, challenging the assumption underlying Olga's utterance that she has had someone read tea leaves for her: "Hey, I ain't never gone to no tea-leave reader." (line 265). Olga responds with the sarcastic remark: "That's encouraging." (line 266), implying that, in fact, she still disapproves of her mother's esoteric beliefs.

In the two preceding extracts from *Avenue*, following opposition, Olga repeats her complete prior utterance verbatim. By contrast, the following sample passage illustrates a slightly different technique of aggravating opposition. In the face of her daughter's suicide announcement, Mama issues a series of oppositional turns, each of which is built around an element of her own prior contribution. That is to say, rather than exactly repeat everything she said in her preceding turn, she constructs her counters by picking up a central phrase of her previous utterance and using it as a scaffolding to shape her next move.<sup>111</sup>

**example (21): 'night Mother**

351 MAMA        (*In panic.*) You can't use my towels! They're my  
352                towels. I've had them for a long time. I like  
353                my towels.  
354 JESSIE      I asked you if you wanted that swimming towel  
355                and you said you didn't.  
> 356 MAMA      And you can't use your father's gun, either.  
> 357                It's mine now, too. And you can't do it in my  
358                house.  
359 JESSIE      Oh, come on.  
> 360 MAMA      No. You can't do it. I won't let you. The house  
361                is in my name.

Prior to this exchange, Jessie has asked her mother to give her some old towels. When Mama finds out that Jessie needs the towels because she wants to commit suicide, she withdraws her consent to give them to her, claiming that they belong to her, that she has had them for a long time and does not want to part with them (lines 351-353). In response, Jessie objects that Mama already agreed to let her have the swimming towel (lines 354-355). In the following turn, rather than address her daughter's objection, Mama builds her turn by picking up a formulation of her own prior contribution and transforming it to construct a new utterance. She prefaces her turn with the coordinate conjunction "and," signalling that she is about to produce a continuation of her prior talk. Subsequently, she repeats the phrase "You can't use my towels" of her own preceding turn, replacing "my towels" with "your father's gun" (line 356).

Moreover, following a supportive assertion, she closes her turn by again repeating her turn-initial utterance, this time substituting "use your father's gun" with "do it in my house" (lines 357-358). By means of multiple self-repeats she is able to emphasise and underscore her negative stance, while avoiding attending to her daughter's arguments. Following Jessie's prompt in line 359 ("Oh come on!"), Mama, repeats her own prior utterance once again: "You can't do it." This time, she prefaces her self-repeat with the negative polarity marker "No," signalling right at the beginning of her turn that disagreement is going to follow, and thereby reinforces opposition.

In the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus, insisting via self-repetition is regularly done by both participants in alternating order. Following opposition, one of the disputants reasserts her own prior claim, subsequently, the opponent recycles her preceding utterance, and then the first speaker repeats her prior utterance again.

This tendency was already noted by Sacks in one of his lectures on conversation back in the early seventies. Sacks observed that "a facet of competition in conversation is that parties do mutual skip-connecting" (1992, vol.2: 350). In skip-connecting, a speaker produces an utterance that is not related to the directly preceding utterance, but to some utterance prior to it, characteristically to her own last utterance. Participants in conversational arguments can thus proceed by taking speaking turns, each engaged in skipping the (other's) last turn and tying to her own prior (i.e. the last-but-one) turn. In this way, argumentative sequences often amount to the mere exchange of never-changing oppositional utterances; the conversation becomes circular and the conflict escalates.<sup>112</sup> Consider the following extract from *Stuck*, in which the participants fall into a pattern of mutual skip-connecting and get caught in an interaction cycle:

**example (22): Stuck 6b**

121 LULA Mom, I am going to leave someday.  
122 MOM You wouldn't do that.  
> 123 LULA I might!  
> 124 MOM You wouldn't.

> 125 LULA I might, I might, so you die? It's not my fault.  
 126 It's not like anyone would miss you. You've  
 127 been useless for the last ten years anyway, so  
 128 I don't care. I can do anything!

The sequence starts with Lula announcing that she intends to leave home someday (line 121). When her mother opposes her, claiming that she "wouldn't do that" (line 122), Lula digs in her heels and reasserts her prior claim: "I might!" (line 123). The increase in volume signals interpersonal involvement and emphasises opposition. In return, rather than offer a reason for her scepticism, Mama simply repeats (an abbreviated version of) her own prior utterance: "You wouldn't." (line 124). The dispute escalates when Lula recycles her preceding utterance once more ("I might, I might," line 125), and subsequently starts insulting her mother, and declares that she does not care if she dies (lines 126-128). Self-repetition across a series of turns and turn-internally alongside the increase in volume displays high emotional involvement and aggravates opposition.

So far, we have looked at contrastive mirroring and insisting as two separate activities. However, as the following extract from *My mother* shows, these two disputation techniques may also co-occur in a single argumentative exchange:

**example (23): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
 131 valley!  
 132 MARGARET He's not.  
 > 133 DORIS He is.  
 > 134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
 135 DORIS Curious method of parking.  
 136 MARGARET That's typical, you think all Americans are  
 137 brash and wear loud check shirts and chew  
 138 gum and want to marry English girls. You're  
 139 just prej-...  
 140 DORIS Margaret, that's enough! (*Pause.*) After  
 > 141 all, he is going to marry an English girl.  
 142 MARGARET Oh Mother, don't look at me like that with  
 143 your lips pressed together. (*exits.*)

The sequence starts with Doris claiming that her daughter's boyfriend is crushing her flowers with his car: "He's reversing straight into my lily of the valley!" (lines 130-131). In the following turn, Margaret opposes her, constructing her counter by negating her mother's prior assertion: "He's not." (line 132). But Doris insists on her initial claim and repeats (part of) her prior assertion: "He is." (line 133). While she is skip-connecting to her own preceding utterance, she is also reversing the polarity of her daughter's prior utterance from negative to positive) at the same time. Thus, her counter incorporates insisting and contrastive mirroring as two complementing cohesive devices. By the same token, at line 134, Margaret retaliates by recycling her own preceding utterance, and thus simultaneously reversing the polarity of her mother's preceding assertion: "He's not." In the initial phase of this argument sequence, the disputants proceed by means of tying subsequent oppositional moves both to the structural details of their own prior utterances as well as those of the opponent's preceding utterance. The interplay of various tying techniques accomplishes a number of things. Firstly, my means of contrastive mirroring via reversal of polarity, coherence between subsequent oppositional turns is established at the structural level of interaction, while a disagreement is emphasised at the content level of interaction. In addition, self-repetition serves to reinforce the speakers' respective positions and signals interpersonal involvement. Moreover, aggravation is signalled by the short turn length of the oppositional moves.<sup>113</sup>

Up to this point in the interaction, both disputants have insisted on their respective positions, simply repeating their prior utterances, without putting forward alternative views the other might agree with and without accounting for their oppositional stance. In other words, they are going around in circles without approaching a (re)solution. This exchange is an instance of what Piaget (1926: 66) has called "primitive argument," i.e. opposition between assertions. In this type of conflict talk, reasons for extended disagreement need not be stated. Rather, the disagreement sequence progresses by the simple, mutual recycling of opposing turns (i.e. "He is." - "He's not." - "He is." - "He's not.").<sup>114</sup>

Subsequent to the self repeat, however, Margaret elaborates on her counter, putting forward an alternative interpretation of her boyfriend's activity ("just parking"). By this means, she provides new material for Doris to construct a new counter. In line 135, she builds her oppositional turn by picking up the word ("parking") in her daughter's prior utterance and incorporating it in her utterance: "Curious method of parking." The resulting sarcastic remark displays that she does not agree with Margaret's assessment of what her boyfriend is doing. When, in the next turn, Margaret accuses her of being prejudiced against Americans (lines 136-139), Doris again opposes her by turning her own words against her. She initiates her turn with a terminating move, cautioning Margaret not to pursue her line of action: "Margaret, that's enough!" (line 140). The interruptive placement of her turn in tandem with the increase in volume signals high involvement and aggravates opposition. Subsequently, Doris issues an assertion, claiming that, in view of the fact that Margaret's American boyfriend does indeed want to marry her, the attitude Margaret has just attributed to her would indeed be justified. She builds her utterance by picking up the phrase "marry an English girl" from her daughter's preceding turn and uses it for her own side: "After all, he is going to marry an English girl" (lines 140-141). The dispute sequence terminates with Margaret leaving the scene exasperated, after making a negative remark about her mother's disapproving look.

As this extract shows, contrastive mirroring and insisting work hand in hand, with the similarity of structure between successive utterances generated by cohesive devices such as self- and other-repetition providing for the smooth progression and orderly organisation of the dispute, while at the same time emphasising opposition and thus exacerbating the dispute. This interplay of mutual skip-connecting and contrastive mirroring is also clearly visible in the following sample passage from *Tell me*:

**example (9): Tell me**

143 DAUGHTER There's something in the corner of my room!  
 > 144 MOTHER (*Absolutely exasperated.*) There is nothing  
 145 in the corner of your room!  
 > 146 DAUGHTER Mama, there's something in the corner of my

147                   room, and I'm scared.  
> 148   MOTHER       There's nothing in the corner of your room,  
149                   do you hear? Absolutely nothing. There's  
150                   nothing to be frightened of. Now I've had  
151                   just about enough, young lady, now you go to  
152                   sleep!

As this example has already been discussed above, I will not look at it in detail here, except to note that it clearly illustrates the cyclical or spiralling process of dispute, proceeding via the give-and-take of equivalent moves, which are interconnected in multiple ways, namely on the structural level of interaction through the use of various tying techniques as well as and on the speech act level through the use of reciprocal types of actions.

The process which is operating in this exchange was identified by Bateson (1935, 1958, 1972, 1979) as "symmetrical schismogenesis." By this process, the divergence between two individuals progressively increases as they respond to each other in identical, mutually alienating ways.<sup>115</sup>

To conclude, in this section I have shown that the mother-daughter disputes in my data display a large number of cohesive devices between subsequent turns. Connections to former turns of the opponent and/or the current speaker are established and explicitly marked via recurrence of words, phrases, or whole utterances. The use of such cohesive ties between successive turns is yet another means by which speakers can be seen to intensify their argument. On the one hand, by means of various types of contrastive mirroring, disputants exploit the lexical and syntactic structure of the opponent's prior talk as a resource for shaping a counter to that very talk. In this way, a pronounced contrast is set up between the opponents' positions on the content level of interaction, while at the same a close link is created on the formal plane. On the other hand, disputants can proceed by means of skip-connecting, i.e. repeating (a part of) their own prior utterances, thus reinforcing their own positions.

Although the present data were drawn from fictional mother-daughter disputes in plays, the practices of building oppositional moves displayed therein are by no means restricted to constructed

argumentative exchanges. As pointed out above, research on naturally occurring conflict sequences in a range of interactional contexts has reported similar phenomena in aggravated phases of conflict. These findings indicate that the sequential phenomena described above serve to contextualise a spate of talk as a heated dispute.

Moreover, the above discussion clearly shows that while argument has frequently been evaluated negatively and viewed as a disruptive and disorderly type of talk, when this activity is examined in detail, it turns out that it is in fact accomplished through a process of very intricate coordination between the parties who are opposing each other. As we have seen, conversational argument is a communicative accomplishment jointly constituted by the participants through carefully orchestrated oppositional moves. Describing argumentative discourse in terms of speech actions and restricting analysis to the sequencing of those actions neglects a vital aspect of the interaction, namely the significance of the surface structure of the talk for sequential organisation. As this section has shown, the consideration of aspects of the detailed sequencing of the speakers provides essential insight into how conversationalists in general, and mothers and daughters in particular, 'do disputing.' Disputes turn out to be characterisable as "sequentially organized, moving utterance by utterance, in which, primarily, persons are engaged in producing talk that connects to prior talk" (Sacks 1992, vol.2: 353).

## 6.4 Conclusion

Taken together, the features described in the preceding sections allow a characterisation of the verbal conflicts in my data on the structural plane of interaction: firstly, the mother-daughter disputes under analysis are characterised by suspending the preference for agreement order of ordinary conversation.

Disagreements no longer show any features of dispreferred seconds as described in the CA-literature. They are not delayed sequentially by means of hesitation, nor are they pushed back in the construction of turns through the use of initial agreement tokens. On the contrary, instead of mitigating their disagreement through the use of reluctance markers, the women in my data emphasise the oppositional character of their turns by prefacing their utterances with various dissent markers. That is to say, in the construction of argumentative turns participants display an orientation towards the structural preference for disagreement. This context-specific preference structure provides one conversational resource by means of which participants can frame (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) or contextualise (Gumperz 1982) an ongoing (inter)activity as a heated dispute.

Secondly, in addition to the departure from the standard preference organisation, the mother-daughter disputes in my data are characterised by a change in the standard turn-taking mechanisms as described by Sacks et al. (1974). (Attempted) speaker changes do not occur at transition relevance places but at disagreement relevance points. That is, opponents produce disagreements immediately when propositions, etc. in the current speakers turn occur which they do not agree with.

By initiating their oppositional turns in the midst of, rather than at the possible completion of the opponent's turn, disputants can stress disagreement. This turn-incursive positioning reinforces disagreements in that it involves the deliberate interruption of a turn in progress. Interrupting is thus another structural means by which the speakers in my data accomplish aggravated opposition/argument. Thus, apart from exchanging unmitigated disagreements, participants make the ongoing talk recognisable (both to each other and observers) as a fervent dispute by packaging these disagreements in the sequential form of interruptions, placing them

immediately at or shortly after a point in the opponent's turn at which an arguable action has been identified.

Thirdly, the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus display a noticeably high degree of formal cohesion between successive turns. Links to the opponent's as well as the current speaker's own prior turns are established and explicitly marked via recurrence of words, phrases, or whole utterances. The use of such cohesive ties between successive turns is yet another structural device which the speakers in my data utilise in building aggravated oppositional moves and thereby making the ongoing talk recognisable (to one another and analysts alike) as a fierce altercation. On the one hand, by means of various types of contrastive mirroring, disputants exploit the lexical and syntactic structure of the opponent's prior talk as a resource for shaping a counter to that very talk. In this way, a pronounced contrast is set up between the opponents' positions on the content level of interaction, while at the same a close link is created on the on the structural level of interaction. On the other hand, disputants can proceed by means of skip-connecting, i.e. repeating (a part of) their own prior utterances, thus reinforcing their own positions.

To sum up, the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus are distinguished by the following structural features: (1) a change in preference organisation with disagreements being the structurally unmarked and hence preferred reactions to an opponent's turn; (2) a change in turn-taking organisation with an increased number of competitive overlaps and simultaneous stretches of talk; and (3) and the frequent use of formal cohesive ties between turns of opponents or the same speaker. This structural organisation of conflict sequences has been labelled the "dissent organisation" of talk by Gruber (1998: 476). He argues that the dissent organisation provides analysts with a "rank scale" of emotional involvement in conflict episodes: if only one of the three discursive features occurs in a stretch of talk "we can speak of a 'mildly' emotional conflict episode, whereas if all three occur we have a 'full-blown' emotional conflict" (477).<sup>116</sup> That is to say, the combination of preference for disagreement, high frequency of interruptions and recurrent reformulations of previous turns contextualise high emotional involvement. On this view, the mother-daughter conflicts under

analysis are distinguished by their sequential organisation as emotionally charged disputes.

This impression is corroborated by the occurrence of paralinguistic and prosodic features such as volume increase, tone of voice, contrastive stress and noticeable emphatic intonation contours, which also signal high emotional involvement and convey the oppositional character of turns and their level of intensity.<sup>117</sup>

Like any verbal (inter)activity, dispute is a product of interactive, interpretative work on the part of the interlocutors. Conflict, opposition and involvement are emergent social phenomena, which are made mutually noticeable by participants through their communicative behaviour, i.e. they are contextualised by the respective conversational features. Aspects of conversational structure such as preference and turn-taking organisation and formal cohesion are interactional resources which conversationalists can draw on to establish and display the kind of (inter) activity they are engaged in, their interpersonal alignment (i.e. footing), their stance towards the current topic of talk, and their degree of involvement in the discourse. In other words, these sequential phenomena can serve to frame or contextualise a current interaction as an adversarial argument.

While the mutual expression of opposition in successive turns at talk is a distinguishing feature of verbal conflict, the occurrence of consecutive oppositional moves does not provide any information about how a conflict is enacted by the participants, i.e. about the interactionally displayed degree of emotional involvement of the opponents and the intensity of the conflict. This is where the sequential organisation of talk comes into play. Structural features of conflict talk allow us to differentiate between mitigated and aggravated forms of verbal conflict, between mild controversies and confrontational arguments, and, thus, to identify the mother-daughter arguments under analysis as fervent disputes.

In the previous sections, I have focussed on the structural level of talk in order to identify the sequential features that give the mother-daughter interaction in my data the (aggravated) character it so manifestly has for the participants. In the following sections, I will look at the speech act level of talk in

order to examine what kinds of actions are employed by the disputants in my data and how these speech actions contribute to the adversarial character of the interaction.

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## Notes for chapter 6:

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of discourse and conversation analytic research into conflict talk cf. Brenneis (1988b), Grimshaw (1990b), Kakavá (2001), Leung (2004), and Schwitalla (2001).

<sup>2</sup> What actions get treated as arguables depends to a considerable extent on the interactants' relational history. As Wiemann (1985: 96) points out, the history of interaction plays a major role in the management of conversations and will have an impact on how participants interpret and respond to another's behaviour. The same idea is expressed by Hinde (1979), who maintains that "a relationship is a series of interactions between two individuals occurring over time, each interaction being relatively limited in duration but affected by past interactions and affecting future ones" (Hinde 1979, quoted in Hartup 1992: 189). This is illustrated by the following extract from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* I, 1, in which, as a result of the ritualised hostile relationship between the Capulets and Montagues, Benvolio's presumably well-meant attempt to stop the fight between Abraham and Sampson (lines 5-6) is treated by Tybalt as an arguable action (lines 8-9) and retrospectively forms the starting point for their ensuing fight.

### example: *Romeo and Juliet* I, 1

1 Abraham: You lie  
2 Sampson: Draw if you be men, Gregory, remember thy  
3 washing blow.  
4 (*They fight.*)  
5 Benvolio: Part fools,  
6 Put up your swords, you know not what you do.  
7 (*Enter Tybalt.*)  
8 Tybalt: What art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?  
9 Turn thee Benvolio, look upon thy death.  
10 Benvolio: I do but keep the peace, put up thy sword,  
11 Or manage it to part these men with me.  
12 Tybalt: What drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word,  
13 As I hate hell, all Montagues and thee:  
14 Have at thee coward.  
15 (*They fight.*)

<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Eisenberg & Garvey (1981:150-151) argue: "Opposition was chosen as the defining criterion for an adversative episode because of its powerful influence on the ensuing interaction. The rationale for this analytical approach is that any partner's move can be unnoticed, ignored, or accepted." For similar views cf. Maynard (1985: 8), Goodwin (1983: 665), and Hutchby (1996a: 23).

<sup>4</sup> As the following analyses will show, however, the oppositional moves do not have to be consecutive in a narrow sense to constitute a conflict episode.

<sup>5</sup> Garvey & Shantz (1992) distinguish four dimensions of variation in conflict talk: orientation (i.e. serious vs. playful), format (i.e. non-ritualised vs. ritualised), frame (i.e. real vs. pretend), and mode (i.e. mitigated vs. aggravated).

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<sup>6</sup> To quote Garvey (1984: 129): "not only squabbles and quarrels but also the most highly valued accomplishments of logical argumentation depend on verbally expressed opposition" (cf. also Garvey & Shantz 1992; Kakavá 2001; Millar et al. 1984; Vuchinich 1987, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> In addition, a third party may be involved in terminating the conflict. As this study focuses primarily on dyadic conversations, however, the "dominant-third party intervention format" identified by Vuchinich (1990: 134) is not relevant to the analysis and will therefore not be discussed in more detail.

<sup>8</sup> For similar distinctions of conflict-termination types cf. Deutsch (1973), Levya & Furth (1986); Pikowsky (1993: 77f); Stein et al. (1997). Early on Simmel (1908/1955: 110-123) distinguished between various ways terminating conflict, including "victory-defeat," "compromise" and "(re)conciliation."

<sup>9</sup> Although the daughter's submission is not explicitly described, her compliance can be assumed from the fact that following the mother's final directive no further opposition occurs.

<sup>10</sup> The form of oppositional moves in the mother-daughter disputes under analysis will be the focus of Ch. 7.

<sup>11</sup> The submissive party may not actually agree with the other's position but for some reason (e.g. for the sake of peace and quiet) still accept that person's superiority on the issue in question for the time being. To quote Samuel Butler: "He that complies against his will, is of the same opinion still." Thus, termination of a verbal conflict episode by means of submission amounts to a settlement of the dispute rather than a resolution, and the unresolved conflict might continue to smoulder and is likely to flare up at an appropriate future time.

<sup>12</sup> Vuchinich (1990) proposes an analogy between concession and self-repair (Schegloff et al. 1977): While corrections or concessions that are imposed by others imply loss of face, when these moves are self-initiated face loss is minimised.

<sup>13</sup> In the course of the argument, the women switch to other topics, in line 157, however, they return to the original issue of Olga's attire.

<sup>14</sup> Some clear instances of this resurfacing of the same issue are illustrated and discussed in detail in Ch. 7.5.

<sup>15</sup> As Vuchinich (1990) demonstrates, withdrawal may be clearly set up or justified in advance or occur rather abruptly. For an examination of interactional features typically preceding unilateral walkouts from argumentative talk cf. Dersely & Wooton (2001).

<sup>16</sup> Since this study is a qualitative rather than quantitative research, I will not provide a counting of the number of occurrences of each termination format.

<sup>17</sup> Due to the negative evaluation of arguing, work on conflict talk has been largely concerned with the examination of how conflicts can be resolved rather than with how they might be sustained (cf. for instance Billings 1979; Bloor & Horobin 1975; Borisoff & Victor 1998; Deutsch 1973a, b; Eder 1990; Eisenberg & Garvey 1981; Garcia 1990; Garvey 1984; Jandt 1973; Knudson et al. 1980; Nothdurft 1995, 1996; Schwitalla 1987). Instead of viewing arguing as an activity to be pursued for its own sake, conflict researchers have tended to consider it something to be remedied and moved past as quickly as possible so that harmony can be restored. For a

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critique of this view cf. Maynard (1985a); Genishi & di Paolo (1982); C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin (1990); M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987); among others.

<sup>18</sup> As we will see more clearly later on, rather than take opportunities for de-escalating and ending the dispute, the participants in my data design their actions so as to emphasise sustain opposition.

<sup>19</sup> This is one of the features that distinguish the argumentative exchanges in my data from the resolution oriented type of conflict talk that has traditionally been labelled "argumentation": Kotthoff (1984, 1989) states that "In Argumentationen geht es immer um die Aushandlung eines ‚gemeinsamen Nenners‘. Es muss ein strittiger Punkt vorliegen, den beide Seiten im Gespräch zu einer für beide akzeptablen Entscheidung führen wollen. Zu diesem Zweck versuchen sie, ihre Positionen zu erklären, zu stützen, zu untermauern" (1984: 92-93). Likewise, van Eemeren et al. (1992) view argumentation as the "externalization of a social problem-solving process," "a procedure whereby two or more individuals try to arrive at an 'agreement'" (12). They concede, however, that their model of argumentation (i.e. "critical discussion") as "the systematic exchanges of resolution-oriented argumentative moves" (16) is an idealised activity type, i.e. a normative model of argumentative discourse.

<sup>20</sup> As Eggins & Slade (1997: 64) argue, "conversation is *always* a struggle over power."

<sup>21</sup> Tannen (2001, 2003) also writes: "Discourse in the family can be seen as a struggle for power ... but it is also - and equally - a struggle for connection. Indeed, the family is a prime example - perhaps *the* prime example - of the nexus of needs for both power and connection in human relationships" (2003: 180). According to Tannen, this "paradox of connection and control" (2001: 212), is most obvious in the mother-daughter relationship - "an intensified form of all close relationships" (2001: 214).

<sup>22</sup> A long-standing assumption of developmental psychology is that maturation is a process of separation and individuation, whereby initially the child is attached to the mother (as the typical primary caregiver), but gradually acquires independence and the capability of making her own decisions (cf. Mahler et al. 1975; and the theory of individuation (Grotevant & Cooper 1986; Youniss & Smollar 1985). The parent-child relationship, and in particular the mother-daughter relationship, is inherently characterised by the conflicting needs of distance and closeness, and control and autonomy. The mother's attempts to control her daughter's behaviour clash with the daughter's claims for autonomy. This clash of needs gives rise to frequent and intense conflicts, especially (but not only) during adolescence. Adult women are said often to suffer extremely ambivalent relationships with their mothers, due to unresolved conflicts over the need for autonomy and separation (cf. Browder 1989; Chodorow 1978; Flax 1981; Friday 1977; Henwood 1993; Henwood & Coughlan 1993; Magrab 1979; Rich 1976; Wodak 1984).

<sup>23</sup> For a similar distinction cf. also M. H. Goodwin (1983); Gruber (1996a, 1998, 2001); Hutchby (1996a,b); Kakavá (1993a,b); Kotthoff (1993a); Mc Laughlin et al. (1983); Muntigl & Turnbull (1998).

<sup>24</sup> I will return to what is meant by "first possible completion" of a turn in the next section.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. the discussions of insertion sequences (Schegloff 1972), side sequences (Jefferson 1972), and repair sequences (Schegloff et al. 1977), among others.

<sup>26</sup> For detailed discussion cf. Atkinson & Drew (1979: 53-56); Bilmes (1988); Boyle (2000); Levinson (1983: 332-345); Heritage (1984: 264-280); Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998: 43-47); among others.

<sup>27</sup> To quote Sacks (1992, vol. 2: 414): "Questioners can of course prefer a 'no' as well as a 'yes', e.g. 'You don't want that lamb chop, do you?' where the questioner has designed a question that says he's looking for a 'no' answer."

<sup>28</sup> It must be noted, however, that sequence types do not necessarily have the same preference for all instances of the type. For example, while it is generally assumed that 'offers' prefer 'acceptances' and disprefer 'declines,' some offers such as, for instance, initial offers of second helpings of dessert may well (e.g. for reasons of etiquette) prefer declines, or prefer them at first. Moreover, some offers may be made only 'pro forma,' i.e. with the understanding that they will be declined. For instance, Clarke (1996) calls attention to the fact that some communicative acts, such as "ostensible invitations" (387), are performed only for politeness' sake, i.e. are not to be taken seriously, and prefer declines.

<sup>29</sup> As already pointed out, the terms "preferred/dispreferred" are not intended to refer to motivational commitments of speakers but to structural properties of turns and sequences. Accepting an invitation is the preferred response, and declining the dispreferred, whatever the actual desires of the speaker. The fact that most speakers will have refused an absolutely undesired invitation with appropriate delay and expressions of regret at a competing engagement rather than by producing an outright and unmitigated rejection exemplifies the distinction between a personal desire to choose a particular course of action (e.g. to decline an invitation) and the institutionalised preferences bearing on that choice (e.g. to construct that decline as a dispreferred action).

<sup>30</sup> Schegloff (1988) talks of two distinct uses of preference in CA: A "structure-based" usage, which treats preference as a property of sequence types, and a "practice-based" usage, which treats it as a property of the participants' ways of doing or enacting a responsive activity.

<sup>31</sup> This view is shared by Garcia (1991), who states that "for accusations, denials are the preferred response because the absence or delay of a denial may be interpreted as an admission of/evidence of guilt" (821). However, Dersely & Wootton (2000) suggest that the preference that operates in complaint sequences is more complex. In a study of complaint sequences in naturally occurring disputes in a variety of settings, they found two different kinds of denials: (1) outright or "didn't do it" denials, which were performed overtly and without delay, in the manner of preferred actions, and comprised only about 5 percent of all replies to complaint, and (2) "not at fault" denials, which were regularly delayed. They show that while the delay of "didn't do it" denials can imply that the complainee was in some way involved, the delay of "not at fault" denials does not create a basis for participants to infer that the complainee accepts blame or guilt for the complained of action. Through "not at fault" denials the complainee implicitly acknowledges some element of truth in the complaint, while rejecting any culpability for the action on question. According to Dersely and Wootton, these findings call into

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question whether there is a simple preference for denial in complaint sequences. For more detailed discussion of accusation and complaint sequences cf. below.

<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Schegloff (1988) describes Sacks' original concept of preference as follows: "Whether a question [for instance] prefers a 'yes' or a 'no' response is a matter of its speaker's construction of it ... the preference is built into the sequence and is not a matter of the respondent's construction of the response. If the question is built to prefer a 'yes,' then a 'no' is a dispreferred response, even if delivered without delay and in turn initial position, and vice versa" (453).

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of contradictions in confrontational situations see below.

<sup>34</sup> Schegloff (1988) shows that bearers of bad news, instead of telling the bad information themselves, often tend to provide clues in order to bring recipients themselves to be the first ones to say it. In these cases, recipients often proffer guesses, which then are accepted or rejected, depending on their correctness. Schegloff observes that some of the rejections of wrong guesses are done as preferreds, while others are done as dispreferreds. He shows that rejections of guesses of bad news are conveyed in preferred format when the actual news is not as bad as the guess, i.e. when guesses are too strong. On the other hand, when the actual news is worse than the guess, i.e. when the guess is too weak, rejection is done as a dispreferred response, leading recipients to proffer stronger guesses. Thus, conversationalists can be seen to exploit the preferred/dispreferred turn shape (i.e. reluctance markers) in different ways to gear recipients' guesses in the right direction.

<sup>35</sup> Heritage (1984: 268) chooses an even more straightforward formulation: "Plainly issues of 'face' (Goffman 1955; Brown & Levinson 1978) are closely associated with our maintenance of the relevant forms and observances."

<sup>36</sup> For similar findings in Israeli speech cf. also Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984).

<sup>37</sup> To quote Kakavá (2002: 1563): "This antagonistic type of discourse represents an interactional practice in which participants engage to match their wits, compete for ideas, yet do not necessarily resolve their differences. While agreement can enhance solidarity and present speakers as supportive and like-minded, in intimate contexts, Greek participants were cooperative by agreeing to disagree."

<sup>38</sup> The relationship between cultural norms and the use and evaluation of disagreement and argument is also discussed by Johnstone (1986, 1989); Kochman (1981); Kotthoff (1989, 1990, 1992b, 1995); Modan (1994); Tannen (1990, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> For instance, in a study of preschool girls' disputes, Sheldon (1996) describes what she labels "double-voice discourse," a female conflict management strategy, "which has an overlay of mitigation, effectively softening the force of dispute utterances rather than escalating discord" (58). Similar claims have been made about adult female dispute behaviour. For instance, based on an analysis of TV discussions and interviews, Trömel-Plötz (1992) claims that even within the context of argument, women talk without being confrontational and without disqualifying the opponent and/or her utterances (1996: 372). Similarly, in her studies of TV discussions as well as discussions between university students and lecturers, Kotthoff (1984, 1989, 1991, 1992a,b, 1993c) observes that in argumentative

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sequences, women generally use a more cooperative speech style and orient towards consent, whereas the men use a more confrontational speech style and orient towards dissent. She finds that men tend to confront their co-participants with unmitigated positions. They defend their positions more vehemently, do not show an orientation towards consent and emphasise opposition. By contrast women formulate their positions more openly, frequently express their understanding of the other's position, show an orientation towards consent and emphasise consent. She concludes that men seem to be more interested in pushing through their position, while women appear to be more interested in finding a solution that is acceptable for both parties.

<sup>40</sup> The variation of disagreement in conflict sequences of talk on a dimension of mitigation and aggravation has also been noted by Garvey & Shantz (1992); Messmer (2003); Vuchinich (1987, 1990). To quote Sheldon (1993): "each conflict has the potential of being aggravated and escalated or of being mitigated and resolved" (86).

<sup>41</sup> Likewise Hasan (2001) states that if a quarrel occurs in the course of an informal conversation, "this quarrel is indicative of a *con/textual shift*: that is to say, at that textual point where the quarrel 'happens', there occurs a shift in the text's design. ... whatever the generic/registral requirements of that previous discourse, they must be at least suspended, if not totally abandoned. At the same time, by virtue of the dialectic of context and text, there is a shift in the context as well, in the sense that the interactants are no longer engaged in the activity which they were performing previously: they are fighting, not doing whatever they were doing before. Their mutual relation too is now different: they are antagonists, having suspended/abandoned their previous personae, whatever those might have been, and so on. ... speakers use their language differently from how they were using it before: they have done a register/genre switch ... in other words the con/text has been reclassified" (29-30, original emphasis).

<sup>42</sup> For similar distinctions between more or less aggravated, emotionally loaded forms or modes of conflict interaction cf. Apeltauer (1978); Fill (1989); Gruber (1996); Hundsnurscher (1993); Knoblauch (1991, 1995); Messmer (2003); O'Rourke (2001); Rehbock (1987); Schank (1987); Schwittala (1987); Spiegel (1995). Commonly, those forms which are more factual, and resolution oriented are called argumentation or discussion, whereas the more emotionally loaded forms are usually referred to as disputes or quarrels (i.e. Streit).

<sup>43</sup> Correspondingly, Messmer (2003) finds that in mitigated forms of conflict management such as "Konfliktepisoden" and "Sachkonflikte" there is a structural preference for agreement whereas in more aggravated and emotionally loaded forms of conflict interaction such as "Beziehungskonflikte" and "Machtkonflikte" there is a structural preference for disagreement.

<sup>44</sup> These findings provide empirical counter evidence to Gruber's (1998, 2001) speculation that the use of unmitigated disagreements as a method of contextualising disputes may be limited to interaction between non-intimates.

<sup>45</sup> Correspondingly, Norrick (1991) shows that in parent-child interaction there is a structural preference for parental correction of children's errors, typically in the immediately following turn, suspending the preference for self-correction in

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ordinary conversation as discussed by Schegloff et al. (1977). He suggests that aside from such factors as the asymmetry in language ability in favour of adults, as well as their goal of improving their children's language behaviour, which seem to minimise the potential face threat of unmodulated corrections and thus affect the organisation of corrective sequences, the family setting, might be conducive to the use of unmitigated corrections. Also, in a study of instructional talk between parents and children, Thornborrow (2002) points out that parents frequently produce unmitigated contradictions. She states that "in parent-child interaction, the force of a direct contradiction of the child's answer ... is mitigated in this context by the close family relationships between the participants" (113).

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed analysis of conflict sequences between friends in which disagreements are mitigated in various ways throughout the conversation to tone down their oppositional character and avoid contradicting the other speaker's utterance head-on. cf. (Drew 1992: 505) and Hutchby (1996a: 27).

<sup>47</sup> This phenomenon has also been observed by M. H. Goodwin (1990: 145) and M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987: 207) in black children's disputes, where it is referred to as "opposition preface." Gruber (1996, 1998), too, discusses the turn-initial use of "No" and "(Oh) yes" as "disagreement markers" in dispute phases of talk in TV discussions. He notes that disagreement markers can either serve to further aggravate an unmitigated disagreement, as in extracts (12) and (13), or they may turn any utterance into an expression of disagreement with a previous utterance, as in fragment (14). Furthermore, in a study of disagreement types in mediation talk, Spranz-Fogasy (1986) describes a similar device, which he calls "Reklamation." In his data this oppositional move was most frequently realised through the negative particle "No" ("Nein") and its positive counterpart "Yes" ("Doch"). It signals that the speaker does not agree with some aspect of the opponent's prior utterance. Both Gruber and Spranz-Fogasy note that expressions of opposite polarity may either initiate a disagreeing turn or stand alone as minimal (disagreeing) responses.

<sup>48</sup> For similar discussions of "but" cf. also Bell (1998); Foolen (1991); and Fraser (1990, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Gruber (1996a, 1998) also discusses the use of "but" as a disagreement marker in dispute phases of talk in TV discussions.

<sup>50</sup> For further analysis of the organisation of repair in conversation cf. Schegloff et al. (1977).

<sup>51</sup> Pomerantz (1984: 83-84) found the same pattern in disagreements with prior speakers' self-deprecations, and indeed, as M. H. Goodwin (1990: 319) points out, in these cases, prior speakers would not be expected to modify their initial position themselves.

<sup>52</sup> In addition, in a study in institutional talk, Schwitalla (1997: 128-130) states that imitating an interlocutor's prior utterance (i.e. "Nachäffen") often expresses a derogatory attitude and may serve as a means of establishing an asymmetric relationship.

<sup>53</sup> For a similar reading of other-repetition followed by a question mark in literary discourse cf. Person (1999: 88-94).

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of counter-attacks as responses to complaints cf. below.

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<sup>55</sup> This finding concurs with Günthner's (1992) and Kotthoff's (1993a) observation that in the course of an argument, sudden unmitigated agreement is usually not understood (or accepted) by the opponent as a concession. Participants cannot simply give up their position and 'change sides.' Rather, the consent with the opponent's position has to be accounted for, otherwise the opponent may claim inconsistency ("but you said...").

<sup>56</sup> As Mack & Snyder (1973) point out, conflict relations represent "a shift in the governing norms and expectations. ... the conflict process is subject to its own rules" (37). Similarly, Eisenberg & Garvey (1981:169) observe that "adversative episodes have their own rules and routines which guide the performance of participants." As an example of the power of such governing obligations and expectations Bilmes (1993: 395) reports a discussion he overheard in which academic A made an analytical point and academic B offered a contrasting analysis. When A began to defend his point, B said, "I'm not going to argue with you." A replied, "You *have* to argue," and B did.

<sup>57</sup> What began as an interview given by then President Candidate George Bush to CBS anchorman Dan Rather turned into what was widely viewed as a confrontation between the two men.

<sup>58</sup> Higher tolerance for overlaps and interruptions in the course of arguments has also been reported for Greeks (Kakavá 1993a, quoted in Kakavá 2001) and Tzotzil speakers (Haviland 1997). Moreover, studies that examine conflict interaction in a range of settings report that the turn-taking rules are commonly violated in phases of heated dispute (cf. Messmer 2003, Schank 1987).

<sup>59</sup> A similar view of interruption is expressed by Lerner (1989).

<sup>60</sup> Correspondingly, interruptions have traditionally been considered one of the most reliable and objective indicators of such personal and relational attributes as domineeringness and dominance in interaction. Dominance/domineeringness scores have frequently been computed and assigned to an interactant based on the proportion of interruptions (i.e. one-up moves) initiated by that person out of the total number of interruptions found within a given exchange (cf. relational communication coding schemes such as Millar & Rogers 1976, 1987, 1988; Rogers & Farace 1975; Rogers & Millar 1988; Rogers-Millar & Millar 1979). As Octigan & Niederman (1979: 52) observe, "an interruption or overlap is taken as a violation and a sign of conversational dominance." However, Rogers & Farace (1975) caution that while domineeringness is positively correlated with an interactant's total number of interruptions (i.e. "talkovers"), dominance is not.

<sup>61</sup> As Watts (1991: 92) puts it: "Not only does an interruption prevent the participant from completing whatever social activity s/he has begun, but it also implies that the interrupter considers that whatever s/he proceeds to do in some sense has priority over what the interrupted was doing. It is thus a denial of participant rights, on the one hand, and a negotiation of the validity of the interrupted activity, on the other. It is also the assertion of dominance over the interrupted and thus strong evidence of the exercise of power." A similar view is put forward by Goldberg (1990) in her discussion of power-oriented interruptions.

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<sup>62</sup> For critique of the formalistic approach to interruption cf. also Beattie (1981, 1983); Murray (1985), Murray & Covelli (1988), and Hopper (1992: 120-137), Hutchby (1992, 1996a), Talbot 1992, among others.

<sup>63</sup> To quote Talbot (1992: 451), in order to determine what counts as an interruption "attention to the occurrence of candidate interruptions [needs to] be coupled with attention to discursal indications of interactants' perceptions of them as interruptions" (original emphasis).

<sup>64</sup> For similar observations, cf. Bennet (1981), Edelsky (1981), Hutchby (1992), and Kotthoff (1992a, 1993b).

<sup>65</sup> As these findings suggest, "one-at-a-time" is not a conversational universal. Rather, the degree to which overlapping talk is acceptable varies by culture and occasion. As Reisman (1974) shows, there is at least one speech community/community of practice where naturally occurring simultaneous talk is frequent, expected, and processed.

<sup>66</sup> Sacks (1992, vo.1) notes that overlapping talk is a criterion of a lively conversation and shows interpersonal involvement in the ongoing activity. He notes that "it seems also to be specifically a criterion of a 'lively conversation' that in its course persons talk severally at a time. ... And in that regard, if one wants to show that one is involved in a conversation, then starting to talk while others are talking will, on its occurrence, be specifically recognized as a means of exhibiting such emotions" (643).

<sup>67</sup> This conversational style is said to be typical of Jewish New Yorkers, and, as Kakavá's (1993a, b, 2002) studies suggest, presumably of Greeks, too.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Jefferson's (1972) discussion of side sequences.

<sup>69</sup> Chan (1992), too, codes interruptions as negative if they express disagreement, raise an objection, or introduce a new topic. She codes interruptions as supportive if they express agreement with the current speaker (e.g. "that's good"), if they make an effectively positive request for elaboration (e.g. "yes, what do you think about that"), or if they complete the speaker's thought. Likewise, Coates (1996: 222-223) argues that "where overlap involves repetition, especially lexical repetition, then it is clearly marked as supportive"; and Herman (1995: 113) states: "Overlaps ... may manifest sympathy or attentiveness, particularly when they are characterized by other- rather than self-orientation."

<sup>70</sup> Cf. also Tannen (1983, 1984, 1987, 1993, 1994) on the relativity or polysemy of interruptions and of linguistic strategies in general.

<sup>71</sup> For further discussion of the interplay of prosodic aspects and sequential placement of conversational contributions cf. French & Local's (1986) study on prosodic features and the management of interruptions.

<sup>72</sup> The aggravating function of interruption has been noted earlier by Sacks in one of his lectures. He notes that interruption can be used to show strong emotion and that overlapping talk shows interpersonal involvement in the ongoing activity. He states that "if, for example, you want to show that something somebody is saying really angers you, the placing you utterance by starting while they're still talking seems to be more effective than waiting and placing it after they've finished. Where placing it after they've finished is something we would talk about as -'keeping under control,' 'not really being bothered that much', etc. And there

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are all sorts of ways of showing somebody that you're doing that, also, e.g. clenching the fists, tightening up, as the prior utterance is going on.

This is not to say that you can't show that you're angered by what somebody says while allowing them to finish and then starting up, but one specific way of doing that involves talking while they're talking. In that regard, then, if you're going to do what is taken to be expressing anger, annoyance, great amusement, etc. then the option of placing the beginning of your utterance in the course of theirs constitutes one technique for showing that" (1992, vo.1: 642).

<sup>73</sup> In terms of the initiative-response coding scheme by Linell and his co-workers (cf. Linell et al. 1988; Linell 1990), such attempts at inhibiting talk from the other, i.e. depriving her of opportunities to participate, constitute attempts at exercising interactional dominance. Similarly, Rogers & Farace (1975: 229), in their relational-control coding system, note the sequence-terminating potential of such explicit framing moves, and view them as control manoeuvres.

<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to note that in each of these fragments it is the mother who assumes the right to restrict the daughter's speaking rights, thereby implicitly drawing on her superior social status to influence the daughter's verbal behaviour and thus the course of the interaction.

<sup>75</sup> To switch to another analytical level, examining what is being done with an interruption in the local context of the talk provides further insights into how the sense of confrontation in *constructed* mother-daughter disputes is accomplished by the playwright(s).

<sup>76</sup> This argumentative technique will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>77</sup> Hutchby (1992: 356-360, 1996a: 85-88) observed a similar use of post-continuation interrupting as a strategy to "rein back" the development of another's line of argument in argument sequences on talk radio.

<sup>78</sup> The structure of accusation-response sequences will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Heritage (1985: 99) argues that "talk that takes place in courtrooms or news interviews is centrally produced for 'overhearers' - either a judge and jury who must decide a case or a news audience." (On the sequential organisation and audience design of news-interview discourse cf. also Clayman 1988, 1992; Clayman & Heritage 2002; Greatbatch 1988, 1992; Heritage 2001a; Heritage & Greatbatch 1991.)

<sup>81</sup> As Gruber's (2001) analysis of controversial TV discussions reveals, "experienced media speakers are not only concerned with the actual ongoing discussion and their immediate interlocutors but also with designing their turns to create effects in the overhearing audience and/or the unaddressed recipients" (1845). The multi-directedness of talk in TV discussions and its possible effects on participants' contributions is also discussed in Gruber et al. (1983); Kotthoff (1992a; 1993c); and Linke (1985).

<sup>82</sup> Bilmes (1999) also notes that speakers in political debates exhibit a strategic regard for control of floor, i.e. the distribution and length of turns at talk.

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed examination of the various types and formats of argumentative actions occurring in the mother-daughter disputes under analysis see Ch. 7.

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<sup>84</sup> In this sense, the interruptions in my data classify as recognitional onsets in terms of Jefferson (1984, 1986): The next speaker starts up well before a transition place has been reached but where (1) an item has been produced sufficiently for recognition and response - i.e. counter - or (2) where an understanding of at least the general thrust of the utterance has been achieved. But in contrast to Jefferson's data, neither do the overlapping turns perform a supportive action nor does the incoming speaker appear to be attending to the 'premature' and turn-incursive character of her talk (e.g. by aborting or repeating the response, or by producing turn-incursive laughter). Instead, the incursive turns always perform an argumentative action, and the interrupters emphasise rather than down-tone the disruptive nature of their talk.

<sup>85</sup> Indeed, increase in volume and tempo, and a high frequency of mutual interruptions and simultaneous speech have been identified as manifestations of emotional involvement and indicators for 'real' conflict situations in elicited arguments between mothers and daughters (Hofer et al. 1993: 17-18; Pikowsky 1992: 62) as well as naturally occurring disputes between couples (Spiegel 1995: 231-232).

<sup>86</sup> Likewise, Maynard (1985b: 213) distinguishes between "surface level" characterisations of an utterance and deeper analysis of what that talk presumes and presupposes.

<sup>87</sup> For a similar view cf. M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987) and M. H. Goodwin (1990).

<sup>88</sup> Gruber (1998) notes that at the climax of conflict sequences, interactants use specific argumentative devices to express an aggravated distance to their opponent's view while at the same time signalling that they stay very closely on topic. He suggests calling this phenomenon "antagonistic cohesion" (491).

<sup>89</sup> M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987) and M. H. Goodwin (1990) describe a similar technique in black working-class children's disputes, whereby a speaker constructs a counter by way of deleting an element of another's prior utterance. However, in contrast to the extract above, in their data, the original utterance is typically transformed into a reciprocal or return action, as illustrated by the following example, quoted from M. H. Goodwin (1990: 180):

Chopper Don't gimme that. I'm not **t**alkin' ta you.  
> Tony I'm talkin' ta **y**:ou!

<sup>90</sup> This arguing technique has also been observed in role-played disputes between white middle-class children (Brenneis & Lein 1977). Likewise, Boggs (1978) finds that in part-Hawaiian children's disputes "one way of contradicting is by grammatically incorporating and negating another speaker's clause" (332-333). Similar procedures have been described in studies of adults' arguments. For instance, Coulter (1990) includes instances of negation in his discussion of "contrastively-matched counters." Koblauch (1991, 1995) identifies "negated parallelism" as one techniques of accomplishing dissent in argumentative sequences during German family dinner conversations. Spranz-Fogasy (1986) notes that the most frequent type of disagreement in his corpus of mediation hearings, i.e.

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"Gegenbehauptung," consists in an exact repetition of the interlocutor's prior utterance using negation markers. In a study of controversial TV-discussions, Gruber (1996a, 1998) observes that opponents frequently repeat the whole turn they disagree with and change only a minimal part (e.g. the polarity of the turn they referred to). He calls this practice "minimal reformulation."

<sup>91</sup> This type of counter has been shown to be characteristic of arguments of part-Hawaiian children (Boggs 1978: 329), among white middle-class children (Brenneis & Lein 1977: 57; Lein & Brenneis 1978: 305), as well as among black working-class children (M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987: 218; M. H. Goodwin 1990: 179).

<sup>92</sup> This extract constitutes a return and exchange sequence in the sense of Pomerantz (1975: 26) and M. H. Goodwin (1990: 152), in which a move equivalent to the one being opposed to is returned.

<sup>93</sup> M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987: 218-219) and M. H. Goodwin (1990: 180) have observed a similar technique in back working class children's disputes, which they have labelled "embedding."

<sup>94</sup> The various types of argumentative actions will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>95</sup> This procedure will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>96</sup> In a study of naturally occurring arguments between adults, Coulter (1990) notes a similar argumentative technique, which he labels "contrastive matching," which consists in the rebuilding of declaratives (i.e. assertions, accusation, etc.) into counters in adjacent turns. The resulting contrastively-matched counters include "some turn-initial re-orderings, obligatory pronominal transformations and, critically, one or more major transformations on a category-phase occurring in the prior turn which alters it in the paired counter to its contrastive category" (195-196). This technique allows speakers to produce a symmetrical utterance which severs to rebut the prior speaker's assertion's point and simultaneously advance an alternative position. This practice is illustrated by the following extract, quoted from Coulter (1990: 183-184).

Prior to this sequence, in reaction to John and Sheila's criticism of her late rising, Mary has repeatedly claimed that she needs her rest.

- 14 John: For what?  
15 Mary: What do I need my rest for? U-eerh ta  
16 get my system going in the right way in  
17 the right-  
> 18 John: -I think ya need some exercise to get  
19 your system going  
20 Sheila: 'f ya sleep eight hours you're gonna  
21 feel a lot more alive  
22 Mary: Oh no not eight - I've never gotten  
23 along on eight hours sleep  
24 (1.5)  
> 25 John: You-you've no-never gotten along very  
26 well on twelve either.

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In line 14, John challenges Mary, demanding that she provide a reason for her claim. When Mary supplies the requested explanation (lines 15-17), John challenges her again, this time by means of a contrastively matched counter.

In line 15, the category "rest" in Mary's assertion becomes "exercise" in John's counter-assertion (line 18). Similarly, a few turns later in the same conversation, the phrase "on eight" in Mary's assertion in line 23 becomes "on twelve" in John's counter in line 26.

<sup>97</sup> M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987) and M. H. Goodwin (1990: 182) have also noted the interplay between format tying and substitution in children's arguments.

<sup>98</sup> The different kinds of argumentative actions will be discussed in detail in Ch. 7.

<sup>99</sup> In a study of lecturer-student discussions, Kotthoff (1990, 1993a) observes a similar technique, whereby a speaker picks up a rhetorically important word of the opponent's previous utterance to build an aggravated oppositional move. The following example, quoted from Kotthoff (1993a: 202-203) illustrates this "opposition format":

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1   N: ... if you buy there for example such a little
2       package of butter, and a and a roll, that then you
3       have to give nearly a mark    [(although that)]
4   B:                                     [That is] really VERY
5       cheap, for a    [sandwich,]
> 6   N:                                     [that is] cheap for a restaurant.
7       With a waitress. Okay? With with well with
> 8       service that you pay for. But that is not cheap
9       for a self-service restaurant, and most of all not
10      for one that actually is sponsored by the student
11      center, and should be sponsored, ...
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In lines 4-5, B (a German lecturer) sharply contradicts N (a student), emphasising the oppositional character of his disagreement by means of the interruptive placement of his response. N qualifies B's assertion in line 6, by repeating "that is cheap," while specifying the context to the contrary of what B meant. First she agrees with B's assertion, using the same word order. That is, she preserves the sentence frame ("that is cheap") but exploits it to focus on a difference ("for a restaurant"). Subsequently, N elaborates on her opposition in line 8, re-using the same phrase, but negating it ("that is not cheap for a self-service restaurant"). Moreover, she intensifies the oppositional character of her disagreement by using the turn-initial contrastive marker "but," and by further expanding it in lines 9-11 ("and most of all not for one that is sponsored by the student center").

<sup>100</sup> The escalation function of threats will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>101</sup> For similar views on the aggravating function of tying techniques in argument sequences cf. M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987), M. H. Goodwin (1990), Gruber (1996a, 1998), Kotthoff (1990, 1993a) and Messmer (2003).

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<sup>102</sup> As Labov (1972a: 153-154) has observed, attributes may include negatively assessed values of age, weight, clothes, appearances, sexual behaviour, smell, wealth, or food.

<sup>103</sup> For instance, among the black migrant children and the Indian children observed by Lein & Brenneis (1978: 302), "insults are repeated or improved on by each succeeding speaker."

<sup>104</sup> For discussion of the affinity between ritual insults and opposition sequences cf. also M. H. Goodwin (1990: 185-188) and M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987: 223-225).

<sup>105</sup> For instance, MacLaughlin (1984: 180) describes argument as a "troublesome" conversational event.

<sup>106</sup> For similar views on the relationship between confrontation and co-operation cf. M. H. Goodwin (1982a); M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin (1987); M. H. Goodwin (1990); Gruber (1998); Knoblauch (1991, 1995); Kotthoff (1993a); Messmer (2003).

<sup>107</sup> In this view, the two conceptual metaphors ARGUMENT IS WAR and ARGUMENT IS DANCE need not be mutually exclusive conceptualisations of the activity of arguing, as proposed by C. Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 4-5).

<sup>108</sup> For a distinction and detailed discussion of various kinds of cooperativeness cf. Gruber (1996a, 1998).

<sup>109</sup> By contrast, Coulter's (1990) category of "reassertions" encompasses a much broader spectrum of argumentative moves: Rather than consisting simply of repeat formulations of prior assertions, "the notion refers to the recycling of a position or thesis and not to the recycling of an utterance, although clearly some sterile arguments can get generated by utterance-reassertions alone" (189). Likewise, Apeltauer (1978: 257-269) and Franke (1983: 1-4) maintain that a speaker can insist on a prior claim either by simply repeating the initial activity or by combining or replacing it with more aggravated utterance formats or types of action, thereby increasing the degree of bindingness of the original claim.

<sup>110</sup> Jefferson (1990) has noted the occurrence of such lists in natural conversation. They usually occur as three-part units, of which the third part may be used to accomplish particular interactional work, such as topic-shifting and offence avoidance. Messmer (2003: 230-232) has also observed such listings in sequences of verbal conflict. He finds that the stringing together of utterances which refer to negative characteristics or offensive behaviour on the part of the recipient, are frequently used by disputants in doing and legitimising blaming. In contrast to the three-part lists in Jefferson's data, the lists in the conflict sequences examined by Messmer, as well as in Olga's turn in the example above, exceed the three-part unit and, thus, are superogatory, with the additional item(s) serving to reinforce the speaker's claim.

<sup>111</sup> The ensuing string of utterances bears a resemblance to the lists discussed above. However, while the instances of listing described by Jefferson (1990) and Messmer (2003) typically occupy a single turn, Mama's list extends over a series of turns.

<sup>112</sup> The escalating function of mutual insisting has also been observed in studies of naturally occurring conflict. Researcher have noted that insisting on both sides

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leads to "repetition" (Brenneis & Lein 1977: 56), "recycling" of positions (Goodwin 1990: 158) or "negative reaction cycles" (Spranz-Fogasy et al. 1993).

<sup>113</sup> As Scott (2002: 308) has observed in a study of controversial TV-discussions, in heated exchanges, turn length appears to be shorter than in non-disagreement talk or in less intense disagreement sequences.

<sup>114</sup> Piaget (1926: 65-72) differentiates between "primitive argument," consisting in extended recycling of positions, "quarrels," i.e. types of dispute in which divergence in position and actions is "accompanied by actions or promises of actions" (66), and "genuine argument," in which participants offer grounds for supporting or objecting to an utterance. This differentiation has been adopted by several conflict researchers, e.g. M. H. Goodwin (1982), (1990); Jacobs & Jackson (1981); Jackson & Jacobs (1980).

<sup>115</sup> Bateson delineated two general patterns of social relationship. In a *symmetrical relationship*, the participants' communicative behaviours mirror one another, such as question and question, blaming and blaming, assertion and assertion. Symmetry refers to "those forms of interactional sequences that could be described in terms of competition, mutual emulation and so on" (Bateson 1979: 192). In a *complementary relationship*, the participants' behaviours are maximally different, but mutually fit together, such as question and answer, giving and receiving, assertion and submission. Bateson viewed these patterns as spiralling, or *schismogenetic* and defined *schismogenesis* as "a process of differentiation in the norms of individuals resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals" (Bateson 1958: 175). He thought of symmetrical assertions of dominance as competitively spiralling: Assertions by one party create stronger assertions by the other. Complementarity was also thought to exhibit this progressive quality over time: One party becomes increasingly dominant while the other becomes increasingly submissive.

<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Kotthoff (1993a) and Spiegel (1995) identify the preference for disagreement, recurrent overlapping and interruptions as manifestations of emotional involvement in disputes, which can occur if tension is heightened.

<sup>117</sup> The aggravating function of paralinguistic and prosodic features in conflict sequences has also been noted in studies of nonscripted conflict talk (Apeltauer 1978; Gruber 1996a; Hartung 1996; Hundsnurscher 1993; Kakavá 2002; Kotthoff 1993a; Laforest 2002; Schifffrin 1984; Schwitalla 1996; Spiegel 1995).

Whenever I'm with my mother, I feel as though I have to spend the whole time avoiding land mines. (Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*)

### **7 Argumentative speech act(ion)s in mother-daughter disputes**

In chapter 6, I proposed that in order to uncover how the mother-daughter disputes in my data are interactionally accomplished and conducted by the participants, we need to pay attention to the minutiae of talk-in-interaction. In particular, we need to analyse the sequential organisation of episodes of conflict talk, the ways in which oppositional moves are constructed, but also the types of argumentative actions that characterise these conflict sequences.

In the preceding sections, I have concentrated on the structural level of interaction, examining some of the discursive resources available to participants to construct oppositional moves in ways that emphasise rather than downplay their argumentative nature. In the following, I will focus on the speech act level of interaction to examine what kinds of actions are used by the disputants in my data and how these speech actions contribute to the confrontational character of the interaction. In the process, I will investigate whether these argumentative resources are equally available to both mothers and daughters, and how they can be effectively employed by participants to seize control over various aspects of the ongoing interaction.

### **7.1. Second position in conflict talk**

As described above, the principle sequential unit in an argument is the (arguable) action-opposition sequence, in which actions that can be construed as arguable are opposed by the recipient and thus retrospectively become the initial point of a verbal conflict, with the opposition itself subsequently open to being construed as arguable. As we have seen, such dissent-turn sequences can emerge at any point in an interaction, since even apparently innocuous, non-argumentative utterances or actions can be responded to by others in a way that makes them the starting point for stretches of conflict talk.<sup>1</sup> The upshot of this is that the oppositional response of one participant to an initial move by another is the crucial element of any conflict episode.<sup>2</sup> As a result, there are consequential differences between going first and going second with one's view on a potentially controversial issue, where going second implies having the first opportunity for opposition.

Sacks (1992, vol. 2: 340-347) was the first to point out the asymmetry between first and second position in arguments.<sup>3</sup> He suggested that those who get to go second are in stronger position than those who go first, since they can argue with the prior party's position simply by taking it apart. While going first means having to state one's position (and, subsequently, developing a defence), going second makes it possible to argue merely by challenging the opponent's position.

To conclude, an essential aspect of conflict sequences is the asymmetry between going first and going second with respect to a potentially arguable matter. This asymmetry operates at the level of arguing for and against particular positions: while disputants in first position are required to build a defence for their stance, those in second position can choose if and when they will put forward their own position, rather than simply attacking that of the opponent. Thus, first and second positions entail different kinds of argumentative resources, and in an important sense, disputants who get to go second are in a more powerful position than those who go first. In the course of the following sections, I will explore some of the uses and consequences of such second position resources in the mother-daughter disputes under analysis. More precisely, I will examine what kinds of actions are prevalently employed by the

disputants in my data to oppose one another and how these speech actions and the ways in which they are constructed contribute to the antagonistic character of the interaction. I will also investigate if the interactional resources provided by these argumentative moves are evenly accessible to both disputants, and how they can be effectively utilised by participants to gain control of various aspects of the ongoing interaction.

Blaming mother is just a negative way of clinging  
to her still. (Nancy Friday)

He who excuses himself, accuses himself.  
(Gabriel Meurier)

## 7.2 Accusations

One of the speech actions which the fictional disputants in my data frequently use to oppose another is commonly referred to as accusing, blaming, complaining, criticising, reprimanding, rebuking, etc. With an accusation, complaint, reproach or a related action, a speaker expresses dissatisfaction with or criticism of a preceding or current action, an attitude or characteristic on the part of the defendant, which she construes as inadequate in that it violates some underlying social rule or norm, or fails to meet her expectations and/or preferences, and for which she holds the defendant responsible.<sup>4</sup> In brief, accusations are speech actions that construe the addressee as the agent of a blameworthy (i.e. arguable) action.

Whereas some researchers seem to regard acts of disapproval, complaints, criticism, accusations, reprimands etc. as distinct from one another (e.g. Apeltauer 1978; Brown & Levinson 1987; Hundsnurscher 1993) such communicative acts actually overlap.<sup>5</sup> In context, it is not easy (and might not be useful) to clearly distinguish between them, as they are likely to appear in the same slot and to elicit similar responses. This is reflected by numerous studies in discourse and conversation analysis, which have addressed the phenomenon being dealt with here variously as "accusation" (Burton 1980; Garcia 1991), "blaming" (Pomerantz 1978), "reproaching" (Hundsnurscher 1993), "complaint" (Dersley & Wootton 2000; Drew & Holt 1988; Laforest 2002; Newell & Stutman 19889/90; Sacks 1992), "complaining speech act" (Olshtain & Weinbach 1993), "disapproval exchange" (d'Amico-Reisner 1983, 1986), and "Vorwurf" (Apeltauer 1978; Frankenberg 1976, 1979; Günthner 2000; Gruber 1996a; Hundsnurscher 1993; Rehbein 1972).

Consequently, for the purpose of this study, I will consider all communicative acts used to express disapproval of what is deemed an unacceptable action, attitude, or characteristic on the part of the opponent without attempting to draw a distinction between them

and use the terms accusation, blaming, complaint, criticism, etc., synonymously.<sup>6</sup>

Accusations and corresponding communicative acts may not only refer to actions that are already completed, as maintained by Apeltauer (1977: 156ff), but also to actions that are in progress at the moment of talk. This is illustrated by the following example from *My sister*, in which Madame Danzard formulates Isabelle's current behaviour as a violation of some standard of conduct:

**example (1): My sister 3**

> 1 MADAME DANZARD Don't toy with your food, Isabelle.  
2 It's so disagreeable. Always making  
3 those little piles.  
4 ISABELLE I'm not, Maman.  
5 MADAME DANZARD You mean to tell me I don't see what  
6 you're doing.  
7 ISABELLE I'm not toying, Maman.  
8 MADAME DANZARD (*Coldly.*) Very well, my dear, call it  
9 what you will.

A similar view is expressed by Gruber (1996a: 197), who distinguishes between "situational" and "extrasituational" accusations: Situational accusations focus on violations of a norm that the opponent has committed during the ongoing interaction and which the speaker addresses immediately or after a short while. By contrast, extrasituational accusations refer to breaches that were committed outside the current interaction.

For instance, in the following extract from *Alto*, Florene first accuses her daughter Wanda of having "deceived" her when pretending that she wanted to go to the movies with her (lines 73-80). Then she complains that during the film, Wanda only talked about her music teacher's view of it and did not show any interest in her mother's opinion (lines 83-86). Both accusations refer to incidents that took place the night before.

**example (2): Alto I,3**

72 WANDA I don't see why you're mad at her.  
73 FLORENE I'm not mad at her! I'm mad at you! You  
> 74 deceived me, Wanda. Talked me into spending

75 my hard earned ironing money to take you to  
 76 the picture show. And let me think you  
 77 wanted us to see it together so we could  
 78 have it to remember for a long time to  
 79 come, like we always have when we saw  
 80 picture shows.  
 81 WANDA I wanted us to see it.  
 82 FLORENE Hah! I might as well have stayed at home.  
 > 83 Once we got there all you did was talk  
 84 about Althea Lockwood and her interpre-  
 85 tation of it. You never once asked me my  
 86 opinion.

In addition, although accusations cannot focus on future actions, they might refer to the defendant's (supposed) intention of performing a specific action as, for instance, in an utterance such as "You can't possible want to do that!" (cf. Günthner 2000: 78).

Moreover, accusations can aim at the defendant's verbal as well as his or her nonverbal behaviour, as illustrated by the following extract from *Home*. When Olivia accuses her daughter of being irresponsible (lines 256-261), Mary Jane turns the tables by returning an accusation. Olivia's blame becomes the basis of Mary Jane's return-complaint, in which she accuses her mother of lying (line 262):

**example (3): Home**

254 MARY JANE Oh right, of course, you're Miss Innocent  
 255 again, Ma.  
 > 256 OLIVIA Oh, I'm Miss Innocent? You make one  
 mistake  
 257 after another for 20 years and you never  
 258 took responsibility for one second! You  
 259 brought babies into this world that you  
 260 could barely feed 'cause that husband a  
 261 yours couldn't hold down a job.  
 > 262 MARY JANE That's such a lie! How could you say that?

Furthermore, accusations may not only express a discrepancy between an expected and/or desired and a factual action, as suggested by

some researchers (e.g. Frankenberg 1976: 51; Laforest 2002: 1596), but they may also turn on the defendant's character traits and/or attitudes. In these cases, the accuser presumes that the accused is responsible for the wrong attitude or character flaw and could (have) behave(d) differently. This is illustrated by the following extract from *My mother*, at the end of which Margaret accuses her mother of being prejudiced against Americans (line 136-139).

**example (4): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
131 valley!  
132 MARGARET He's not.  
133 DORIS He is.  
134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
135 DORIS Curious method of parking.  
> 136 MARGARET That's typical, you think all Americans are  
137 brash and wear loud check shirts and chew  
138 gum and want to marry English girls. You're  
139 just prej-...

Additionally, as illustrated by the preceding examples, criticism can be directly addressed to the person identified as the cause of the problem, i.e. the individual held responsible for the behaviour or attitude that is deemed inadequate. In these cases, the *addressee* of the accusation and the *accused* are identical.<sup>7</sup> However, dissatisfaction may not only be expressed to the person whose behaviour or attitude is considered unsatisfactory, but also to some third party, who is not held responsible for the trouble.<sup>8</sup> In these cases, a speaker complains to a person about the conduct or attitude of others,<sup>9</sup> as in the following two extracts from *Avenue*.

In the example below, Mother is complaining to Olga about the caretaker having sent her a summons:

**example (5): Avenue**

81 MOTHER (*Comes back, holding two slips of paper.*)  
82 Nobody there, just these papers.  
83 (*Looking at them, lets out a shriek.*)  
84 Hey, they're summons! One is for spitting  
85 in the hallway and the second one, let's  
86 see (*Reading slip.*) for leaving garbage

> 87                    in the hall. Hey, that ain't fair, that was  
88                    last week.  
89    OLGA            (*Shutting off radio.*) He has a good memory.  
90    MOTHER        Damn him, that lousy old man.

After having read the note, Mother expresses her indignation at the fact that one of them refers to an incident that happened the week before: "Hey, that ain't fair, that was last week." (lines 87-88). Her utterance construes the caretaker's activity as contravening some underlying standard regarding the amount of time after which it is still acceptable (i.e. "fair") to send someone a summons.

Similarly, in the following segment, Olga is complaining to her mother about her current boyfriend's table manners (lines 441-43). This instance differs from the preceding example in that, although Olga's complaint does not identify Mother but her boyfriend as the cause of the problem, it nevertheless implies criticism of Mother by presenting her as someone who is going out with a person whose table manners are unacceptable.

**example (6): Avenue**

440    OLGA            After dinner we're going to sit around and  
> 441                    talk. He always folds his napkin up and puts  
442                    it in the saucer full of coffee. It looks all  
443                    soggy and I want to vomit.  
> 444    MOTHER        You're always getting sick.  
445    OLGA            Tell him not to put ashes on the table.  
> 446    MOTHER        You talk too much. Did anyone ever tell you  
447                    that?  
448    OLGA            Yes, you just did.  
449    MOTHER        Damn—  
450    OLGA            I don't talk much at all. If I had any nerve  
451                    I'd say what I think about him to his face.

In legitimising her claim, Olga uses a rhetorical device that Pomerantz (1986) has identified as "extreme case formulations" (ECFs). ECFs are descriptions or assessments that employ semantically extreme expressions "every," "all," "none," "best," "least," "as good as it gets," "always," "perfectly," "brand new," and "absolutely." As Edwards (2000) demonstrates, ECFs do not adhere

to any single logical formula or grammatical rule. Rather, they cut across grammatical categories, including statements containing extreme adjectives (e.g. "total," "absolute"), all-quantifiers such as "all," "every," "no," "none" and related nouns like "everybody," "nothing," adverbs (e.g. "always," "never"), and phrases like "as good as it gets" and "brand new" as well as superlative constructions with optional expressions involving "ever." Pomerantz shows that one of the uses of ECFs in complaint sequences is "to defend against or counter challenges to the legitimacy of complaints, accusations, justifications, and defenses" (219).<sup>10</sup>

In the conversation preceding this sequence, Olga has repeatedly expressed her disapproval of Mother's new boyfriend, claiming that his conduct is intolerable. However, so far, Mother, who has consistently been taking her boyfriend's part, has refuted each of her complaints vehemently. In the extract above, Olga launches yet another complaint. She describes a situation that is representative of her mother's lover's objectionable behaviour. She portrays the incident in such a way as to make Mother see her boyfriend's fault. In lines 440-442, Olga describes the circumstances ("After dinner we're going to sit around and talk.") and activity ("He always folds his napkin up and puts it in the saucer full of coffee.") that constitute the boyfriend's offence. The adverb "always" is a proportional measure describing the frequency of occurrence of the reported misconduct. To be precise, it specifies that the frequency with which the complained of action occurs is the maximum possible. The extreme formulation "always" (as opposed to a less extreme description, such as, for instance, "once in a while") is a device that formulates the boyfriend's putting his napkin in the saucer as a recurrent pattern rather than a single or random occurrence. As Pomerantz (1986) points out, this is an important difference in so far as regularly occurring cases should be taken into consideration, whereas random cases may or ought to be dismissed. Hence, in describing the boyfriend's offence as an "always" occurrence, Olga suggests that it should not be dismissed as minor. That is to say, she employs an ECF in portraying the situation in question as a legitimate complainable.

Pomerantz (1986) maintains that speakers tend to use ECFs when they anticipate or expect the interlocutor to undermine their claims

and when they are in adversarial situations. Thus, in describing the offence in question with an ECF, Olga can be seen to display an orientation to the argumentative sequential context in which she produces her complaint and to the related expectation that her mother will counter her complaint.

Indeed, in the following turn, Mother challenges the legitimacy of her daughter's complaint against her boyfriend by claiming that she is "always getting sick" (line 444). Similar to Olga in the preceding turn, she uses the extreme formulation "always" to legitimise her return complaint.<sup>11</sup> By formulating Olga's nausea as a mannerism rather than a reaction triggered by her boyfriend's table manners, she both undermines the basis for her daughter's complaint and legitimises her own criticism. Olga responds with a directive demanding Mother to tell her boyfriend "not to put ashes on the table" (line 445). Again, Mother opposes her with an accusation. By rebuking her for talking "too much" (line 446), she formulates Olga's verbal behaviour as violating an interactional norm and thus manages to avoid complying with her daughter's demand. This extract illustrates how accusations can be exploited by participants as a discursive resource to build opposition in conversational disputes. In addition, it shows that ECFs are rhetorical devices that disputants can employ in defending against prospected challenges to the legitimacy of complaints.<sup>12</sup>

The vast majority of expressions of criticism in my corpus are addressed directly to the person identified as the cause of the problem rather than to some third party. This can be explained with reference to the argumentative context in which the utterances are produced. As discussed above, in the course of a dispute, participants show an orientation to the expectation of opposition. The fact that the disputants frequently accuse each other indicates their orientation towards finding fault with the opponent as an effective means of constructing oppositional moves.

This corresponds with the findings of linguistic studies of naturally occurring conflict talk. For instance, M. H. Goodwin (1982, 1990) observes that a frequent argumentative action in preadolescent children's disputes involves "categorising what prior speaker has just said as a culturally defined offence" (1990: 154). Such negative categorisations include phrases such as talking

"trash" (i.e. talking in what the recipient considers an inappropriate manner), "showing off," "acting smart", "having smart answers," "telling stories" or lying. Similarly, several researchers have shown that accusations and related activities are routinely used in naturally occurring arguments between adults (Apeltauer 1978; Drew & Holt 1988; Frankenberg 1976, 1979; Garcia 1991; Gruber 1996a; Laforest 2002; Messmer 2003).

In addition, the high frequency of accusations in my data may be related to the fact that I am looking at (portrayals of) mother-daughter disputes. Blaming someone is one way of reminding them that there are certain standards of conduct which are not to be transgressed and of giving expression to our expectations. Since in close relationships, establishing and negotiating shared norms of behaviour is a central issue, the people, who provide us with the most opportunities to evaluate their conduct, and who most frequently evaluate ours, are those closest to us. Consequently, accusations, complaints, criticism, etc. are common activities in conversations between people who are on intimate terms.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, as Boxer (2002: 50) points out, speech behaviours such as direct complaining and "disapproval exchanges" (d'Amico-Reisner 1986) - which frequently initiate conflict sequences (Frankenberg 1979; Gruber 1996a) - occur most often "where the relationship has already been established and where the disapproval has less chance of hindering the relationship."

Moreover, as Tannen (2002, Ch. 7) maintains in her study of family conversation, the mother-daughter relationship is an intensified form of all close relationships, and communication between mothers and daughters is frequently characterised by mutual criticism (cf. also Augenstein 1998; Browder 1989; Hofer et al. 1990a, 1991, 1993; and Wodak 1984).

As linguistic research has shown, accusations generally involve (1) a reference to the relevant activity, attitude, or characteristic; (2) a negative evaluation of that action, attitude, or trait based on the perceived violation of some underlying norm or the speaker's preferences and/or expectations; (3) the attribution of responsibility for the relevant action, attitude, or characteristic and its consequences to the accused; and (4) a request to the defendant to remedy the perceived failure, for

instance, by offering a remedy or an explanation of their behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

In the context of the ongoing interaction, however, some of these aspects are often not made explicit. For instance, the attribution of responsibility is frequently implicit by way of direct address. Similarly, the negative evaluation of the activity in question may be unspoken as, for example, in accusations that are realised by statements that merely allude to the relevant behaviour or attitude without explicitly mentioning it or the norm that it has violated, and without explicitly calling into question the defendant.<sup>15</sup> Such complaints typically take the form of an assertive utterance with no evaluation or second person markers, as in the following extract from *Avenue*:

**example (7): Avenue**

- > 638 OLGA      (*Looking at her hand.*) I have a wart on my  
639                   hand.  
640 MOTHER     (*Goes to sit beside her again, examines it,*  
641                   *touches her hand gently; soothingly.*)  
642                   Warts are from playing with frogs.  
> 643 OLGA      (*Pulling her hand away.*) It's from the cold.  
644                   I know it is.  
> 645 MOTHER    (*Becoming angry.*) Why you complaining now,  
646                   after all these years!  
647 OLGA      (*Softly, it's painful to talk about her*  
648                   *misery.*) I guess it's because ... well, we'll  
649                   be leaving and now I see how we've been living  
650                   and it's sickening.  
651 MOTHER     (*Agreeing sadly.*) Everything about this place  
652                   was sickening.

Olga remarks that she has a wart on her hand (lines 638-639), and opposes Mother's following claim that "Warts are from playing with frogs" (line 642), with a counter-assertion (cf. below), maintaining that "It's from the cold" (line 643). Although Olga does not explicitly express criticism, Mother apparently interprets her activity as a complaint, which is displayed by her response, "Why you complaining now, after all these years!" (lines 645-446).<sup>16</sup> Her utterance explicitly formulates Olga's activity as complaining.

Moreover, the increase in volume signalled by the exclamation mark signals her indignation. In response, Olga backs down, attempting to explain her behaviour. She attributes her conduct to the fact that now that she and Mother are going to start a new life she has become aware that they have been living in appalling conditions (lines 648-650).

As indicated above, accusations and corresponding activities entail a request to the defendant to remedy their perceived violation, for instance, by producing an account for their behaviour or by offering an apology. From a sequential perspective, an accusation is the first pair part of an adjacency pair and thus makes specific second pair parts conditionally relevant. As Sacks (1992, vol.2: 47) has pointed out, "doing a complaint" sets up a sequence, locating both the sorts of actions that appropriately follow and who should do them. Goffman (1971: 124ff) views accusation sequences as "remedial interchanges": The interactor who has violated a rule or norm, is expected to produce a remedial activity. The function of remedial work is to change the meaning that otherwise might be attributed to the relevant activity (i.e. the "worst possible reading" of the act) with the aim of changing what could be considered offensive into what can be considered acceptable. Hence, from a structural point of view, by issuing an accusation, the speaker limits the addressee's freedom of action forcing her to respond in a certain way.

With regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, accusations and related acts represent FTAs as defined by Brown & Levinson (1987: 65). In fact, they figure among those FTAs that threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. Firstly, they threaten the hearer's positive face wants by indicating (at least potentially) the speaker's dissatisfaction with/negative evaluation of the addressee's behaviour, personal characteristics, beliefs or values. As a result, accusations put the defendant in a position to either accept a loss of face and offer an apology (i.e. an admission of fault), or to attempt to save face by means of accounting for the activity in question or refuting the accusation. In addition, they present a threat to the addressee's negative face by impeding her freedom of action: Through projecting some future act of the hearer, they put some pressure on her to produce the required activity.

Therefore, accusations provide a conversational resource available to speakers that may be exploited to exercise interactional power over others at the micro-level of interaction by constraining their freedom of action, and thus to exercise power over others.

In the following, I will look at the patterns by which accusations are realised in my data and analyse their structural and lexical aspects of these accusation formats. In addition, I will explore the interplay of conflict and power by examining how the disputants employ accusations as an interactional resource both to counter the opponent's prior activities and to attempt to exert control over their subsequent actions.

As the preceding examples have already indicated, expressions of disapproval can be packaged in various ways. For instance, in my corpus, they are frequently formatted as interrogatives.<sup>17</sup> One syntactic construction that the participants in the fictional mother-daughter disputes recurrently use for the packaging of accusations are question formats with "Why," as the following two extracts illustrate:

**example (8): Home**

226 OLIVIA Life is too hard here.  
227 MARY JANE It's hard everywhere. It's harder out  
228 there. Where do you even think we're  
229 gonna go? I don't know where on earth you  
230 think we're gonna go.  
231 OLIVIA I don't know.  
232 MARY JANE You don't know. Great. Well, you should  
233 think of someplace to go. You can't sell  
234 this house without some idea of where you  
235 plan on ending up. Even I know that.  
236 OLIVIA Tennessee.  
> 237 MARY JANE So you decided. Why do you always keep  
238 secrets? You always just sit with your  
239 mouth closed and nobody ever knows what  
240 you're thinking.  
241 OLIVIA I don't have to tell you everything.

Prior to this exchange, Olivia has told her daughter that she intends to sell her house and move away. Mary Jane strongly

disapproves of Olivia's plans. She discards her mother's reason for wanting to move away ("It's hard everywhere. It's harder out there." lines 227-228) and adds a challenge demanding her to provide further information about where she wants to move (lines 228-230). Her indignation is signalled by the use of "even" and "on earth." When Olivia apparently is not able to name a destination (line 231), Mary Jane opposes her again claiming that her plans do not make sense if she does not know where she wants to move (lines 232-235). The partial repeat ("You don't know.") as well as her use of sarcasm ("Great.") indicates right at the beginning of her turn that opposition is going to follow. When Olivia eventually discloses that she wants to move to Tennessee, Mary Jane challenges her by accusing her of collusiveness ("Why do you always keep secrets?" lines 237-238). Her criticism is formulated as an interrogative starting with the question word "Why". By designing her utterance in this way, Mary Jane requests that Olivia account for her perceived misconduct.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, her use of the extreme formulation "always" construes Olivia's behaviour as a non-unique violation and thus serves to legitimise her accusation. Consequently, as an argumentative strategy, Mary Jane's utterance accomplishes a number of things: Firstly, it presupposes a violation in Olivia's part, namely that she keeps secrets from her daughter. In order to save face, Olivia is forced to justify her behaviour. Secondly, by means of the interrogative format with "Why", it makes an account conditionally relevant and obliges Olivia to provide an explanation for her behaviour, thus limiting her freedom of action. Therefore, her utterance presents a control manoeuvre, i.e. an attempt at exercising power. Mary Jane's blame implicative question is followed by another accusation in the form of a declarative statement, in which she underpins her initial complaint by describing Olivia's behaviour in more detail ("You always just sit with your mouth closed and nobody ever knows what you're thinking." lines 238-240). Instead of offering an explanation for her behaviour, Olivia rejects her daughter's blame by disputing the validity of the norm which builds the basis of Mary Jane's negative evaluation of her conduct, namely that a mother is obliged to share her thoughts with her daughter ("I don't have to tell you everything." line 241). Her

response displays her interpretation of Mary Jane's prior utterance as an accusation.

In the following extract from *Neaptide*, Claire also uses this format:

**example (9): Neaptide**

175 CLAIRES Mum, you were always saying don't get married  
176 like you did at nineteen and regret it.  
177 JOYCE Regret it? Regret it? What have I got to regret?  
178 I might have said don't get married at sixteen,  
179 but I didn't, say don't get married at all or  
180 fornicate or emigrate or crack up or go the  
181 other way or whatever. My God, I wanted three  
182 daughters like the Brontës and I ended up with  
183 a family fit for a Channel Four documentary.  
184 Regrets, me? It's you lot that should have  
185 regrets.  
186 CLAIRES I give up.  
187 JOYCE Now you know how I feel - I gave up a long time  
188 ago.  
> 189 CLAIRES Why do you have to criticise me all the time?  
190 JOYCE Me? Criticise? Just what do I criticise you  
191 about?  
192 (*Enter JEAN behind JOYCE.*)  
193 CLAIRES Hi, Jean.  
194 JOYCE Personal cleanliness is the last thing I'd  
195 criticise you for - you can tell that by your  
196 fingernails - spotless.

In line 189, Claire is challenging her mother by issuing a blame implicative question: "Why do you have to criticise me all the time?" Her utterance presupposes that Joyce habitually criticises her daughter and thus portrays her behaviour as offensive. The ECF with "all the time" formulates Joyce's behaviour as a recurrent violation and thereby legitimises Claire's accusation. In addition, by using an interrogative format with "Why" she obliges Joyce to offer an account for her behaviour and thus tries to constrain her freedom of action. Thus, her utterance presents an attempt at exercising power. However, Claire's control manoeuvre is

unsuccessful. Instead of providing the requested account, Joyce challenges her daughter's accusation in the next turn. She begins her turn by repeating a part of Claire's prior utterance ("Me? Criticise?" line 190) producing it with rising intonation. As discussed above, in disagreement sequences, (partial) repetition of the interlocutor's prior talk is frequently used as a preface to begin oppositional turns. It announces right at the beginning of the turn that disagreement is going to follow. Moreover, as I noted earlier, repetition of the talk that is being opposed allows the speaker to convey a particular affective reaction to what the other has just said. By prefacing her turn with a partial repetition of her daughter's utterance, Joyce displays incredulity at what Claire has just said, and thus portrays her activity as inappropriate. Moreover, the disagreement preface is directly followed by further talk, which explicitly opposes what Claire has said: Subsequent to the repeat, Joyce issues a return question, demanding that Claire provide evidence for her prior claim: "Just what do I criticise you about?" (lines 190-191).<sup>19</sup> However, rather than awaiting Claire's response, Joyce immediately expands on her challenge to Claire's complaint by providing an example that counters her daughter's claim ("Personal cleanliness is the last thing I'd criticise you for" lines 194-196). Her reaction displays her understanding of Claire's interrogative as a complaint rather than a request for information.

As we have seen, the "Why"-questions in the preceding examples are noticeably oriented to by the disputants as expressions of reproach. Their accusatory function is displayed by a number of features that indicate how the utterances are being used in the ongoing interaction. For instance, the interrogatives with "Why" are characterised by the use of adverbs of frequency such as "always" and "all the time." These extreme formulations construe the complained-of activity as a recurrent violation rather than a single instance, and thus serve to legitimise the accusations. Moreover, they display a particular affective reaction (e.g. indignation, irritation, frustration or annoyance) at the opponent's behaviour and thus serve to aggravate opposition. In addition, the negative connotation of verb phrases such as "keep secrets" and "criticise" attribute a pejorative quality to the actions in question and thus add to the accusatory character of the utterances. Furthermore, the

sequential placement of the interrogatives within the context of an argument contributes to their contextualisation as accusations. These lexical and sequential features are meta-pragmatic signs that indicate that, although at the denotative level they ask for the reason for the other's behaviour, the interrogatives are to be interpreted as accusations, i.e. as requests for justification rather than requests for information: They function as contextualisation cues which frame the "Why"-questions as accusations. This is echoed by the addressees' responses, which reflect their interpretation of the interrogatives as challenges.

Another interrogative construction that is recurrently used in my corpus to package accusations is questions with "How." This format is illustrated by the following two extracts from *Avenue*:

**example (10): Avenue**

476 OLGA       (*Confronting her.*) I'd rather be alone than  
 477               settle for him.  
 478 MOTHER    You're a fool! If you were in my position,  
 479               (*Crosses D. L. for drink.*) you'd have to.  
 480               (*Pours a drink, and swallows slowly.*)  
 481               Sometimes I get cravings, like sometimes it's  
 482               for sour cream and pickles. (*Faces away from*  
 483               *Olga.*)  
 484 OLGA        (*Stunned.*) Pregnant?  
 485 MOTHER    (*Proud.*) Yeah. (*Toasts with drink.*)  
 > 486 OLGA    (*Sitting back down on high-riser.*) How can  
 487               you do this to me? I'm all grown up and  
 488               you're going to walk, around with a big  
               belly.  
 489               You disgust me.  
 490 MOTHER    (*Crosses U. C. and then goes to sit beside*  
 491               *Olga, who is on high-riser.*) Now it's no  
 492               disgust. I'm a woman and there's no disgust  
 493               in what I've done.

Prior to this sequence, Olga and her mother have been arguing about Mother's current love affair. Towards the end of the dispute, Mother insinuates that she is expecting a baby. When she confirms her daughter's inference that she is pregnant, Olga challenges her with

a blame implicative question with "How" ("How can you do this to me?" lines 486-487) expressing both shock and indignation at Mother's pregnancy. In the remainder of her turn, she elaborates on her accusation claiming that her mother's condition is inappropriate for her age ("I'm all grown up and you're going to walk, around with a big belly." lines 487-489), and then concludes her turn with an explicit expression of contempt: "You disgust me." (line 489). In the following turn, however, Mother rejects Olga's depreciation ("Now it's no disgust." lines 491-492) and then goes on to support her stance by denying the negative quality that Olga has attributed to her behaviour ("I'm a woman and there's no disgust in what I've done." lines 492-493).

In the following sequence, too, Olga's accusation takes the form of an interrogative with "How":

**example (11): Avenue**

> 306 OLGA        (*Putting papers inside notebook.*) How dare  
307                you read my personal property?  
308 MOTHER      (*Angry, scared, she has gone too far.*) I  
309                wanted to see what you write. Sometimes I see  
310                you writing, so I wanted to see what it was.

In the section preceding this extract, Olga was desperately trying to get back her personal notes, which Mother was reading without her permission, and the two women ended up chasing each other round the kitchen table. After having recaptured her papers, Olga challenges Mother with the accusatory question: "How dare you read my personal property?" (lines 306-307). This formulation presupposes that Mother has violated a norm by looking through her daughter's personal things. In particular, the modal auxiliary "dare" construes Mother's activity as an offence. In fact, the interrogative construction "How dare" + second person pronoun is a formulaic expression which is customarily employed by conversationalists to package accusations. In addition, by using an interrogative format with "How," Olga forces Mother to provide an account for her action in the subsequent turn, and thus tries to constrain her freedom of action. Therefore, Olga's utterance presents a control manoeuvre. In the next turn, Mother provides the required response and justifies her behaviour by claiming that she meant no harm looking through Olga's documents,

and was reading her papers merely out of curiosity: "I wanted to see what you write." (lines 308-309). Her defensive response reveals her interpretation of Olga's utterance as an accusation rather than a request for information.<sup>20</sup>

The interrogatives with "How" in the two preceding extracts are perceptibly oriented to by the disputants as expressions of criticism. They exhibit certain cues, which indicate that they are being used as accusations in the ongoing exchanges. For instance, the modal auxiliaries "can" and "dare" construe the activities in question as offensive and thus indicate that the utterances are to be interpreted as challenges rather than requests for information. Moreover, the expression of contempt at the end of Olga's turn in example (10) ("You disgust me." line 489) frames her preceding interrogative as an accusation. Furthermore, the sequential placement of the interrogatives within the context of a dispute contributes to their contextualisation as accusations. This is reflected by Mother's responses, which display her interpretation of Olga's interrogatives as criticism rather than requests for information. The examples above - as well as other instance of this question format which occurred in my data, such as Mary Jane's utterance "How could you say that?" in extract (3) - suggest that in the context of an argument, interrogative constructions that take the form "How" + modal auxiliary "dare"/"can"/"could" + second person pronoun serve as a conventionalised format for accusations and are generally oriented to as such by conversationalists in the production and interpretation of utterances.<sup>21</sup>

The syntactic construction that is most frequently used in my data to package accusations is declarative statements, in which the speaker explicitly mentions the activity or attitude that constitutes a violation and attributes a negative quality to it. For example, in the following extract from *Home*, Mary Jane repeatedly opposes her mother with such accusatory claims:

**example (12): Home**

237 OLIVIA Tennessee.  
238 MARY JANE So you decided. Why do you always keep  
> 239 secrets? You always just sit with your  
240 mouth closed and nobody ever knows what

241                   you're thinking.  
242 OLIVIA            I don't have to tell you everything.  
> 243 MARY JANE       You were always like this. Always like  
244                    this. I was 19 years old and you coulda  
245                    stopped me from going to California with  
246                    Jimbo to begin with and my life woulda-  
247 OLIVIA            Nobody coulda stopped you.  
> 248 MARY JANE       You didn't even try! I was your daughter  
249                    and you didn't care where I ended up.  
250 OLIVIA            That's ridiculous. You didn't care where  
251                    you ended up.

As described above, prior to this sequence, Olivia has told her daughter that she is planning to sell her house and move to some other place. When, at Mary Jane's urging, she discloses that she wants to move to Tennessee (line 237), her daughter challenges her with a blame implicative question ("Why do you always keep secrets?" lines 238-239). This is followed by an accusatory claim, in which Mary Jane reinforces her initial accusation by giving a detailed description of Olivia's problematic behaviour: "You always just sit with your mouth closed and nobody ever knows what you're thinking." (lines 239-241). As noted above, her criticism is aggravated by the use of extreme formulations. The repeated use of the adverb "always" portrays Olivia's behaviour as a non-unique violation and thus functions to legitimise Mary Jane's blames. Likewise, the phrase "nobody ever knows" construes Olivia's conduct as both typical and frustrating not only for Mary Jane, but also for others. Olivia rejects her daughter's blames by disputing the legitimacy of her accusations. While she does not deny that she keeps her plans to herself, she justifies her behaviour by arguing with the validity of the norm which builds the basis of Mary Jane's negative judgment of her conduct by disputing that she is obliged to share everything with her daughter: "I don't have to tell you everything." (line 242). Her response signals her interpretation of Mary Jane's prior utterance as an accusation. Mary Jane does not accept Olivia's justification and opposes her with another accusation: "You were always like this. Always like this." (lines 243-244). As in her initial complaint, the extreme formulation "always" serves to both

intensify and legitimise her criticism by construing Olivia's behaviour as a non-unique offence rather than a single instance. Moreover, self-repetition stresses and underscores Mary Jane's position without relating to Olivia's prior turn at all and thus aggravates the disagreement.<sup>22</sup> In the remainder of her turn, Mary Jane elaborates on her blame by referring to a concrete example of Olivia's perceived failures (lines 244-246). Olivia interrupts her with an outright denial ("Nobody coulda stopped you." line 247) and the initial accusation sequence evolves into a full-blown argument.<sup>23</sup> In the subsequent turn, Mary Jane counter-opposes her mother with another accusatory claim: "You didn't even try!" (line 248). The increase in volume signals high emotional involvement and further escalates the dispute. In the remainder of her turn, Mary Jane expands on her accusation adding another accusation in the form of a declarative statement: "I was your daughter and you didn't care where I ended up." (lines 248-249). Olivia again opposes this in the following turn, and the argument continues. This extract illustrates how accusations can be used as a discursive resource to aggravate disagreement and initiate a dispute.

Conversely, the example below shows how the use of accusations can escalate a dispute that is already in progress. Margaret's argument with her mother about whether her American boyfriend is about to drive into Doris's flower-bed with his car culminates in Margaret accusing her mother of being prejudiced.

**example (13): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS        He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
131                valley!  
132 MARGARET    He's not.  
133 DORIS        He is.  
134 MARGARET    He's not, just parking.  
135 DORIS        Curious method of parking.  
> 136 MARGARET   That's typical, you think all Americans are  
137                brash and wear loud check shirts and chew  
138                gum and want to marry English girls. You're  
139                just prej-...  
140 DORIS        Margaret, that's enough! (*Pause.*) After all,  
141                he is going to marry an English girl.

The sequence starts with Doris complaining to Margaret that her American boyfriend is about to crush her flowers (lines 130-131). When Margaret opposes her with a contradiction (line 132), a conflict sequence ensues with the two women mutually negating each others' assertions. The dispute escalates when Margaret opposes her mother with an accusatory claim (lines 136-139). The adverb "typical" construes Doris's behaviour as characteristic and the cut-off declarative: "You're just prej-..." attributes a negative quality to her attitude. However, instead of providing a justification, Doris cuts her off ("Margaret, that's enough!" line 140) and then uses her argument against her by pointing out that at least one of the assumptions that she has attributed to her mother and evaluated as prejudice is in fact correct: "After all, he is going to marry an English girl." (lines 140-141). Doris builds her counter by employing the technique of contrastive mirroring. As discussed earlier, by this means, she establishes coherence at the structural level, while setting up a marked contrast at the content level of interaction. Moreover, the interruptive placement of her turn and the raised voice signal emotional agitation and reinforce opposition.

As the subsequent extracts illustrate, accusations in my corpus are also formulated as imperatives. Apart from declarative statements, this syntactic construction is most frequently used in my data to package criticism. By using this format, the speaker both expresses her disapproval of the other's conduct and explicitly demands that she change her behaviour. Accordingly, such utterances constitute attempts to constrain the addressee's freedom of action, and thus present control manoeuvres (i.e. attempts to exercise power), as the following extract from *Alto* illustrates:

**example (14): Alto II, 1**

37 WANDA        (*Bounds across the floor to look out the door.*)  
 38 FLORENE    Careful, Wanda. Remember these shaky floors.  
 39 WANDA        (*Becoming panicky.*) We're not nailed down to  
 40                anything, are we? Aunt Ola Belle's always  
 41                saying how a strong gust of wind will blow us  
 42                off these building blocks.  
 43 FLORENE    (*Trying to hide her fear of their precarious*

44                   *predicament, which has now dawned on her.)*  
 45                   Now Wanda calm down.  
 46 WANDA           *(Frantically grabs a large envelope from the*  
 47                   *top of the radio and clutches it to her chest.)*  
 48 FLORENE       *(Points to the envelope.)* What is that?  
 49                   *(More lightning and thunder. WANDA'S hysteria*  
 50                   *mounts.)*  
 51 WANDA           None of your business.  
 > 52 FLORENE       Don't you sass me even if it is coming a  
 53                   tornado.  
 54 WANDA           I want my Daddy.  
 55 FLORENE       Maybe we ought not to wait for him.

Florene and Wanda are waiting for King, Florene's husband and Wanda's father. Outside a fierce thunder storm is raging, threatening to blow away their house. Both women are frightened and the atmosphere is tense. The extract starts with Wanda trying to look out the door to see whether her father has arrived (line 37). Florene cautions her to be careful (line 38), and when she starts panicking, tells her to calm down (line 45). When Wanda grabs an envelope that has been lying around, Florene issues a request for information regarding its content: "What is that?" (line 48). Wanda challenges Florene's question by invoking a precondition for a valid request for information, namely that the recipient of the question has no objection to revealing the requested information to the speaker (cf. Burton 1980: 152). With an assertion that expresses her unwillingness to tell Florene what is in the envelope ("None of your business." line 51), Wanda denies this precondition. Florene counter-opposes Wanda's challenge with a negative meta-communicative imperative ("Don't you sass me," line 52), which rejects Wanda's prior activity as unacceptable. By designing her utterance like this, she accomplishes several things. Firstly, she challenges the appropriateness of Wanda's prior activity implying that Wanda has contravened some standard of conduct for daughters, which does not permit them to talk back to their mothers. In addition, she demands Wanda not to exhibit similar behaviour in the future. By trying to regulate Wanda's behaviour, Florene attempts to constrain her

daughter's freedom of action. Hence, her utterance presents an attempt to exercise power.

Likewise, in the following extract from *Home*, Olivia's criticism of her daughter is packaged as an imperative:

**example (15): Home**

346 MARY JANE As soon as you called me and ASKED me to  
347 come here I started thinking about all  
348 kinds of things and it started looking up  
349 again. Coming back kind of washed away all  
350 my mistakes. I can't explain it but it  
did.  
351 It did.  
> 352 OLIVIA Don't be silly.  
353 MARY JANE I'm not being silly.  
354 OLIVIA Well you're not making any sense. I hope  
355 you don't go around talking to people like  
356 this.

The sequence starts with Mary Jane describing what she felt when her mother asked her to return home after her failed marriage and what her home coming means to her (lines 346-351). In the following turn, Olivia opposes her with a negative imperative ("Don't be silly." line 352) by which she construes Mary Jane's prior activity as violating some underlying norm and demands that she change her behaviour. By censuring Mary Jane's behaviour Olivia limits her daughter's freedom of action. Consequently, her utterance presents control manoeuvre. Mary Jane rejects her mother's criticism denying the assumption that she is "being silly" (line 353). However, Olivia insists on her prior position and produces a counter-claim (cf. below) maintaining that Mary Jane is "not making any sense" (line 354).

It is noteworthy that she uses the marker "Well" at the beginning of her turn. One of the communicative functions identified for "Well" as a discourse marker is to preface utterances which reject, cancel, disagree with or in some other way oppose (some aspect of) the foregoing discourse unit (cf. Aijmer 2002; Biber et al. 1999; Lakoff 1987; Norrick 2001; Owen 1983; Pomerantz 1984;

Sacks 1992; Schifffrin 1987; Svartvik 1980; Wooton 1981b). Moreover, as this example shows, "Well" can also indicate that, despite an intervening utterance (such as Mary Jane's denial), the speaker has not changed her mind about the subject under discussion and that the other person's argument has failed.<sup>24</sup> In designing her turn in this way, Olivia acknowledges her daughter's prior refutation, while maintaining her disapproval of Mary Jane's behaviour by signalling that she has not changed her stance as a result of her denial. In addition, in the remainder of her turn she maintains her portrayal of Mary Jane's communicative behaviour as inappropriate by appealing to her not to talk to people "like this" (line 356).

Another way in which criticism is often packaged in my data is by exclaiming a term of address. While, in contrast to the accusation formats describe above, the blameworthy action is not explicitly identified, in using this format a speaker can be seen to express disapproval of the other's immediately preceding action.<sup>25</sup> I will therefore label this format 'blame-implicative address.' Consider as an example the following extract from *'night Mother*:

**example (16) 'night Mother**

336 JESSIE Dead is everybody and everything I ever  
 337 knew, gone. Dead is dead quiet.  
 338 MAMA It's a sin. You'll go to hell.  
 339 Jessie Uh-huh.  
 340 MAMA You will!  
 341 JESSIE Jesus was a suicide, if you ask me.  
 342 MAMA You'll go to hell just for saying that.  
 343 Jessie!  
 344 JESSIE (*With genuine surprise.*) I didn't know I  
 345 thought that.  
 > 346 MAMA Jessie!

Prior to this fragment, Mama has repeatedly - but unsuccessfully - tried to dissuade Jessie from carrying out her plan to commit suicide that night. In line 338, she launches another attempt, claiming that suicide is a sin, and that, therefore, Jessie will "go to hell" if she kills herself. However, Jessie does not seem to be too impressed, let alone scared, by this prospect. The acknowledgement token in line 339 signals that she does not take

Mama's note of caution very seriously. When Mama reinforces her prior assertion, by repeating it with raised voice (line 340), Jessie responds by stating that, in her view, "Jesus was a suicide" (line 341). In the following turn, Mama expresses her shock at what her daughter has just said, claiming that comparing Jesus' death to suicide is a bad enough sin to condemn her to hell: "You'll go to hell just for saying that" (line 342). She reinforces her claim by terminating her turn with the exclamation "Jessie!" (line 343). The raised voice in combination with the kin term signals high emotional involvement and serves to emphasise her request.<sup>26</sup> However, in the following turn, rather than trying to take the edge off what she said, Jessie issues a statement that indicates that she is pleasantly surprised by her realisation (lines 344-345). Mama, taken aback and upset, can but reply with "Jessie!" (line 346), presumably in a reproachful tone of voice. The exclamation of the address term is clearly a reaction to what Jessie has just said. It expresses Mama's disfavour with her daughter's utterance and portrays her behaviour as inappropriate and objectionable. The vocative thus functions as a blame-implicative address.

The following extract from *Home* displays a similar use of an address term as an argumentative device:

**example (17): Home**

189 OLIVIA She said, "Mrs. Dunn. It's a dream come  
 190 true for me to have your house. I wouldn't  
 191 do a thing to it." I was so flattered.  
 192 MARY JANE What?  
 193 OLIVIA So they're coming to take a look around.  
 > 194 MARY JANE Mother.  
 195 OLIVIA Well, I never said I was happy here.

Prior to this fragment, Olivia has told Mary Jane that she recently met the daughter of one of the neighbours, who is looking for a house. At the beginning of this extract, she describes the young woman's enthusiastic response to her offer, listing several details which the girl remembered about the house and reporting that she said it was "a dream come true" for her to have the house and that she "wouldn't do a thing to it" (lines 1990-191). Olivia closes her turn by recounting that she was "so flattered" (line 191) at what

the girl said, thus suggesting that she took her words at face value and feels inclined to sell her the house. In line 192, Mary Jane reacts to her mother's report by issuing the question word "What?" presumably with emphatic rising intonation. The interjection indicates Mary Jane's emotional alignment towards her mother's account. More precisely, it displays incredulity and shock at what her mother has just told her and thus construes her action as unexpected, inappropriate and accountable. Though on the surface it appears to be a request for clarification, it is really a pseudo-clarification question, which conveys disapproval or disbelief.<sup>27</sup> Instead of addressing her daughter's affective reaction, in the following turn, Olivia goes on to finish her account by announcing that the young woman and her future husband are "coming to take a look around" (line 193). In line 194, Mary Jane responds to Olivia's story simply by saying "Mother," presumably in a reproachful tone of voice. Like her previous interjection, the exclamation "Mother" signals incredulity and shock at what her mother has just told her and portrays her behaviour as objectionable. It indicates that she disapproves of Olivia's plan to sell her house and, hence, represents an implicit accusation. Olivia's reaction reveals that she perceives her daughter's action as an expression of criticism. She apparently feels that an explanation is called for and produces an account for her wanting to sell the house. As we will see below, this is one of the prototypical responses to accusations.

The accusatory character of address terms in my data is even more graphic in the following sample passage, where Mama adds an accusatory question immediately after she has issued a blame-implicative address (lines 1956-1957):

**example (18): 'night Mother**

1953	MAMA	I can't just sit here and say O.K., kill
1954		yourself if you want to.
1955	JESSIE	Sure you can. You just did. Say it again.
> 1956	MAMA	(Really startled.) Jessie! (Quiet horror.)
1957		How dare you! (Furious.) How dare you!

As noted above, in the interaction preceding this extract, Mama has tried repeatedly to persuade Jessie against killing herself. In line 1953, she explains her behaviour by claiming that Jessie cannot

expect her to accept that she is planning to kill herself without a word of protest, let alone explicitly encourage her to do so (lines 1953-1954). But her claim is opposed by Jessie in the following turn (line 1955). Jessie constructs her turn-initial move by picking up the verb phrase of Mama's prior negative declarative statement ("I can't") and producing it with the opposite polarity ("you can"). In addition, she prefaces the contradiction with the emphatic adverb "Sure" and in so doing intensifies disagreement. Subsequently, she adds an assertion supporting her position, pointing out that Mama has just produced exactly the utterance she claims she cannot make ("You just did"). She concludes her turn with a directive, telling her mother to repeat her prior statement ("Say it again."). Mama's subsequent response reveals that she is completely taken aback by her daughter's reasoning. She begins her turn by exclaiming her daughter's first name ("Jessie!" line 1956), presumably in a reproachful tone of voice. The interjection signals incredulity and shock at what her daughter has just said and portrays her action as both unexpected and inappropriate. Her response indicates that she strongly disapproves of Jessie's behaviour and, hence, has an accusatory character. This interpretation of her turn-initial utterance is corroborated by the subsequent moves. Following the blame-implicative address, Mama produces the formulaic interrogative construction "How dare you!", which expresses indignation at Jessie's prior utterance and construes Jessie's preceding activity as an offence. As discussed above, the interrogative construction "How" + modal auxiliary "dare" + second person pronoun is a conventionalised format for accusations and is generally oriented to as such by conversationalists in the production and interpretation of utterances. In addition, the increase in volume signals a negative affective reaction (i.e. horror and fury, as indicated by the stage direction) at what Jessie has just said and thus aggravates opposition. Moreover, the subsequent repetition of the accusatory question signals high emotional involvement and intensifies opposition.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have shown that the participants in my corpus frequently oppose each other by means of accusations. I have demonstrated that these communicative actions are variously packaged as interrogatives with "Why" and "How" + "can"/"could"/

"dare," declarative statements, imperatives, and exclamations of address terms and are used by mothers as well as daughters. Moreover, I have shown that the accusation formats display a number of lexical and sequential features which signal to participants (and analysts) that they are to be interpreted as accusations. For instance, they frequently involve evaluative and negatively connoted expressions (e.g. "keep secrets", "criticise", "sass", "silly"), by which the accuser attributes a pejorative quality to the activity in question, and which thus contribute to the contextualisation of an utterance as an accusation. Furthermore, they often contain expressions which indicate particular affective reactions (e.g. irritation, indignation or annoyance) at the other's behaviour (e.g. "on earth") and thus serve to intensify disagreement. In addition, they frequently include extreme formulations such as "always," "never," "all the time," "typical," "all," which the speaker uses to dramatise her point. These hyperbolic expressions are usually realised by adverbs of frequency, which construe the complained-of activity as a non-unique violation (rather than a single instance) and thus serve to legitimise the accusations. As discussed above, such exaggerations typically raise the emotional temperature of an argument and escalate the dispute. Additionally, the sequential placement of the utterances within an argumentative context, in which participants orient to the expectation of opposition, contributes to their contextualisation as accusations. These lexical and sequential features are meta-pragmatic signs that indicate to participants (as well as analysts) that the utterances are to be interpreted as accusations rather than requests for information or innocent remarks. In other words, they function as contextualisation cues, which frame the utterances as accusations and thus as oppositional moves. This is reflected by the addressees' responses, which reveal their understanding of the prior utterances as doing criticising rather than some other activity.

Apart from illustrating how accusations can be used as arguing techniques by participants to maintain and initiate dispute sequences, I have shown that conflict and power are closely related in that disputants can employ accusations as a conversational resource not only to oppose the other party's preceding activity - and thereby resist being controlled themselves - but also to

exercise influence over the opponent's subsequent actions - and thus exerting control over them.

To summarise this section so far, I have examined the internal structure of accusations. I have looked at various formats that are employed in the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus to package accusations and thereby oppose the other party. I have shown that these formulations display certain features which signal to participants as well as analysts that the utterances are being used as accusations. Moreover, I have shown how accusations can be employed by disputants as a conversational resource both to express opposition and to control the opponent's actions, i.e. to exercise discursive power. However, as the above examples have already indicated, accusations may also be successfully challenged and/or resisted by the defendant. It is this last point that I will focus on in the remainder of this chapter. By looking at the ways in which participants respond to accusations, I will explore the interface of conflict and power by examining how discursive power is negotiated in the local context of the ongoing disputes.

As noted earlier, from a sequential point of view, accusations are first pair parts of adjacency pairs and thus make specific second pair parts conditionally relevant. Linguistic and sociological research has shown that a variety of action types can serve as responses to accusations. Among these are remedies or offers of remedies, justifications, excuses, apologies, denials, counter-complaints, and others (cf. Atkinson & Drew 1979; Bilmes 1988; Burton 1980; Dersley & Wootton 2000; Frankenberg 1976, 1979; Garcia 1991; Gruber 1996a; Günthner 2000; Laforest 2002; Messmer 2003; Sacks 1992, vol. 2; Schegloff 1988; Scott & Lyman 1968).

For instance, several researchers have claimed that accusations obligate the defendant to produce an account of some sort.<sup>28</sup> According to Scott & Lyman (1968), "accounts" are responses to accusations which are produced "to explain untoward behavior and bridge the gap between actions and expectations" (46).<sup>29</sup> They can be subdivided into "justifications" and "excuses" (47).<sup>30</sup>

Justifications are accounts in which the defendant (implicitly) accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it by the accuser. She can do so by denying the claimed damage, the blamelessness of the person

affected by the act in question, the legitimacy of the accusation, bad intentions, or the validity of the norm that builds the basis of the negative evaluation. Thus, justifications imply a certain kind of concessionary stance towards the accuser. However, defendants usually do not overtly agree that the accuser is right. Rather the concession is embedded within the defensive action that forms the principal activity of the response.<sup>31</sup> This is illustrated by the following extract from *Avenue*, in which Mother responds to her daughter's accusation with a justification:

**example (19): Avenue**

306 OLGA        (*Putting papers inside notebook.*)  
307                How dare you read my personal property?  
308 MOTHER     (*Angry, scared, she has gone too far.*)  
> 309                I wanted to see what you write. Sometimes  
310                I see you writing, so I wanted to see what  
311                it was. Just a bunch of junk. You'd think  
312                you'd write something good, like them  
313                confession stuff. I read a story the  
314                other day about this girl, just out of  
315                high school and she got mixed up with a  
316                bunch of college men and-  
317 OLGA        I never look in your drawers!  
318 MOTHER     If you did, you'd find nothing silly like  
319                that.

As described above, Mother has read her daughter's personal notes without asking for permission. After having recaptured her papers, Olga issues an accusatory question: "How dare you read my personal property?" (line 307). In response to Olga's accusation, Mother offers a justification, explaining that she did not have any bad intentions when looking through Olga's documents, but was reading her papers merely out of interest: "I wanted to see what you write." (line 309). By producing a justification, Mother implicitly agrees that some relevant action on her part has taken place (i.e. that she has read her daughter's personal property), but she disputes the negative characterisation of that action offered by Olga. In addition, she immediately launches a counter-attack by following her justification with a negative evaluation of Olga's writing ("Just a

bunch of junk." line 311). Hence, although she at first provides the requested account, by subsequently dismissing Olga's prose as "junk", she construes her offence as a mere bagatelle thus undermining Olga's complaint. Moreover, the use of the negatively co-notated expression "junk" intensifies opposition and escalates the dispute. Olga's subsequent turn displays that she does not accept her mother's response as an adequate explanation for her offensive behaviour. She produces another accusation claiming that she would never invade her mother's privacy in the way her mother invaded hers (I never look in your drawers! line 317). By contrasting Mother's behaviour with her own she implies that Mother could and should have behaved differently. Through expressing an inconsistency between how she expected her to act and Mother's actual behaviour she portrays Mother's activity as inappropriate. Aggravation is signalled by the interruptive placement of her turn as well as an increase in volume. As a result, the dispute continues for another series of turns. To conclude, in response to her daughter's accusation, Mother at first provides the requested justification. Hence, Olga - at least temporarily - succeeds in controlling her mother's next action. However, by immediately following her justification with a counter-attack, in which she denigrates Olga's writing, Mother refutes her daughter's negative evaluation of her behaviour and thus retrospectively undermines the impact of her accusation. As this extract shows, in order to capture the workings of power in conversation, it is necessary to look at longer stretches of talk, since the trajectories of control manoeuvres frequently span more than a sequence of turns.

In contrast to justifications, excuses are accounts in which the defendant (implicitly) admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility by providing grounds through which the complained-of action can be understood as excusable. Through the provision of these grounds, the accused disclaims that she was at fault with regard to the action in question, for instance, by arguing that the shortcoming is explainable with reference to extrinsic circumstances that are beyond her control, insufficient information, other people's action or inaction, etc. That is, in producing an excuse, defendants implicitly concede that the accuser is in some sense right. However,

rather than admitting guilt, they construct a turn that is designed to deny that the fault is theirs and deflect any blame for the trouble onto other sources.<sup>32</sup> This is exemplified by the following extract from *Perfect days*:

**example (20): Perfect days I, 2**

20 SADIE You never said thankyou for your birthday  
21 card.  
22 BARBS Thankyou. (*She flaps it open and shut to*  
23 *air the cassio-tone happy birthday and*  
24 *puts it back down on the coffee table.*)  
25 SADIE Zat all you got?  
26 BARBS No, there's all these.  
27 SADIE You've never opened them.  
> 28 BARBS I haven't had a bloody chance.  
29 SADIE Did Davie send you one?

On Barbs' thirty-ninth birthday, her mother Sadie drops by to congratulate her. The sequence starts with Sadie remarking that Barbs has not said thank you for her birthday card yet (lines 20-21). Her observation is of a negative event, i.e. something that was expected, but did not happen. More precisely, she formulates a failure on Barbs' part. By this means, Sadie is 'doing' a complaint. In addition, her use of the extreme formulation "never" serves to intensify Barb's failure and thus aggravates opposition. In response, Barbs says "Thankyou" (line 22), and thus - at least to all appearance - remedies her failure. Her response displays her understanding of Sadie's utterance as a complaint.

A couple of turns later, Sadie notes that Barb has not opened her birthday cards yet (line 27). Again, her remark formulates a failure on her daughter's part, and hence constitutes a complaint. As in her initial complaint, the absolute "never" serves to emphasise Barb's failure and thereby intensifies opposition. In response to this second complaint, Barbs produces an excuse: "I haven't had a bloody chance." (line 28). In so doing, Barb implicitly concedes that she has failed to open the cards but denies full responsibility for her failure by referring to the fact that she did not have an opportunity to do so. Again, her response displays her interpretation of Sadie's preceding utterance as an expression of

disapproval. Moreover, the use of the curse "bloody" signals her irritation at her mother's repeated criticism.

This extract illustrates a conversational practice that is regularly used to 'do complaining.' If speakers report a state of affairs when it is redundant to do so - such as the fact that Barbs has not said "Thank you" or that she has not yet opened her birthday cards -, by the very obviousness of the state of affairs it reports, their remark invites an account of it.<sup>33</sup> This stating of redundant information has been labelled "fishing" by Pomerantz (1980) and "noticing" by Schegloff (1988). In the example above, we can see how noticing can be used as a method for blame-giving: Sadie's noticing that Barbs has not said "Thank you" for her card formulates Barb's behaviour as a failure and prompts her to produce a remedy (line 3). Similarly, Sadie's noticing that her daughter has not opened her cards yet construes Barb's behaviour as problematic and unleashes the excuse: "I haven't had a bloody chance" (line 9).<sup>34</sup>

A little later in the same conversation, Sadie reissues her complaint (lines 55-57):

**example (21): Perfect days I, 2**

55 SADIE Not much point in sending you a card, you  
56 don't even bother to open them. I suppose I  
57 should be flattered you opened mine...  
> 58 BARBS Mum, you sent yours three days early with do  
59 not open till the 29<sup>th</sup> all over it. These just  
60 arrived today, presumably after I left for  
61 work, because I do have to work, you know,  
62 being the boss means you are in earlier not  
63 later, OK? But I will certainly open them  
64 right now, ((...))

This indicates that Sadie has not heard her daughter's excuse in response to her prior complaint as adequate (or that her behaviour is part of a pattern of nagging that is characteristic of her interaction with Barbs). In any case, her mother's repeated complaint prompts Barbs to produce another, more elaborate excuse, in which she accounts for her behaviour by giving a detailed explanation of why she has not opened the cards yet (line 58-63). While she implicitly admits that she has not opened the cards, she denies that the fault was hers by providing grounds which make her

omission excusable. She claims that her inaction arose out of circumstances that are beyond her control, namely the fact that she has to be at work on time and therefore had to leave for work before the cards arrived. The question tag "OK?" (line 63) following her explanation signals Barb's exasperation at her mother's repeated criticism. Nevertheless, her prior account having been rejected as a satisfactory response to Sadie's complaint, she adds a different type of response and offers to remedy the complained of failure by opening the cards (line 64).

Apart from accounts, accusations can also be followed by apologies. By producing an apology, the defendant admits that she is guilty of an offence and thereby asserts her acknowledgment of the rule or norm that has been violated.<sup>35</sup> Apologies are often realised by ritualised formulas expressing regret and/or an admission of guilt such as "(I'm) sorry," as in the following extract from *Home*:

**example (22): Home**

48 MARY JANE God, that was a lifetime ago. I wonder if  
49 anybody else remembers that but me.  
50 OLIVIA People don't think about things like that.  
51 MARY JANE I don't know. They might.  
52 OLIVIA People learn to move on.  
53 MARY JANE What? Are you picking on me already? I  
54 didn't come three thousand miles to get  
55 picked on.  
> 56 OLIVIA Oh, sorry. I didn't realize I was picking on  
57 anybody. I thought I was just sitting in my  
58 living room minding my own business.  
59 MARY JANE You'd think you'd be a little happier to  
60 hear me talk like this. ((...))

The sequence starts with Mary Jane reminiscing about her youth and wondering if she is the only person thinking about their childhood. Her mother opposes her with generalising statements ("People don't think about things like that." line 50; "People learn to move on." line 52). By referring to a standard of conduct, which contrasts with Mary Jane's behaviour, Olivia construes Mary Jane's behaviour as deviant. As a reaction, Mary Jane challenges her with a meta-

communicative utterance ("What? Are you picking on me already?" line 53) thus revealing her interpretation of Olivia's remarks as expressing disapproval. This prompts Olivia to produce an apology ("Oh, sorry." line 56), which she follows with a justification (lines 56-58).

Olivia's turn displays a number of interesting features that bear closer examination. What is particularly striking about her response is that although she says "sorry", her utterance does not sound apologetic. In the following, I will examine which aspects of her utterance contribute to this impression of inconsistency.

Firstly, the particle "Oh" at the beginning of her turn marks a "change of state" proposal (Heritage 1984, 2002b) in response to Mary Jane's utterance, indicating that Mary Jane's challenge has occasioned a marked shift of awareness on Olivia's part.<sup>36</sup> In signalling a change of state with the production of "Oh" at the beginning of her response, Olivia conveys that prior to Mary Jane's challenge she was unaware of having been "picking on" her daughter, and only now realises that Mary Jane has heard her utterances as expressions of criticism. In other words, by prefacing her turn with "Oh," she indicates that she was ignorant of the adversative character of her utterances and thereby claims innocence. In addition, by signalling a change of state of awareness, she displays her own interpretation of her utterances as innocuous remarks and thus construes Mary Jane's accusation, in which she formulates them as offensive, as both unexpected and inappropriate.

Nonetheless, the apology token "sorry" following the "Oh"-preface not only displays her understanding of Mary Jane's utterance as an accusation but also represents a conventionalised admission of fault.<sup>37</sup> Up to this point, then, Olivia's utterance seems to indicate that she has realised that Mary Jane has interpreted her prior remarks as criticism and now tries to remedy the trouble by offering an apology expressing her regret. However, the remainder of her utterance gives her response yet a new turn.

Subsequent to the apology token, Olivia produces a justification in which she denies the negative quality that Mary Jane has associated with her remarks. She claims that she was not aware of criticising her daughter ("I didn't realize I was picking on anybody." lines 56-57) and offers an alternative assessment of

her behaviour ("I thought I was just sitting in my living room minding my own business." lines 57-58). In other words, subsequent to a formula that conventionally expresses an admission of fault, she produces an utterance in which she denies being at fault and thus undermines her prior apology.

To sum up the analysis so far, Olivia's response to Mary Jane's challenge consists of three components: firstly, an "Oh"-preface, which indicates a change of state of awareness and thereby claims her innocence; secondly, an apology token, which conventionally expresses admission of fault; and thirdly, a justification, which again claims her innocence and thus denies that she is at fault. This juxtaposition of mutually exclusive propositions explains the peculiar effect of Olivia's utterance. Apparently, by prefacing her apology with a change-of-state token that claims her innocence and following it with a justification that also insists on her blamelessness she cancels out the apology because she does not acknowledge having done anything wrong. Moreover, the sequential placement of her utterance in the context of an argument, which (as discussed above) is governed by the participants' orientation to the expectation of dissent, contributes to the contextualisation of her activity as a rejection rather than a concession.

However, whether or not Mary Jane treats Olivia's reply as an adequate response to her accusation is displayed in her subsequent conduct. Rather than produce a turn that signals her acceptance of Olivia's apology as a satisfying response to her complaint and thereby terminate the disagreement sequence, Mary Jane issues another blame, formulating Olivia's behaviour as inadequate ("You'd think you'd be a little happier to hear me talk like this." lines 59-60), and the argument continues. Her oppositional response indicates that she has not accepted Olivia's utterance as a satisfactory response to her complaint.

This extract shows how "Oh"-prefacing of responses to accusations can be exploited by disputants as an argumentative device to deny blame and intensify disagreement. By prefacing her response to Mary Jane's accusatory question with the change-of-state token "Oh," Olivia claims her innocence while at the same time construing Mary Jane's activity as unexpected and out of place, thus aggravating disagreement.

It is worth noting that Olga's "Oh, sorry." is the only occurrence of apology in my data, and, as the preceding discussion has shown, it is rendered ineffective in the remainder of her turn. This paucity of admissions of fault reflects the participants' orientation to the expectation of disagreement in the context of an argument.

In spite of the peculiarities of Olivia's response to her daughter's accusation, this example illustrates that apologies can occur in combination with justifications. This finding stands in contradiction to Günthner's (2002: 82, fn. 23) assertion that explicit apologies only co-occur with excuses but not with justifications. There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy. Firstly, it might be due to the fact that Günthner's findings are based on a study of accusations in ordinary German conversation, while my corpus is composed of fictional dispute sequences. Secondly, one might argue that the divergent findings result from the fact that, as we have seen, Olivia's response apparently is not interpreted by its recipient as an apology in the sense of an admission of fault. However, based on our communicative experience, we can readily imagine an exchange, both in English and in German, in which a similar response to an accusation, consisting of an apology + justification such as "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." or "Tut mir Leid. Ich wollte dich nicht verletzen." is oriented to by conversationalists as an adequate response. Consequently, in contrast to Günthner, I suggest that apologies can be combined with excuses as well as justifications.

As noted earlier, while accusations make an appropriate response conditionally relevant, there is no typical second pair part. As Sacks (1992, vol. 2) has pointed out, the sequence that a complaint initiates is ambivalent, since although a complaint in some way controls what happens next, it does not fully control what is going to follow. "So that if you want is, e.g. for the other person to apologize, a complaint does not guarantee that you will get that" (48). Apart from justifications, excuses, (offers of) remedies and apologies, subsequent to an accusation, the defendant can also produce a denial, insisting that the activity in question did not take place or that she has not committed it.<sup>38</sup>

Denials usually take the form of a negative declarative statement, in which the proposition of the prior statement is negated with a "not," as in "I'm not difficult." They can also be realised by a declarative sentence, in which the truth of the preceding claim is denied, as in "That's not true." or "That's a lie." Denials are often prefaced with a disagreement token such as "No" - or, if the preceding claim takes a negative form, "Yes" -, which indicates right at the beginning of the turn, that opposition is going to follow, and they can be followed by an alternative claim, as in ("Never. That's your imagination.")

For instance, in the following extract from *My sister*, Isabelle rejects her mother's accusation with a denial, claiming that the negative characteristic attributed to her by Madame Danzard is not true.

**example (23): My sister 12**

1 MADAME DANZARD What did I tell you? It's perfect.  
2 ISABELLE Yes Maman. (*After a pause.*) Do you  
3 really think so?  
4 MADAME DANZARD Of course I think so. You're always so  
5 difficult when it comes to clothes.  
> 6 ISABELLE I'm not difficult. (*Looking down at  
7 the dress.*) I just didn't like it.  
8 MADAME DANZARD Well you see - you were wrong.

Isabelle is trying on a dress that her mother has just bought for her and that needs adjustments. When she expresses doubts about whether the dress really suits her ("Do you really think so?" lines 2-3), her mother accuses her of being problematic with respect to clothes ("You're always so difficult when it comes to clothes." lines 4-5). Her use of the adjective "difficult" explicitly states her negative evaluation of Isabelle's conduct. In addition, the impact of her criticism is intensified by the use of an ECF. As I noted earlier, the adverb "always" construes Isabelle's "being difficult" as characteristic behaviour rather than a single instance and thus serves both to aggravate and to legitimise Madame Danzard's accusation. Isabelle opposes her with an outright denial ("I'm not difficult." line 6) refuting her mother's negative representation of her behaviour. In the remainder of her turn she offers an

alternative interpretation of her conduct: "I just didn't like it." (line 7). In response to her daughter's denial Madame Danzard, says: "Well you see - you were wrong" (line 8). As noted earlier, the use of "Well" at the beginning of a turn in disagreement sequences can indicate that, despite the other party's intervening utterance, the speaker has not changed her mind about the subject under discussion and that the other person's argument has failed. In prefacing her turn with "Well," Madame Danzard acknowledges her daughter's prior denial, while maintaining a critical stance on Isabelle's behaviour. This is reinforced by the assertion that, however her behaviour is labelled, Isabelle was "wrong."

In my data, denial is the most frequent response to accusations. It is commonly produced immediately following the accusation without any mitigating techniques as in the example above. The high rate of unmitigated denials can be explained with reference to a structural peculiarity of accusations that has been pointed out by several conversation analysts.

Studies in conversation analysis have shown that accusations operate contrary to the preference for agreement, as discussed above, which would lead to an admission of guilt as the preferred response. Drawing on the concept of "relevant absence" (i.e. the phenomenon that the absence of a certain conversational token provides an interactional resource for conversationalists which they can draw on to make inferences), conversation analysts have argued that after accusations denials are the preferred response because the absence or delay of a denial is experienced as a relevant absence and is commonly interpreted as an admission of guilt (cf. Atkinson & Drew 1979; Bilmes 1988; Garcia 1991). As a result, denials tend to be placed interruptively or immediately following the turn in which the accusation was produced, without delay, accounts, or other mitigating techniques. The upshot of this is that from a sequential point of view, accusations make disagreement relevant and thus provide an interactional environment for the emergence of argument sequences.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the high frequency of denials in response to accusations, the participants' orientation to this sequential peculiarity of accusations is also reflected by the fact that both the justifications and excuses in my data are designed to downplay

their concessionary aspect and highlight their defensive function. As we have seen, although they produce some form of account, the defendants do not overtly agree that the accuser is right, nor do they indicate an acceptance of blame by delaying their response. On the contrary, far from admitting guilt, they construct a turn that is designed to deny that the fault is theirs and shift any blame for the expressed trouble onto other sources. That is to say, even in those cases in which the defendants do not respond to an accusation with an outright denial, their turns are constructed in a way that minimises agreement and emphasises disagreement with the prior speaker's activity. Furthermore, the aforementioned lack of apologies in my corpus displays the participants' orientation to the expectation of disagreement in response to accusations.

Moreover, as described earlier, by producing an accusation, a speaker treats another's activity, attitude or characteristic as an arguable, thereby setting up an opposition and constituting the complained-of activity, attitude or characteristic as the initial part of a verbal conflict. Consequently, if the defendant issues a denial in response to an accusation, thus producing a counter-opposition, an argument is under way.

Furthermore, denials constitute an aggravated form of opposition, putting the accuser in a position of either backing down, which is face threatening, or defending her position and repeating the accusation. If the accuser maintains her stance and reissues the accusation, the disagreement sequence continues for another adjacency pair because the second accusation again invites disagreement. Therefore, accusations are structurally predisposed to initiate or maintain an argument.

The potential of accusations to initiate dispute is illustrated in the following extract from *My sister*:

**example (24): My sister, 9**

22	ISABELLE	One, two, three ... begin. Maman- that
23		is not fair.
24	MADAME DANZARD	What's not fair?
25	ISABELLE	You started at two.
> 26	MADAME DANZARD	I did not. I absolutely did not.
27		However, if you insist, we'll start



terminates the argument by issuing an imperative telling Isabelle to be quiet (line 35).

In addition to refuting an accusation with a denial, an accused person can also oppose an accusation by producing a counter- or return-accusation.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to denials, return-accusations are not concerned with the truth value validity of the accuser's claim. Hence, the accusation is responded to with a reciprocal action (i.e. a counter-accusation), rather than with an action which tries to disprove the accuser's assertion (i.e. a denial). Counter-accusations bring about a reversal of the participants' interactional roles: By returning an accusation, the original defendant turns the tables and becomes the accuser. This is illustrated in the following two extracts from *Home*:

**example (25): Home**

62 MARY JANE You'd think you'd be a little happier to  
63 hear me talk like this. Here I am coming  
64 home after all this time and looking for a  
65 nice husband.  
> 66 OLIVIA You think you'd be a little more concerned  
67 with someone else once in a while—  
68 MARY JANE I am.

As illustrated above, prior to this extract, Mary Jane and Olivia were having an argument. The sequence starts with Mary Jane producing a complaint in which she formulates Olivia's conduct as inadequate unacceptable: "You'd think you'd be a little happier to hear me talk like this." (lines 62-63). In return, Olivia issues a counter-complaint construing Mary Jane's behaviour as unacceptable: "You think you'd be a little more concerned with someone else once in a while—" (lines 66-67). Her return-complaint prompts a denial from Mary Jane in the subsequent turn, in which she claims that the failure which her mother attributes to her, namely that she is not concerned with anybody else, is not true. The interruptive placement of her denial indicates interpersonal involvement and serves to aggravate disagreement.

Likewise, in the following passage, Mary Jane opposes her mother's accusation with a counter-accusation:

**example (26): Home**

293 OLIVIA I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
> 294 MARY JANE I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
295 I guess my plans don't matter. Do they?  
296 The failure daughter comes home but that's  
297 just not good enough for you, I guess.  
298 OLIVIA Just shut up. Shut up.  
299 MARY JANE You shut up. You just shut up forever.  
300 How about that? (*She rushes into the*  
301 *bedroom.*) I'm so sick of this.

Prior to this extract, Mary Jane and Olivia were having a fierce dispute in the course of which they repeatedly accused, challenged and shouted at each other. The sequence starts with Olivia producing an accusation in which she formulates Mary Jane's behaviour towards her as offensive: "I can't believe you're doing this to me." (line 293). Mary Jane counters her with a return-accusation: "I can't believe you're doing this to me." (line 294). In the remainder of her turn, she expands on her criticism insinuating that her mother does not show any consideration for her ("I guess my plans don't matter. Do they?" line 295) and that she does not appreciate her homecoming ("The failure daughter comes home but that's just not good enough for you, I guess." lines 296-297). Instead of addressing the content of Mary Jane's counter-accusation, Olivia - presumably for lack of a better argument - issues a meta-communicative imperative telling Mary Jane to "shut up" (line 298). The aggravated directive as well as the self-repetition signal interpersonal involvement and escalate the dispute. Mary Jane counters her with a reciprocal aggravated directive (line 299) and then terminates the argument by leaving the room.<sup>41</sup>

As argumentative devices, counter-accusations achieve at least two things: By returning an accusation in response to an accusation, the defendant avoids giving an account for the violation that is presupposed by the accuser and at the same time launches a counter attack reversing the original participant roles and thus obliging the original accuser to produce an adequate response. In the subsequent turn, the original accuser can either back down (which is face-threatening), and thus terminate the conflict, or produce

another counter, thereby maintaining the dispute. As a result, accusation/counter-accusation sequences regularly establish interaction cycles, in which the opponents continuously accuse each other of having committed an offence, without addressing the substance of each other's claims, thereby escalating the dispute while preventing conflict resolution at the content level of interaction.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the disputants in the two preceding extracts build their counters by means of contrastive mirroring, i.e. they reuse the materials just provided by the other's preceding accusation to shape a counter to it. In example (25), Olivia builds her return-accusation by incorporating Mary Jane's preceding formulation: "You think you'd be a little more concerned." Similarly, in example (26), Mary Jane constructs her counter-accusation by repeating the exact wording of Olivia's prior turn: "I can't believe you're doing this to me." Likewise, in line 301, she integrates Olivia's prior formulation in her counter to her mother's meta-communicative imperative "You shut up. You just shut up forever." By this means, the opposing moves are tied together at the word level, while at the content level of interaction, dissent is stressed and reinforced.

In this section, I have looked at the ways in which the participants in the fictional mother-daughter disputes in my corpus use accusations as a communicative practice of building opposition and thus initiate or maintain verbal conflict. I have shown that accusations and related actions have a special function in dispute sequences: They are retroactive because they assume a violation (an action on the part of the accused, which is somehow defective), and thus constitute oppositional moves. They are also proactive, as they are first-pair parts of adjacency pairs and have been shown by conversation analysts to project opposition (denial); hence they are predestined to initiate and maintain dispute sequences.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, I have examined how accusations can be employed by speakers as an interactional resource to exert a degree of discursive power by placing constraints on the discourse options available to the recipient. Moreover, by looking at the ways in which the defendants respond to accusations, I have investigated how disputants can challenge the opponent's control manoeuvres and even exploit them to launch a counter-attack, thus maintaining and

escalating disagreement. Finally, I have shown that, since power has to do with controlling versus being controlled, we can examine how relations of power are negotiated at a micro-level of interaction by looking at the interplay of control manoeuvres and opposition strategies in (fictional) episodes of conflict talk.

### 7.3 Directives

Opposition in the fictional mother-daughter disputes under analysis is also frequently expressed by a type of discursive activity that is traditionally labelled directive or request (for action). Directives are generally defined as attempts to get the addressee to do or refrain from doing something.<sup>44</sup> To quote Fraser (1975: 192), they express "the speaker's desire for the hearer to bring about the state of affairs expressed in the proposition." Directives are used to elicit goods or services from the listener, or to regulate her behaviour and/or attitudes.<sup>45</sup> The use of directives as argumentative techniques has also been observed in previous studies of conflict interaction both between children and between adults (e.g. Apeltauer 1978; Brenneis & Lein 1977; Garvey & Shantz 1992; M. H. Goodwin 1988; Gruber 1996a).

Various researchers in discourse and conversation analysis have pointed out the ways that directives are a potentially powerful interactive resource available to speakers. From a sequential standpoint, directives are first pair parts of adjacency pairs and thus make specific second pair parts conditionally relevant. More precisely, as research in conversational analysis has shown, following directives compliance is the structurally preferred response (cf. Levinson 1983: 308, 336). Furthermore, Labov & Fanshel (1977) argue that the conditional relevance of what follows after a directive is much greater than that of other speech actions such as, for instance, assertions. Hence, with a directive a speaker constrains the addressee's freedom of action by forcing her to respond under certain conditions. This is reflected by numerous studies on power, dominance and control in conversational interaction, in which directives have been discussed as forms of "(social) control acts" (Ervin-Tripp 1982, 1977; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1984, 1990; Vine 2004), i.e. "moves in which there is a clear intention to influence the activities of the partner" (Ervin-Tripp 1982: 29), "control manoeuvres toward one-up" (Rogers & Farace 1975), "persuasive talk" (Cook-Gumperz 1981), "strong initiatives" (Linell et al. 1988), "controlling moves" (Linell 1990b), and "control-claiming actions" (Thimm et al. 1994) and have been

considered as attempts at exercising power over the interlocutor at the micro-level of interaction.

With regard to the interpersonal aspect of interaction, directives present a threat to the addressee's negative face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987). They are potentially destructive to the autonomy of the listener: Directives predicate some future activity of the addressee, and in so doing put some pressure on the addressee to do (or refrain from doing) that activity. To sum up, directives provide a conversational resource that speakers may use to exercise control over others by forcing them to respond under certain conditions, thus limiting their freedom of action.

Directives can take a variety of forms. They can be packaged as imperatives, declarative statements or interrogatives, both negative and positive. In my data, directives are typically produced without delay, immediately following the opponent's preceding utterance; they can stand on their own in a turn or be accompanied by additional argumentative devices. Instances of this type of oppositional move device are illustrated in the following examples.

With a directive a speaker attempts to influence the addressee's (non-)verbal behaviour and/or attitudes. For instance, in the following extract from *Raisin*, Beneatha calls on her mother to "be on [her] side," i.e. to show alignment with her position rather than her brother's:

**example (1): Raisin, III**

5 BENEATHA That is not a man. That is nothing but a  
6 toothless rat.  
7 MAMA Yes - death done come in this here house.  
8 (*She is nodding, slowly, reflectively.*)  
9 Done come walking in my house. On the lips  
10 of my children. You, who supposed to be my  
11 harvest. (*To BENEATHA.*) You - you mourning  
12 your brother?  
13 BENEATHA He's no brother of mine.  
14 MAMA What you say?  
15 BENEATHA I said that that individual in that room is  
16 no brother of mine.  
17 MAMA That's what I thought you said. You feeling

18                   like you better than he is today?

19 BENEATHA   *(Does not answer.)*

20 MAMA        Yes? What you tell him a minute ago? That he

21                   wasn't a man? Yes? You give him up for me? You

22                   done wrote his epitaph too - like the rest of

23                   the world? Well, who gave you the privilege?

> 24 BENEATHA   Be on my side for once! You saw what he just

25                   did, Mama! You saw him down on his knees.

26                   Wasn't it you who taught me to despise any man

27                   who would do that. Do what he's going to do.

28 MAMA        Yes - I taught you that. Me and your daddy.

29                   But I thought I taught you something else

30                   too ... I thought I taught you to love him.

After having learned that he has lost all the family's money in a business transaction, Beneatha's brother, Walter, has broken down and left the room. Mama and Beneatha stay behind and start arguing about his conduct. The episode begins with Beneatha expressing her contempt for Walter, denigrating him ("That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat." lines 5-6) and distancing herself from him ("He's no brother of mine." lines 13, 15-16). In response, Mama confronts her with a series of opposing questions, challenging her right to judge her brother: "You feeling like you better than he is today?" (lines 17-18); "Well, who gave you the privilege?" (line 23). In response, Beneatha issues a directive calling on Mama to support her: "Be on my side for once!" (line 24). In the remainder of her turn, she provides reasons to back her claim (lines 24-27). As an argumentative technique, Beneatha's directive accomplishes several things: Firstly, it allows her to produce an adequate response, which opposes her mother's prior action(s) while avoiding answering her challenging questions. Furthermore, it not only presents an attempt to influence her mother's attitude (and behaviour as a reflection of that attitude) but also constitutes an expression of criticism, since it conveys her dissatisfaction with Mama's stance (and resulting conduct). The adverb "for once" implies that Mama frequently takes up an oppositional stance towards her daughter and thus serves to legitimate Beneatha's claim. Moreover,

as we have seen above, escalated volume signals high emotional involvement and aggravates opposition.

Directives can also be used in an attempt to get the opponent to perform or refrain from performing some action, as in the following sequence from *My mother*, which follows the argument between Doris and her daughter about whether Margaret's boyfriend is crushing Doris' flowers with his car:

**example (2): My mother I, 7**

136 MARGARET That's typical, you think all Americans  
137 are brash and wear loud check shirts and  
138 chew gum and want to marry English girls.  
139 You're just prej-...  
140 DORIS Margaret, that's enough! (*Pause.*) After  
141 all, he is going to marry an English girl.  
> 142 MARGARET Oh Mother, don't look at me like that with  
143 your lips pressed together. (*Exits.*)

At the beginning of this fragment, Margaret accuses her mother of being prejudiced against Americans (lines 136-139). In the following turn, Doris retaliates by turning her daughter's own words against her. She initiates her counter with a terminating move, cautioning Margaret not to pursue her line of action any further: "Margaret, that's enough!" (line 140). Subsequently, Doris issues an assertion, claiming that, in view of the fact that Margaret's American boyfriend does indeed want to marry her, the attitude Margaret has just attributed to her would indeed be justified. She builds her utterance by means of contrastive mirroring, picking up the phrase "marry an English girl" from her daughter's preceding turn and uses it for her own side: "he is going to marry an English girl" (lines 140-141). Rather than disputing the content of her mother's claim, in the following turn, Margaret challenges Doris' non-verbal behaviour, i.e. her disapproving facial expression. She issues a negative directive, telling Doris not to look at her "like that" (lines 142-143) and then leaves the scene exasperated. This sequence shows that directives are a communicative resource that disputants can effectively employ to counter another's prior activity without disputing the truth of her claim.

In the extract from *My sister* below, it is not the daughter but the mother who uses this oppositional move:

**example (3): My sister 3**

> 1 MADAME DANZARD Don't toy with your food, Isabelle.  
2 It's so disagreeable. Always making  
3 those little piles.  
4 ISABELLE I'm not, Maman.  
5 MADAME DANZARD You mean to tell me I don't see what  
6 you're doing.  
7 ISABELLE I'm not toying, Maman.  
8 MADAME DANZARD (*Coldly.*) Very well, my dear, call it  
9 what you will.

Madame Danzard and Isabelle are sitting at the dining room table, finishing the first course of lunch. In line 1, Madame Danzard issues a negative imperative, telling Isabelle not to "toy with [her] food," thus treating her behaviour as an arguable action. Subsequently, she adds an assertion supporting her claim ("It's so disagreeable. Always making those little piles." lines 2-3). Madame Danzard's directive proposes the violation of a convention on Isabelle's part, portraying her behaviour as a breach of etiquette and therefore functions as a rebuke. Moreover, her utterance presents an attempt to exercise control over her daughter by trying to stop her from carrying on with the behaviour that is deemed inadequate. In addition, the intensifier "so" and the ECF with "always" (line 2) heighten the oppositional character of the utterance by implying that Isabelle's misbehaviour is non-unique, i.e. that her table manners are frequently inappropriate. As discussed above, the construal of Isabelle's conduct as both unacceptable and recurrent (rather than an isolated case) serves to legitimise Madame Danzard's reproach. Isabelle counter-opposes her mother's criticism by arguing with the assumption that she is toying with her food ("I'm not." line 4), thus undermining the validity of Madame Danzard's directive. This is followed by a sequence of disagreements centring round the question whether Isabelle's behaviour can be legitimately described as "toying" with her food or

not (lines 5-9). Thus, the proposition that is expressed in Madame Danzard's directive has become the focus of argument.<sup>46</sup>

Directives can also be employed to regulate (an aspect of) the opponent's verbal behaviour. For instance, in the following extract from *Home*, Olivia uses a meta-communicative directive to get her daughter to lower her voice:

**example (4): Home**

257 OLIVIA           You make one mistake after another for 20  
258                   years and you never took responsibility  
259                   for one second! You brought babies into  
260                   this world that you could barely feed  
261                   'cause that husband a yours couldn't hold  
262                   down a job.  
263 MARY JANE       That's such a lie! How could you say that?  
> 264 OLIVIA        (*Overlapping.*) Oh, keep your voice down.  
265 MARY JANE       (*Overlapping.*) He got laid off that time,  
266                   Ma! Laid off!

Prior to this fragment, Mary Jane and her mother have been arguing about whether Olivia has been taking enough interest in her daughter's life. Mary Jane has repeatedly accused her mother of neglecting her, while Olivia has persistently denied her daughter's allegations. At the beginning of this sequence, Olivia issues a series of accusatory claims, which portray Mary Jane's behaviour as irresponsible (lines 257-262), thus shifting the blame back to her. In the following turn, Mary Jane disputes the truth of her mother's prior claim, maintaining that what Olivia has just said is "such a lie!" (line 263). Subsequently, she issues a blame-implicative question ("How could you say that?" line 263), construing Olivia's prior claim as offensive and simultaneously obliging her to account for it in the subsequent turn, as discussed above. But before she can finish her turn, Olivia interrupts her with a meta-communicative directive, telling her to "keep [her] voice down" (line 264). However, instead of complying with her mother's demand and lower her voice, Mary Jane even raises her voice. She counters Olivia's prior allegation that her husband "couldn't hold down a job" (line 262), shouting: "He got laid off that time, Ma! Laid off!" (lines 265-266). The interruptive placement of her utterance combined with an

increase in volume and self-repetition signals negative emotional involvement and exacerbates the dispute even further. As this example shows, although directives provide a potentially powerful discursive resource that disputants may exploit to exercise control over various aspects of the ongoing interaction, they are not necessarily always successful.

While in the preceding fragment, Olivia's meta-communicative directive challenges a prosodic aspect of her daughter's prior utterance, in the following extract from *My sister*, Madame Danzard employs this arguing technique to contest the appropriateness of Isabelle's response to her initial question:

**example (5): My sister, 14**

- 1 MADAME DANZARD (*Impatient.*) Where is she?  
2 ISABELLE How do I know?  
> 3 MADAME DANZARD Don't answer me like that.  
4 Go and find her.

Madame Danzard and Isabelle have just returned from shopping and are annoyed that their maid is not turning up to help them put away the purchases. The episode starts with Madame Danzard's request for information regarding the location of their maid: "Where is she?" (line 1). Her utterance is challenged by Isabelle in the subsequent turn, with respect to what it presumes. With her oppositional turn, Isabelle invokes a rule of discourse, namely that a speaker who asks a question about information supposes knowledge about this information on the part of the recipient (cf. Labov & Fanshel 1977: 89; Burton 1980: 152). With a return question that asks for the basis of her ability to know where the maid is ("How do I know?" line 2), Isabelle suggests a lack of knowledge regarding the content of her mother's question, and thus challenges this assumption. Madame Danzard counter-opposes Isabelle's retort with a negative meta-communicative imperative, telling her not to answer her "like that" (line 3). As an argumentative device, this utterance achieves several things. Firstly, as discussed above, by formulating Isabelle's prior activity as violating some underlying norm - more precisely, by arguing with the appropriateness of Isabelle's response to her mother's question - it functions as a rebuke. Secondly, it aims at preventing Isabelle from answering her in a similar way in the future, thus trying to constrain her freedom of

action. In this sense, it is an attempt at exercising control over Isabelle. Subsequently, she issues another imperative, which focuses on Isabelle's non-verbal behaviour, ordering her to "go and find" the housemaid (line 4).

In the extract above, the mother uses a meta-communicative directive to challenge the acceptability of her daughter's preceding answer. By contrast, in the fragment from *Alto* below, Florene employs this argumentative device to challenge the appropriateness of Wanda's prior assertion.

**example (6): Alto II,3**

102 FLORENE ((...)) You don't even know yet what you want.  
103 But you deserve a chance to find out.  
104 WANDA I do! I do too know! You're the one who  
105 doesn't know anything. You don't even know  
106 how to love anybody! I bet you never loved  
107 him!  
> 108 FLORENE Don't you ever say that! Ever! I'll always  
109 love him. There are some things you don't  
110 understand, Wanda.  
111 WANDA I understand everything, and I love him more!

Prior to this fragment, Wanda and her mother Florene have been arguing about whether they should get on the bus to San Antonio to meet Wanda's father there. While Wanda has been eager to see her father again and has urged her mother to get ready, Florene has refused to go. At the beginning of this extract, Florene defends her authoritative behaviour by claiming that Wanda is too young to make any informed decisions ("You don't even know yet what you want." line 102) and should have "a chance to find out" (line 103). In the subsequent turn, Wanda first disputes her mother's claim ("I do! I do too know!" line 105), and then retaliates by claiming that, in fact, Florene is "the one who doesn't know anything," not even "how to love anybody!" (lines 104-106). She terminates her turn by proposing that Florene does not love her husband (lines 106-107), emphasising opposition with the extreme formulation "never." Dissent is further aggravated by means of self-repetition and an increase in volume, signalling emotional involvement. In the next turn, Florene

counters Wanda's assertion with a negative meta-communicative directive: "Don't you ever say that! Ever!" (line 109). Like Madame Danzard's directive, her utterance portrays Wanda's utterance as offensive and thus functions as a rebuke. In addition, it constitutes a control manoeuvre, by forbidding Wanda to repeat what she said, thus restricting her freedom of action. Self-repetition as well as volume increase indicate a negative affective reaction (i.e. anger) at what Wanda's has said and intensify opposition. Subsequently, Florene disputes Wanda's turn-final claim, stating that she will always love her husband (lines 108-109). The contrastive use of the extreme adverb "always" as opposed to "never" in Wanda's utterance serves to reinforce disagreement. She terminates her turn by reaffirming to her initial position, claiming that due to her youth and inexperience Wanda is not in a position to judge: "There are some things you don't understand, Wanda." (lines 109-110). In the following turn, Wanda challenges her mother's turn-final claim: "I understand everything" (line 111). The extreme formulation "everything" as opposed to the noun phrase "some things" in Florene's utterance emphasises disagreement. Subsequently, she adds an assertion, claiming that she loves her father more than Florene does. This last move allows her to counter her mother's prior claim (i.e. that she will always love her husband) without disputing its truth.

In both of the preceding fragments, meta-communicative imperatives are employed to challenge the appropriateness of the opponent's prior utterance; in the extracts below, this oppositional move is used to completely inhibit the opponent's talk.

**example (7): My sister 9**

29 ISABELLE One ... two ... three ... start.  
 30 MADAME DANZARD (*Inspecting her cards.*) I don't have  
 31 anything to start with.  
 32 ISABELLE You always do that. Start first.  
 33 MADAME DANZARD Never. That's your imagination.  
 34 ISABELLE (*Shrieking.*) I saw you.  
 > 35 MADAME DANZARD Quiet, Isabelle. (*Looking at her cards*)  
 36 This is absurd. I can't move a thing.  
 37 (*Looks over at ISABELLE's cards.*)

Madame Danzard and Isabelle are playing cards. When Madame Danzard claims that she cannot start the game because she does not have a suitable card, Isabelle complains: "You always do that." (line 32). By means of the ECF, Isabelle portrays her mother's activity as typical and legitimises both her accusation and her subsequent demand on her mother to "start first." However, in line 33, Madame Danzard rejects her daughter's accusation as unjustified, by claiming: "That's your imagination." The extreme adverb "never" sets up a marked contrast to "always" in Isabelle's prior utterance and thus emphasises opposition. When Isabelle reissues her blame, the disagreement sequence develops into an argument: Isabelle counter-opposes her mother's denial insisting that she saw her cheat (line 34). Her "*shrieking*" tone of voice indicates her indignation at her mother's denial and aggravates opposition. But instead of addressing her daughter's renewed blame, Madame Danzard issues a meta-communicative imperative: "Quiet, Isabelle." (line 35). Her response displays that she is not willing to continue arguing with her daughter and constitutes an attempt at closing down Isabelle and terminating the dispute. Therefore, it presents a control manoeuvre that operates on the structural as well as the content and interpersonal level of interaction.<sup>47</sup> Directly following the directive, she reasserts her initial claim, remarking on her bad cards (line 36). Her gaze at Isabelle's cards (line 37) implies that, in contrast to her, Isabelle is in a position to start. In fact, in the next turn, Isabelle takes up her mother's hint, asking her to show her which card she can play (line 38).

In the preceding extract, the mother employs a meta-communicative imperative to restrain her daughter's speech. Conversely, in the following fragment, it is the daughter who uses this argumentative device to inhibit her mother's talk.

**example (8): Stuck 6b**

134 MOM What's wrong with your life? Why do you have to  
 135 leave? Not good enough for you? Have a drink.  
 136 LULA I don't want one.  
 137 MOM BORING, don't want to have a drink with your mom.

138 LULA Not boring- not gonna end up like you.  
 139 MOM I gave birth to you for godsakes, birth, my  
 whole  
 140 fuckin' life over, for you, and you want to  
 leave  
 141 me to die, to rot, is that what you want?  
 > 142 LULA Just shut up! Just shut the fuck up and  
 143 forget I ever said anything! ((*end of scene*))

In the interaction preceding this exchange, Lula has suggested that she might leave home some day, triggering an extended series of disagreements. After several unsuccessful attempts at dissuading Lula from her plans, Mom issues a series of challenging questions, demanding that Lula account for her discontent and insinuating that she is difficult to please (lines 134-135). She closes her turn with a directive, offering Lula a drink. When Lula refuses, Mom challenges her with a negative categorisation, exclaiming that she is being "BORING" (line 137), presumably in a derogatory tone of voice. But Lula rejects her mother's deprecating characterisation of her behaviour, claiming that rather than being boring she does not want to be become like her mother. The formulation "not gonna end up like you" expresses Lula's disapproval of her mother's alcohol consumption and thus constitutes a derogatory remark. Indeed, Mom's response reveals that she interprets her daughter's utterance as an offence. She opposes Lula with a challenging question, claiming that not only did she gave birth to Lula but also sacrificed her life for her and that Lula has no right to abandon her now (lines 139-141). Her use of expletives ("for godsakes," "fuckin'") as well as negatively connotated words ("rot") signals a negative affective reaction at what Lula has said and aggravates opposition. By formulating her counter as an interrogative, she is able to challenge her daughter's prior activity while simultaneously forcing her to resume the floor and put up a defence for her position in the next turn.<sup>48</sup> Instead of providing the required response, however, Lula issues a meta-communicative imperative, telling her mother to "shut up" (line 142), thereby terminating the interaction. Self-repetition, the use of the f-word and the increase in volume signal high emotional involvement and exacerbate opposition.

As the preceding examples have shown, in my data, directives are realised by positive (e.g. "Be on my side for once," "Quiet," "Shut up") and negative formulations (e.g. "Don't look at me like that," "Don't toy with your food," "Don't answer me like that," "Don't you ever say that"). They tend to be produced without delay, immediately following the opponent's preceding utterance. They can stand on their own in a turn or in combination with other oppositional moves. They are used to challenge various aspects of the opponent's (non-)verbal behaviour as well as her alignment with the speaker or her position as displayed in that behaviour. As argumentative devices, directives accomplish at least two functions. Firstly, they treat the opponent's prior activity as an arguable action and thus achieve opposition. As we have seen, negative directives in particular imply the violation of some norm or expectation by the opponent and are therefore expressions of criticism/dissatisfaction. Secondly, directives are attempts to influence some aspect of the recipient's future behaviour, thereby limiting her freedom of action, and therefore represent control manoeuvres. Thus, directives provide a discursive resource that disputants can employ both to challenge the opponent's prior action and to exercise control over her following action.

Directives, like all speech actions, may vary in intensity. As Labov & Fanshel (1977: 84-86) have shown, they may be formatted in a straightforward or aggravated fashion, as imperatives (i.e. "(Don't) do X!"), or declaratives that state the speaker's wants and needs (i.e. "I (don't) want you to do X."). Alternatively, they may take more softened or mitigated forms, as requests for information (i.e. "Could you do X?") or requests for permission (i.e. "Can I do/have X?").<sup>49</sup> In addition to the selection of the verb in the directive, as Ervin-Tripp (1982: 29-30) notes, that the "head act" (the principal verb) may be accompanied by "supporting explanations, attention getters, vocatives, and polite markers." She further states that social information about role, rank, distance, etc. can be manifested "through nuancing by markers, such as saying *please*, using slang, address forms, minimizers, conditionals, or past tense" (33).

Several researchers have suggested that some form of (a)symmetry is established through the alternative ways in which

directives and their responses are formatted. As Mitchell-Kernan & Kernan (1977: 201) have argued, "directives and reactions to them" can be used "to define, reaffirm, challenge, manipulate, and redefine status and rank." Similarly, in a study of children's use of and responses to directives, M. H. Goodwin (1988) has shown that in terms of both how directives are constructed and how they are responded to, directives may be used to display symmetrical or asymmetrical forms of relationships.<sup>50</sup>

Aggravated forms of directives have been analysed by a number of researchers as displaying control vis-à-vis the recipient. Some researchers have suggested that speakers use imperatives not mainly to effect actual behaviour change but rather to test and make assertions about relative positions among participants. For instance, as Labov and Fanshel (1977: 78) have argued, one of the preconditions for a valid request for action is that the speaker who issues an imperative has the right to tell the addressee to perform the requested action. Likewise, Searle (1969) suggests that an order differs from a request in that the former has the additional preparatory condition that the speaker must be in a position of authority over the addressee. A similar view is expressed by Apeltauer (1978: 90) and Gruber (1996a: 216), who both maintain that one of the assumptions underlying a command is an asymmetrical relationship with the speaker in the dominant position, which she may draw on to reinforce her claim and gain compliance from the addressee (cf. also Becker 1982, 1984; Ervin-Tripp 1982; M. H. Goodwin 1988; Mitchell-Kernan & Kernan 1977). Thus, by packaging a directive as an imperative, a speaker may assume a superior position vis-à-vis the addressee, which authorises her to control the other's behaviour. Aggravated directives thus provide an interactional resource with which speakers may attempt not only to regulate others' actions but also to define a position of relative superiority over recipients. By contrast, mitigated directives such as information and permission requests display deference towards the addressee and permit options in the way in which the recipient should respond.

In the following paragraphs, by looking at the form and sequencing of directive-response sequences in my data, I will examine how within mother-daughter dyads the social order of the

moment is formulated, refuted, and reconstituted through (dispute) talk, thus exploring the intersection of conflict and power relations.

As the preceding examples indicate, in my data, directives - by both mothers and daughters - predominantly take an aggravated format, highlighting rather than downplaying their oppositional and face-threatening character. This suggests that in mother-daughter disputes, unmitigated directives provide a discursive resource that is in principle equally available to both parties.

This is especially clear in the following extract from *Home*, in which Olivia and Mary Jane oppose one another by means of reciprocal meta-communicative imperatives, telling each other to "shut up":

**example (9): Home**

293 OLIVIA I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
294 MARY JANE I can't believe you're doing this to me.  
295 I guess my plans don't matter. Do they?  
296 The failure daughter comes home but that's  
297 just not good enough for you, I guess.  
> 298 OLIVIA Just shut up. Shut up.  
> 299 MARY JANE You shut up. You just shut up forever.  
300 How about that? (*She rushes into the*  
301 *bedroom.*) I'm so sick of this.

As illustrated above, prior to this extract, Mary Jane and Olivia were having a fierce dispute in the course of which they repeatedly accused, challenged, interrupted and shouted at each other. In line 293, Olivia issues an accusation, in which she formulates Mary Jane's behaviour towards her as offensive: "I can't believe you're doing this to me." In the following turn, Mary Jane retaliates with a contrastively mirroring return-accusation: "I can't believe you're doing this to me." (line 294). In the remainder of her turn, she expands on her criticism insinuating that her mother does not show any consideration for her ("I guess my plans don't matter. Do they?" lines 295) and that she does not appreciate her homecoming ("The failure daughter comes home but that's just not good enough for you, I guess." line 296-297). Instead of addressing the content of Mary Jane's counter-accusation, Olivia issues a meta-communicative

imperative, telling Mary Jane to "shut up" (line 298). The aggravated format of her directive as well as self-repetition signal high emotional involvement and exacerbate opposition. In line 299, Mary Jane retaliates with a reciprocal action. Similar to line 294, she builds her counter by means of contrastive mirroring, repeating her mother's prior imperative verbatim, this time prefacing her repeat with the pronoun "You" (presumably with emphatic stress) to signal the reversal of the participant framework. The aggravated format in combination with self- and other-repetition highlights and reinforces opposition. Subsequently, Mary Jane withdraws from the interaction, leaving the room and thereby terminates the dispute (at least for the moment).

In the preceding extract, both the mother and the daughter employ aggravated directives to oppose one another, thus emphasising opposition and escalating the dispute. In this exchange then both parties have equal access to the same argumentative resource(s), and this is displayed in their equivalent construction of mutually oppositional turns. Through the mutual exchange of control manoeuvres in the form of aggravated directives, the disputants jointly establish a symmetrical relationship in the local context on the ongoing conflict interaction.

By contrast, in the following extract from *Alto*, Florene and her daughter Wanda at first deploy dissimilar directive formats in the beginning of the exchange, thereby mutually (re-)constructing an asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship, and then gradually shift towards a more egalitarian relationship:

**example (10): Alto I,1**

1 WANDA Now I'm going to ask one more thing. "Ouija,  
2 how old will I live to be and what will I die  
3 of?"  
4 FLORENE (*She jerks her fingers from the planchette.*)  
> 5 Wanda, don't you be asking about dying!  
6 You're just a kid. Besides, we're not  
7 supposed to know things like that.  
8 WANDA I don't see why not. I want to find out if  
> 9 it knows when people will die. Let me ask  
10 about somebody old.

> 11 FLORENE Now, Wanda, don't nose into such ghoulish  
12 stuff.

> 13 WANDA Let me test it on Miz Hattie. We'll write  
14 down what it says, and then when she does  
15 die, we'll know whether to believe it about  
16 everything else.

17 FLORENE Well, it would be nice to have a dependable  
18 source of advice. But Miz Hattie seems like  
19 a good enough landlady so far, and I don't  
20 want to think about her dying either. If she  
21 died, this house would probably sell, and we'd  
22 have to move again.

> 23 WANDA Let's ask it anyway. I bet it knows.

24 FLORENE (*Tentatively placing her fingers on the*  
25 *planchette.*) I just couldn't face another move  
26 any time soon.

Wanda and her mother Florene are asking the Ouija board questions about the future. The fragment starts with Wanda asking the board about the time and cause of her death (lines 1-3). In the following turn, Florene strongly opposes her daughter's activity. She begins her turn with a meta-communicative negative directive, reproaching Wanda for asking the board about her death (line 5). The raised voice indicates her indignation at Wanda's question and emphasises opposition. Her utterance construes Wanda's activity as a violation of some underlying social norm, which she makes explicit in the remainder of her turn. Moreover, it aims at preventing Wanda from restating her question, thus trying to limit her freedom of action. In this sense, it is a control manoeuvre. In addition, as discussed above, by designing her directive as an imperative, Florene assumes a position of authority vis-à-vis Wanda, which permits her to regulate her daughter's behaviour. Directly following the directive, she issues a series of assertions supporting her position, claiming that people - especially "kids" - are not supposed to speculate on matters of death (line 6-7). In so doing, she retrospectively moderates the imposition of her turn-initial interdiction.<sup>51</sup> However, Wanda refutes her mother's command, declaring that she is not convinced by Florene's explanation ("I don't see why not." line 8), and then goes on to give reasons for her initial question ("I want

to find out if it knows when people will die." lines 8-9). She closes her turn with a permission directive asking Florene to let her "ask about somebody old" (lines 9-10). As mentioned above, permission requests display deference to the addressee. Thus, although Wanda does not comply with her mother's prior command, by packaging her own directive in this way, Wanda ratifies Florene's superior position. In the next turn, Florene rejects her daughter's request with another negative imperative telling her not to "nose into such ghoulish stuff" (lines 11-12). Again, the design of her action implies that she can determine what is allowable and what is not. Up to this point in the interaction, then, the asymmetrical distribution of turn types between the participants in the episode reflects their orientation to the unequal distribution of social power and status. But Wanda does not give up. In the subsequent turn, she issues another permission directive ("Let me test it on Miz Hattie." line 13), and then adds an assertion, pointing out the possible benefits of the requested action for both her mother and herself (lines 13-16). Indeed, at the beginning of her next turn, Florene concedes that "it would be nice to have a dependable source of advice" (lines 17-18). When she expresses her misgivings in the remainder of her turn (lines 18-22), Wanda issues another directive, prompting her to "ask it anyway" (lines 23). In contrast to Florene's prior commands and her own prior permission directives, this directive is constructed as a suggestion for action. In line with the inclusive pronoun "we," which she employed in her prior utterance, she uses the verb "let's," which includes both speaker and hearer as potential agent to the action to be performed.<sup>52</sup> According to M.H. Goodwin (1988), "let's" signals a proposal rather than a command or a request and as such neither shows special deference towards the other party (as a request does) nor claims about special rights of control over the other (as a command does). Thus, through the way in which Wanda formats her directive at this point in the interaction, she proposes a more symmetrical, egalitarian relationship between her and Florene, than the more asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship displayed in the first part of the exchange. Indeed, in the following turn, Florene complies with her daughter's request, thus ratifying her definition of the relationship (lines 24-26).

In summary, in this fragment, the participants can be seen to jointly (re-)construct and modify their relationship in the course of their interaction through the differential ways in which directives are formatted and responded to in the beginning and towards the end of the exchange. At the start of the conversation, a pattern of asymmetry in the formatting and usage of directives and their responses develops in the interaction between the two women, creating the positions of superior and inferior. Florene, who assumes a position of authority in this phase of the talk, directly opposes her daughter's activities by issuing imperatives. Wanda, on the other hand, ratifies her mother's claim of superiority by using a more mitigated utterance format, i.e. permission directives, and thus collaborates in (re-)establishing a status differential in the local context of the interaction. Initially, Florene's superior position in the dyad is displayed and confirmed through issuing direct commands while receiving indirect requests. Towards the end of the interaction, however, the women collaboratively work towards a more balanced relationship. When Florene produces a mitigated disagreement, expressing partial concession to her daughter's claims, Wanda issues an inclusive directive, thus assuming an equal position with her mother. This in turn receives compliance from Florene, who thus ratifies her daughter's re-definition of the relationship.

In the preceding extract, the daughter's mitigated directives eventually receive compliance. By contrast, in the following extract from *Avenue*, Olga's commands are ineffective:

**example (11): Avenue**

279 MOTHER (*Looks around, spots the few papers in book*  
280 *on table, takes them out, gets up, begins to*  
281 *read.*) Last night I dreamed I was on an island  
282 and had my, let's see, this is a fancy word.  
> 283 OLGA (*Rising.*) Give me that!  
284 MOTHER (*Continues to read.*) Governess Tina watching  
285 me (*Olga tries to grab paper from her, as*  
286 *chase begins around kitchen table.*) and she  
287 told me I was going to be a leader, maybe of  
288 the world and a great piano player. (*Throws*

289                    *that paper to her.*) For three nights—

> 290 OLGA            Give it to me, you—

291 MOTHER        (*Ignoring her, continuing.*) For three nights

292                    I have been having the same dream. I dreamed I

293                    was at a fancy ball.

294 OLGA            (*Looks around. She is trying to think of a*

295                    *way to get these papers back. She spots the*

296                    *whiskey bottle.*)

297                    And all the men asked me to dance at the same

298                    time—

299 OLGA            (*Crosses to bureau, takes whiskey bottle,*

300                    *turns to Mother, threatens to spill it out.*)

301 MOTHER        (*Goes over to her, grabs the bottle away from*

302                    *her and gives her writing back to her.*)

At the beginning of this fragment, Mother takes out Olga's personal notes and reads them without asking. In line 283, Olga opposes her with an imperative, demanding that she give back the papers. Apart from the aggravated format of her turn, the adversative character of her utterance is highlighted by the increase in volume and her non-verbal reaction. But Mother ignores her demand and goes on reading, thus signalling her refusal to comply with her mother's command, and the two women end up chasing each other round the kitchen table, with Olga reasserting her prior command (line 290) and Mother ignoring her, continuing to read. In terms of Rogers & Farace's (1975) relational-control coding system, Mother's reaction qualifies as a "disconfirmation." This move suggests an ignoring of other, that is, not just a disagreement with what was said, but rather a denial or negation of the other's right even to attempt to define the relationship (cf. also Bilmes (1997) on the potential functions of ignoring). That is to say, in ignoring her daughter's demand, Mother not only rejects Olga's attempt at controlling her behaviour, but also challenges the assumption of superiority underlying her imperatives. Thus, while the daughter obviously has access to aggravated directives as a discursive resource, her imperatives prove ineffective: Mother does not comply with her commands and return the papers until she takes more radical measures and threatens to spill out her whiskey (lines 299-302). This episode

shows that although underlying social relations of power and status do not necessarily determine the actions that are available to speakers, they may well affect the kinds of responses they receive as well as the outcomes of those actions in the ensuing talk.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the design and sequencing of directives and their responses in this extract displays the participants' joint construction of social organisation in conflict interaction.

The interactional process of status or relationship negotiation in and through dispute talk via the usage and formatting of directives and their responses is even more obvious in the following extract, in which Florene and Wanda both draw on meta-communicative imperatives to accomplish opposition and both challenge each other's use of this very device:

**example (12): Alto II, 4**

- 17 HATTIE Ola Belle's always looking for an excuse to  
18 kill one, ain't she? Well, I tell you, I think  
19 it serves her right for living in sin. Them  
20 blistered feet's just a foretaste of what's  
21 coming when she goes to hell.
- > 22 WANDA Shut up!
- 23 FLORENE Wanda, who do you think you're talking to?
- > 24 WANDA Everybody. I want everybody to stop saying  
25 mean things about Miz Lockwood.
- 26 ETHYL Oh, Honey, I didn't mean to be criticizing  
29 her. I just wish I'd ever met such an exciting  
30 man. I never knew one that was a bit of fun.
- 31 OLA BELLE He sure sounds like a barrel of laughs.
- > 32 WANDA Shut your gossipin' old-lady mouths!
- > 33 FLORENE Wanda, you bridle your tongue right now, and  
34 apologize to everybody for being rude.
- 35 WANDA No! I will not!
- 36 FLORENE Wanda, you heard me.
- 37 WANDA I won't say something just because you want  
38 me to. It is gossip, because Miz Lockwood  
39 wouldn't act that way. And I won't take back  
40 what I said.
- ((The argument terminates with Althea Lockwood entering the stage.))

Florene's and Wanda's landlady Hattie, their elderly neighbour Ethyl, Florene's sister Ola Belle and Florene are gossiping about Wanda's music teacher Althea Lockwood, who has recently been dumped by her boy friend. In line 22, Wanda opposing Hattie's utterance (and presumably also the preceding gossip about Ms Lockwood) with an aggravated meta-communicative directive, telling her (and presumably the other women present) to "Shut up!" In the following turn, Florene challenges her with an accusatory question ("Wanda, who do you think you're talking to?" line 23), implying that Wanda's activity is inadmissible on account of the addressees' social identities. As discussed above, one of the preconditions for a valid directive is that the speaker who issues the imperative has the right to tell the addressee to perform the requested action. By implying that Wanda has addressed her imperative to people who are in a superior position, Florene argues with this precondition, and thus rejects Wanda's utterance as inappropriate. Moreover, by means of the interrogative syntax, she obliges Wanda to account for her offensive behaviour in the next turn. However, Wanda treats Florene's interrogative as a genuine request for information. She produces an answer ("Everybody." line 26), and then reasserts her prior claim, this time in the form of a declarative sentence: "I want everybody to stop saying mean things about Miz Lockwood" (lines 24-25). The use of desire statements (Ervin Tripp 1982: 30) has been argued to constitute a relatively aggravated way of formulating a directive (Garvey 1975: 52, 60; Ervin Tripp 1976: 29) and has been shown to be primarily directed downward to subordinates (Ervin-Tripp 1977: 166-167). Thus, by designing her utterance in this way, Wanda assumes a position vis-à-vis the other women, which allows her to censure their behaviour. And a few lines later, in reaction to Ethyl's account (lines 26-30) and Ola Belle's comment on Ms Lockwood's former boy friend (line 31), Wanda recycles and escalates her initial imperative (line 32). Her raised voice in combination with the derogative phrase "gossipin' old-lady mouths" aggravates opposition. This time, Florene opposes her with a meta-communicative directive, commanding her to apologise to all those present "for being rude" (lines 33-34). By construing Wanda's activity as "rude", Florene's utterance functions as an accusation. In addition, the imperative argues for Florene's position of authority that licenses

her to regulate her daughter's behaviour. Furthermore, by explicitly obliging her to produce an apology, it constrains Wanda's freedom of action, and thus, presents an attempt at exercising control. Yet, rather than produce the requested apology, Wanda rejects her mother's directive with an aggravated and unaccounted refusal ("No! I will not!" line 35), thereby further escalating the dispute. However, Florene insists on her prior command and issues a prompt (Burton 1980), reinforcing her preceding directive and demanding immediate compliance ("Wanda, you heard me" line 36). Again, Wanda refuses to comply. She opposes her mother's directives by challenging the underlying assumption that Florene has the right to tell her what to do, and that she is obliged to comply with Florene's commands: "I won't say something just because you want me to." (lines 37-38), and then explicitly rejects her mother's command: "I won't take back what I said" (lines 39-40).

To sum up, in this example, the mother's attempts at regulating her daughter's behaviour by means of imperatives are unsuccessful. This shows that even though directives can be employed as a powerful interactive resource, they are not necessarily always successful. It also again illustrates that social order and status are actively (re-)established through talk rather than being static social categories. It demonstrates that being a less powerful participant in terms of social status does not mean a speaker cannot resist another's control manoeuvres (e.g. by challenging and/or rejecting their commands) or even turn the tables and take up a potentially powerful discursive position in the local context of the interaction (e.g. by issuing commands herself). In other words, this extract clearly shows that power is not something fixed, not something a speaker possesses but a dynamic relationship that has to be constantly negotiated in the local context of the interaction. It also demonstrates that the dynamics of power relationships is most obvious in the open clash of power and resistance in the action of the ongoing talk, i.e. in the interplay of control manoeuvres and opposition moves in episodes of dispute.

To conclude, in this section, I have examined the argumentative use of directives, that is, oppositional moves by which a speaker attempts to get the addressee to do or refrain from doing something. As the preceding analysis has shown, as argumentative devices,

directives accomplish a range of functions, operating at various levels of interaction. Firstly, they treat the opponent's prior activity as an arguable action and thus achieve opposition. They can be used to challenge various aspects of the opponent's (non-)verbal behaviour as well as her alignment with the speaker or her position as displayed therein. Furthermore, directives are attempts to influence some aspect of the recipient's future behaviour. From a structural perspective, they make specific second pair parts conditionally relevant, i.e. following a directive, compliance is the structurally preferred response. In sum, directives have both a retrospective function (challenging the opponent's preceding activity) and a prospective function (determining the opponent's subsequent action). At the interpersonal level of interaction, directives pose a threat to the addressee's negative face, as they are potentially harmful to her autonomy. In demanding that the addressee perform (or refrain from) performing some activity they put some pressure on the addressee to comply. Thus, directives are control manoeuvres, forcing the other to respond under certain conditions. However, although directives present a potent interactional resource that disputants may effectively exploit both to express opposition and to exert control over the opponent's activities, the preceding analyses have shown that they may also be successfully challenged and/or resisted. Moreover, we have seen that the linguistic form of directives in my data ranges from interrogatives to declaratives to imperatives, both negatively and positively formulated. Their packaging contributes to their degree of mitigation and aggravation, and displays the speaker's perception of her position vis-à-vis the recipient. Speakers may use specific forms of directives not mainly to effect actual behaviour change but rather to test and make assertions about relative positions among participants. By packaging a directive as an imperative, a speaker may assume a superior position in relation to the addressee, which authorises her to control the other's behaviour. Aggravated directives thus provide an interactional resource with which speakers may attempt not only to regulate others' actions but also to define a position of relative superiority over recipients. By contrast, mitigated directives such as information and permission requests display deference towards the addressee and permit options

in the way in which the recipient should respond. By looking at the form and sequencing of directive-response sequences I have examined how within the mother-daughter dyad the social order of the moment is formulated, refuted, and reconstituted in the course of the ongoing conflict interaction, thus exploring the interplay of conflict and power/control. As the preceding discussion has shown, although directives are a discursive resource which is in principle accessible to all speakers, whether they are employed successfully still depends on contextual factors such as the participants' social roles and the related rights and obligations. That is to say, while social relations of power do not automatically determine the actions that speakers have at their disposal, they may still have an impact on the effects of those actions in the subsequent talk. In addition, the preceding analysis evidences (once more) that power is not a static social category but a dynamic relationship that is constantly negotiated in and through talk-in-interaction. It also shows that the dynamics of power is most obvious in the open clash of control manoeuvres and resistance in verbal conflict sequences. It demonstrates that participants actively negotiate their relationships in and through (conflict) talk, and, by the same token, that dispute represents a fruitful site for the analysis of the ways in which participants jointly (re-)construct and transform social order and their status with respect to one another, for instance through the formatting and sequencing of directives and their responses.

#### 7.4 Demands for explanation

Another way in which disputants can challenge an opponent's prior activity is by questioning the opponent's grounds for making the claim she is making. This can be done by means of oppositional moves that I will term 'demands for explanation.' Demands for explanation are a class of utterances that question the basis for the prior speaker's claim and request that she provide a reason for it. In my data, demands for explanation tend to be produced immediately following the opponent's prior turn or in overlap with it.<sup>54</sup> They typically have the syntactic form of an interrogative containing question particles such as "When," "What," "Who," "Why," "Where" and "How."

In producing a demand for explanation, a speaker challenges an opponent's prior activity demanding that she provide a substantial reason or evidence for his or her claim, while suggesting that she cannot do so. This argumentative device can be employed to challenge various kinds of activities on the part of an opponent. For instance, in the following extract from *My sister*, Madame Danzard counters her daughter's preceding assertion by requesting her to produce evidence for her claim that veal "ruins the complexion":

**example (1): My sister 3**

- 23 MADAME DANZARD (*Savouring the veal.*) This veal is  
24 delicious.  
25 ISABELLE Of course, you love veal. (*She looks at*  
26 *her mother.*)  
27 MADAME DANZARD Don't you?  
28 ISABELLE You know I don't. It's too heavy in the  
29 middle of the day.  
30 MADAME DANZARD Not the way she's prepared it. Light as  
31 a feather.  
32 ISABELLE I've heard it ruins the complexion.  
> 33 MADAME DANZARD Where did you hear that?  
34 ISABELLE I read it.  
> 35 MADAME DANZARD (*Scornfully.*) Really. Where?  
36 ISABELLE Somewhere. I don't remember.  
37 MADAME DANZARD Certain days of the month, my dear, you  
38 really are worse than others.

Madame Danzard and her daughter Isabelle are having veal for lunch. When Isabelle claims that veal is "too heavy in the middle of the day" (lines 28-29), her mother contradicts her (lines 30-31) and an argument ensues. In response to her mother's disagreement, Isabelle issues a counter-assertion, claiming that she has heard that veal "ruins the complexion" (line 32). In the next turn, Madame Danzard challenges her daughter's assertion, requesting her to provide evidence for her claim: "Where did you hear that?" (line 33). When Isabelle replies that she read it (line 34), her mother challenges her once more, demanding her to substantiate her claim ("Where?" line 35). Madame Danzard initiates her turn with the acknowledgement token "Really," which is delivered in a scornful tone of voice (as indicated by the stage directions). Moreover, it is immediately followed by a demand for explanation. Both the intonation contour and the sequential placement of the acknowledgement token suggest that it expresses sarcasm rather than interest in or surprise at what Isabelle has just said. Thus, the preface conveys Madame Danzard's critical stance towards her daughter's assertion and signals right at the beginning of the turn that disagreement is going to follow. In the next turn, Isabelle responds to her mother's question with the evasive statement: "Somewhere. I don't remember." (line 36). Although she provides the required response, her reply indicates that (as suggested by her mother's recurrent demands for evidence) she cannot, in fact, supply concrete proof of her prior claim. In response, Madame Danzard issues an utterance that displays her construal of Isabelle's conduct as both irritating and quarrelsome, by claiming that her daughter's present behaviour is particularly bad (line 37-38).

To recapitulate, as an argumentative move, Madame Danzard's demands for explanation accomplish two things: Firstly, they challenge the validity of Isabelle's previous utterances by requesting evidence for her claims. Secondly, by means of the interrogative structure, they oblige Isabelle to resume the floor and offer an account for the relevance of her remark - which she does in the respective subsequent turns (lines 34 and 36). This floor-returning property is an important argumentative feature of demands for explanation. By challenging the validity of Isabelle's assertions and forcing her to provide evidence for her claims,

Madame Danzard successfully manages to control her daughter's activities. Thus, demands for explanation represent a powerful argumentative resource that disputants can effectively employ to exert control over the other's next action, i.e. to exercise discursive power.

The following extract from *'night Mother* illustrates another format that is used in my data to realise demands for explanation:

**example (2): 'night Mother**

695 JESSIE Mama, I know you used to ride the bus. Riding  
696 the bus and it's hot and bumpy and crowded and  
697 too noisy and more than anything in the world  
698 you want to get off and the only reason in the  
699 world you don't get off is it's still 50 blocks  
700 from where you're going? Well, I can get off  
701 right now if I want to, because even if I ride  
702 50 more years and get off then, it's the same  
703 place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel  
704 like it, I can get off. As soon as I've had  
705 enough, it's my stop. I've had enough.  
706 MAMA You're feeling sorry for yourself!  
707 JESSIE The plumber's helper is under the sink, too.  
708 MAMA You're not having a good time! Whoever promised  
709 you a good time? Do you think I've had a good  
710 time?  
711 JESSIE I think you're pretty happy, yeah. You have  
712 things you like to do.  
> 713 MAMA Like what?  
714 JESSIE Like crochet.  
715 MAMA I'll teach you to crochet.  
716 JESSIE I can't do any of that nice work, Mama.

At the beginning of this sequence, Jessie tries to explain to her mother why she has decided to kill herself (lines 695-705). Following her daughter's account, Mama says "You're feeling sorry for yourself!" (line 706). With this turn she selectively formulates the upshot of Jessie's prior utterance thereby glossing her daughter's stance in a single sentence. This practice, termed "formulating" by Garfinkel & Sacks (1970) and Heritage & Watson

(1979, 1980), has been described by Heritage (1985: 100) as "summarizing, glossing, or developing the gist of an informant's earlier statements." While it is common in institutionalised, audience-directed interaction such as courtroom interaction (cf. Atkinson & Drew 1979), classroom interaction (cf. Edwards 1976), news interviews (cf. Heritage 1985) and talk radio shows (cf. Hutchby 1996a), it is relatively rare in ordinary conversation.<sup>55</sup> In the following paragraph, I will examine which functions this device has in the preceding exchange.

According to Heritage & Watson (1979: 138), "the primary business of formulations is to demonstrate understanding and, presumptively, to have that understanding attended to and, as a first preference, endorsed." That is to say, by producing a formulation, Mama both displays her interpretation of Jessie's prior utterance and invites her to confirm this interpretation in the following turn. This sequential aspect of her formulation can be explained by drawing on some observations by Labov & Fanshel (1977) concerning "shared knowledge." They have suggested that all statements in a two-party conversation can be classified according to the shared knowledge involved as A-events (known to speaker A, but not to speaker B), B-events (known to speaker B, but not to speaker A), AB-events (known to both speaker a and B), and D-events (known to be disputable). A-events are those that typically concern speaker A's emotions, her daily experience in other contexts, elements in his or her past biography, and so on. (By the same token, B-events are those that have to do with speaker B's emotions, experience, biography, etc.) From this classification, they derive the following rule of interpretation of discourse: "If A makes a statement about B-events, then it is heard as a request for confirmation" (100).

Accordingly, by making a statement about Jessie's emotions, Mama presents information that is originally and primarily known to Jessie (i.e. a B-event). In so doing, Mama's formulation invites Jessie to confirm her understanding of her daughter's preceding utterance in the subsequent turn. Hence, as a communicative strategy, Mama's formulation accomplishes several things: Firstly, in summarising the gist of Jessie's prior talk, it displays Mama's interpretation of her daughter's utterance and requests Jessie to

validate this interpretation in the next turn. By this means, it both maintains Jessie's emotions as its topic and picks them out as the focus for Jessie's next turn. By requesting Jessie to confirm her mother's construal of her utterance in the subsequent turn, Mama's formulation serves to constrain her daughter's freedom of action. Therefore, it presents a control manoeuvre, i.e. an attempt at exercising power at the structural level of interaction. In addition, by summing up the gist of Jessie's utterance and obliging her to confirm that summary, Mama tries to impose her interpretation on Jessie's utterance, thus attempting to exert control over the content of the ongoing talk. As a result, we can say that Mama's formulation represents a communicative resource with which she tries to exercise a degree of discursive power at both the structural and the content level of the ongoing interaction.

However, instead of confirming (or rejecting) her mother's formulation, Jessie tries to turn the conversation to the subject of household utensils (line 707). But Mama does not let her change the topic and begins her next turn with another formulation of her daughter's original utterance: "You're not having a good time!" (line 708). By this means she maintains the issue of Jessie's state of mind as the focus of the ongoing conversation over one more turn at talk, while simultaneously requesting Jessie to validate her interpretation in the next turn. However, rather than waiting for Jessie's response, Mama immediately follows her formulation with an interrogative: "Whoever promised you a good time?" (lines 708-709). She presumes that her understanding of Jessie's utterance, which is conveyed by her formulation (namely, that Jessie is "not having a good time"), is correct and goes on to challenge Jessie on the basis of this presumption: By asking "Whoever promised you a good time?", Mama challenges her daughter by means of questioning a presupposition that she proposes is implied in Jessie's prior talk, namely that she expected to have "a good time," and demands her to account for this presupposition. This second component of Mama's turn resembles an oppositional strategy that Gruber (2001) has observed in TV discussions. He describes "implicit opposition questions," by means of which speakers "provide opponents with unfavourable interpretations of their points of view and establish an obligation for the opponent to make explicit his/her position

towards these interpretations" (1835). By using this argumentative device, Mama presents Jessie with her understanding of Jessie's utterance as involving an unwarranted claim and obliges her to take up a stance towards this understanding. Thus, Mama employs formulations, which present her interpretation of Jessie's prior utterance, as argumentative moves to take issue with Jessie's preceding activity and, at the same time, force Jessie to attend to Mama's reconstruction of her position. However, once again, Mama does not wait for Jessie to provide a response, but instead issues another interrogative: "Do you think I've had a good time?" (lines 709-710). By this means, she explicitly requests that Jessie put forward a position on the matter in question that can then be criticised. This part of Mama's turn thus functions as a second position question (as described above) by which the opponent is required to expand on or account for the challenged claim. If Jessie answers Mama's question by taking a stance on her mother's emotional state, Mama is then in a position to challenge that stance and Jessie is forced to build a defence.

In fact, this is precisely what happens as the conversation proceeds. In response to her mother's question, Jessie offers her view of Mama's state of mind, asserting "I think you're pretty happy, yeah. You have things you like to do." (lines 711-712). This allows Mama to oppose her daughter's argument by demanding that she provide evidence for her claim rather than by arguing for an alternative position. In line 713, by saying "Like what?", Mama challenges Jessie's assertion not by putting forward a counter-position or openly disagreeing with it but by requesting her to offer proof of her claim, which she does in the subsequent turn ("Like crochet." line 714). The sequence ends with Jessie rejecting Mama's subsequent offer to teach her to crochet (line 715) by claiming that she "can't do any of that nice work" (line 716).

In the two preceding examples, demands for explanation are used to challenge the prior speaker's utterance. As the following fragment illustrates, disputants can also draw on this argumentative device to counter an opponent's non-verbal activity. In the extract from *'night Mother* below, Mama first challenges Jessie's cleaning the gun by requesting her to provide an explanation for her

behaviour (line 182), and then counters her response with another demand for explanation (line 185):

**example (3): 'night Mother**

165 JESSIE (*Is cleaning the gun, pushing the cylinder out,*  
166 *checking to see that the chambers and barrel*  
*are*  
167 *empty, then putting some oil on a small patch*  
*of*  
168 *cloth and pushing it through the barrel with the*  
*push rod that was in the box.*)  
170 MAMA (*Goes to the kitchen and washes her hands, as*  
171 *instructed, trying not to show her concern*  
*about*  
172 *the gun.*) I shoulda got you to bring down that  
173 milk can. Agnes Fletcher sold hers to somebody  
174 with a flea market for forty dollars apiece.  
175 JESSIE I'll go back and get it in a minute. There's a  
176 wagon wheel up there too. There's even a churn.  
177 I'll get it all if you want.  
178 MAMA (*Coming over now, taking over now.*)  
> 179 What are you doing?  
180 JESSIE The barrel has to be clean, Mama. Old powder,  
181 dust gets in it...  
> 182 MAMA What for?  
183 JESSIE I told you.  
184 MAMA (*Reaching for the gun.*) And I told you, we  
don't  
185 get criminals out here.  
186 JESSIE (*Quickly pulling it to her.*) And I told you...  
187 (*Then trying to be calm.*) The gun is for me.

Prior to this exchange, Jessie has fetched her father's old shotgun from the attic, and is now cleaning it (lines 165-169). After a brief intermediary sequence about some of the objects that are in the attic (lines 170-177), Mama approaches Jessie with the interrogative "What are you doing?" (line 179). While this turn might be heard as a simple request for information, the above sequence displays several features that go against such an

interpretation. Firstly, as Burton (1980: 152) has pointed out, one of the preconditions for an utterance to be heard as a valid request for information is that the speaker who addresses an interrogative to a hearer requesting her to provide a linguistic response concerning a question X does not know X. Since Mama perfectly well knows that Jessie is cleaning the gun, her question does not meet this precondition. Rather it seems to serve as a challenge which obliges Jessie to account for her activity in the subsequent turn. In fact, Jessie responds by providing an explanation for her cleaning the gun: "The barrel has to be clean, Mama. Old powder, dust gets in it ..." (lines 180-181). Hence, instead of an innocuous request for information, Mama's turn can be treated as an oppositional move by means of which she demands that Jessie provide a reason for her activity in the subsequent turn.

In reaction to Jessie's explanation, Mama issues another interrogative: "What for?" (line 182). With this turn, she indicates that she does not accept her daughter's response as a satisfactory explanation for her activity and at the same time forces her to elaborate on her account and disclose her underlying motive for cleaning the gun, thus trying to constrain Jessie's freedom of action. Accordingly, her utterance represents a control manoeuvre, i.e. an attempt to exercise power. Moreover, the interruptive placement of her turn serves to intensify opposition and to indicate interpersonal involvement. In response to her mother's repeated demands for explanation, Jessie at first refers to a statement she made earlier in the conversation, namely that she needs the gun for protection against criminals: "I told you." (line 183). When Mama insists that there are no criminals around (lines 184-185), she eventually discloses that she needs the gun for herself (line 187).

To sum up, by repeatedly questioning the reason for Jessie's activity and requesting her to provide an explanation for her behaviour, Mama successfully manages to pressure her daughter into revealing her real motivation for cleaning the gun, thereby constraining Jessie's freedom of action. In other words, she effectively uses demands for explanation as an oppositional strategy to control her daughter's activities, i.e. to exercise discursive power.

In the extracts above, the disputants employ demands for explanation as a discursive resource to challenge the prior speaker's assertion or non-verbal activity by requesting them to provide a reason for their claim or behaviour. By contrast, in the examples below, demands for explanation are used following directives to query the opponent's reason for making a request.

**example (4): Alto I, 2**

*(The sound of a car stopping outside... A car door slams.)*

46 FLORENE *(Looking out door.)* Now I want you to  
47 straighten up, Wanda. Somebody's coming to the  
48 door. And she drives a convertible.  
49 *(ALTHEA LOCKWOOD enters porch area. She is a*  
50 *pretty, dramatic woman in her late twenties.*  
51 *She wears the apricot taffeta dress described*  
52 *earlier by WANDA. FLORENE hurriedly tries to*  
53 *tidy up things.)*

54 WANDA *(Keeps on writing.)*  
55 *(ALTHEA knocks at their door.)*

56 FLORENE *(Calls.)* Just a minute! Wanda, put your shoes  
57 on.

> 58 WANDA What for? What's so hot about this old lady?  
59 FLORENE *(Swatting at her legs as she goes to the door)*  
60 You mind me, Wanda! *(Opens door.)* Hello, Miz  
61 Lockwood. Come on in. I just finished your  
62 ironing.  
63 *(WANDA's jaw drops as she hears the name of*  
64 *her music teacher and looks up to see her. She*  
65 *would flee, but realizes it is too late. She*  
66 *is scrambling to put on her shoes and*  
67 *straighten her hair and clothes as ALTHEA*  
68 *LOCKWOOD sweeps in.)*

This episode begins with Florene addressing a directive to Wanda, telling her to "straighten up" (lines 46-47). As discussed above, directives are communicative activities that serve to get the addressee to do (or stop doing) something. Following directives compliance is the structurally preferred response. Therefore, by

issuing a directive Florene impedes Wanda's freedom of action by obliging her to respond under certain conditions. Her directive thus presents a control manoeuvre. The use of "desire statements" (Ervin Tripp 1982: 30), has been argued to constitute a relatively aggravated way of formulating a directive (Garvey 1975: 52, 60; Ervin Tripp 1976: 29) and has been shown to be primarily directed downward to subordinates (Ervin-Tripp 1977: 166-167). Thus, by designing her utterance in this way, Florene proposes a superior social status vis-à-vis Wanda, and vice versa, her daughter's inferior position with respect to her. Subsequently, however, she adds a supporting assertion, which accounts for her request ("Somebody is coming to the door. And she drives a convertible." lines 47-48) and thus moderates the imposition of her command.<sup>56</sup> However, instead of providing the required response, Wanda ignores Florene's request and continues her prior activity (line 54), thus signalling her refusal to comply with her mother's directive.<sup>57</sup> As a reaction to Wanda's disagreement-implicative silence, Florene makes use of a more aggravated format, and issues an imperative specifying her prior claim (lines 56-57).<sup>58</sup> This is challenged by Wanda in the subsequent turn with an interrogative that demands that Florene provide a reason for her request ("What for? What's so hot about this old lady?" line 58). As an oppositional strategy, this turn achieves several things: Firstly, it brings into play one of the preconditions for valid requests for action, namely that a speaker requesting an addressee to perform an action presumes that there is a need to carry out this action (cf. Labov & Fanshel 1977: 78). By producing a demand for explanation in the form of an interrogative, Wanda questions the assumption that there is a need to perform the requested action (i.e. to "straighten up" and "put on her shoes"), thereby putting off her mother's request. In addition, by questioning the grounds for her mother's directive, she obliges Florene to take the floor again and provide a reason for her request in the subsequent turn. Instead of producing the required explanation, however, Florene reacts by swatting at Wanda's legs and exclaiming "You mind me, Wanda!" (line 60). Her response construes Wanda's activity as unacceptable, implying that she has contravened some standard of conduct for daughters, which obliges them to comply with their mothers' requests. In addition, it indicates her

indignation and expresses a threat (cf. below) to punish Wanda if she does not obey. But although it enables her to counter her daughter's demand for explanation and thus resist being controlled, in another sense, Florene's threat proves ineffective: Wanda does not comply with her mother's request until she realises that the visitor whom Florene was announcing is her music teacher. This sequence shows that demands for explanation provide a communicative resource that can be effectively employed by disputants to refuse to comply with requests and, thus, to reject another's control attempt.

In the following extract from *My sister*, Madame Danzard challenges her daughter's request by compelling her to provide a reason for her claim.

**example (5): My sister 14**

35 MADAME DANZARD Maybe they're upstairs. I'm going up  
36 there this minute.  
37 ISABELLE Maman- wait.  
> 38 MADAME DANZARD Wait? What for?  
39 ISABELLE I don't think you should.  
40 MADAME DANZARD This is my house. Of course I'm going  
41 upstairs. Right now. (*She starts up the*  
42 *stairs.*) You don't have to come if you  
43 don't want to.  
44 ISABELLE (*Follows her slowly.*)

Madame Danzard and her daughter Isabelle have just returned from shopping. When their maids do not turn up to help them put away the purchases, Madame Danzard wants to check whether they are upstairs in their room (lines 35-36). When Isabelle asks her to wait (line 37) Madame Danzard challenges her request with a demand for explanation (line 38). She begins her turn by repeating Olga's prior utterance ("Wait?"), producing it with rising intonation. As noted earlier, (partial) repetition of the prior speaker's talk is frequently used as a preface to begin oppositional moves. It signals right at the beginning of the turn that disagreement is going to follow, and also conveys a particular affective reaction to what the other has just said. By prefacing her turn with a repetition of her daughter's utterance, Madame Danzard displays her surprise at

Isabelle's request, portraying it as unexpected. Immediately following the opposition preface, Madame Danzard produces another interrogative, demanding that Isabelle provide a reason for her request: "What for?" In response, Isabelle tells her mother that she does not consider it a good idea to go the maids' room (line 39). However, Madame Danzard refutes her daughter's objection, claiming that, being the owner of the house, she has the right to go upstairs (line 40-41).

As the two preceding examples have shown, demands for explanation provide an argumentative resource that disputants can employ to challenge the opponent's request without explicitly refusing to comply with it.<sup>59</sup> This oppositional strategy makes it possible for the speaker to challenge the validity of the opponent's directive by querying his or her reason making the request while simultaneously obliging him or her to take the floor again and provide an explanation for the challenged claim. In so doing, demands for explanation enable the speaker to resist the opponent's prior control manoeuvre (i.e. request for action) and at the same time to attempt to control the opponent's next action.

By challenging the validity of Isabelle's request and forcing her to provide evidence for her claim, Madame Danzard successfully manages to resist being controlled by her daughter's directive while simultaneously exerting control over Isabelle's subsequent activity. Thus, demands for explanation represent a powerful argumentative resource that can be effectively employed by disputants both to resist being constrained by the opponent's control manoeuvres and to exert control over their next activity by limiting their freedom of action. This does not mean, however, that opponents are incapable of offering resistance to a speaker's demand for explanation. As the preceding extract from *Alto* has shown, disputants can counter-oppose the prior speaker's demand for explanation, for instance, by means of contesting the activity's appropriateness or legitimacy. By challenging the suitability of Wanda's activity rather than providing the required explanation, Florene rejects her daughter's demand for explanation and thereby resist being controlled.

In the preceding paragraphs, by looking at the sequential aspects of directives and demands for explanation, I have examined how demands for explanation can be employed by disputants as a

discursive resource both to oppose the interlocutor's prior control manoeuvre and to attempt to control her following activity, thus exploring the intersection of conflict and power.

Demands for explanation can also be used to query the interlocutor's reason for failing to comply with the speaker's prior request, as the following extract from *Tell me* illustrates:

**example (6): Tell me**

285 DAUGHTER Can I?  
286 MOTHER No.  
> 287 DAUGHTER Why not?  
288 MOTHER Because.  
> 289 DAUGHTER Because why?  
290 MOTHER Because you're only 12-years-old, that's why.  
(dispute continues)

The sequence starts with the daughter producing an interrogative, asking her mother for permission to join her friends in some free-time activity ("Can I?" line 285). According to Ervin-Tripp (1977: 166-167), such "permission directives" are usually addressed upward in rank. That means, by designing her activity in this way, the daughter expresses deference thus showing an orientation to her mother's superior social status.<sup>60</sup> In the next turn, Mother rejects her daughter's request with an outright refusal: "No." (line 286). Her turn, too, displays an orientation to the fact that she is in a position of authority in relation to her daughter, which allows her to refuse her daughter's request without accounting for her refutation. Up to this point in the interaction, then, both participants can be seen to jointly (re-)produce an underlying power differential in the ongoing talk. However, in the subsequent turn, the daughter challenges her mother's refusal by demanding that she provide a reason for her negative response: "Why not?" (line 287). In response, Mother offers an account for her rejection, albeit a quite imprecise one: "Because." (line 288). Again, her turn indicates her orientation to her social role as a mother, which authorises her to withhold or grant permission without being obliged to account for her reactions. Yet, in the next turn, the daughter challenges her again by saying "Because why?" (line 289). Her turn

displays her construal of her mother's response as unsatisfactory and demands Mother to take the floor again and expand on her account providing a more elaborate explanation for why she refuses to comply with her daughter's request. In fact, this is what Mother does in the subsequent turn by saying "Because you're only 12-years-old, that's why" (line 290).

Exchanges such as the above are highly formulaic for both children and parents.<sup>61</sup> Arguments between parents and children typically entail sequences such as C: "Why?" - P: "Because." - C: "Because why?" - P: "Because I'm your father/mother." or "Because you're just n years old." The preceding spate of talk thus portrays the classical parent-child argument and characterises the participants' underlying social relationship, which is (re-)constructed in and through conventionalised (and probably ritualised) forms of conversational interaction.

In addition, this fragment clearly illustrates that power is a multi-dimensional phenomenon: At one level, by virtue of her social role, the mother is in a position of authority that allows her to refuse her daughter's request, i.e. to ensure her own freedom of action while at the same time limiting her daughter's freedom of action. At another level, however, by employing demands for explanation, which oblige her mother to account for her refusal, the daughter constrains her mother's freedom of action, i.e. exerts discursive power over her. This demonstrates that relations of power are constantly actively (re-)produced (or challenged) through talk rather than being imposed by exterior social structures. However, the example also shows that, although by using demands for explanation the daughter exerts a degree of discursive power at the structural level of interaction, whether her initial permission directive ultimately gains the mother's compliance still depends on contextual factors such as the participants' respective social roles and the related rights and obligations.

As the preceding discussion has shown, demands for explanation are argumentative moves that enable speakers to challenge the opponent's prior action without explicitly disagreeing with it, by demanding that she provide an explanation or evidence for the activity or claim in question. They can be used to challenge a variety of activities such as assertions, accusations, directives,

and refusals to comply with the speaker's preceding request. Demands for explanation are commonly realised by interrogatives containing question words such as "Where did you hear that?"; "Like what?"; "What for?"; "Why not?"; etc. This oppositional strategy enables the speaker to challenge the validity of the opponent's prior activity by querying his or her reason for making the claim they are making while simultaneously obliging her to resume floor and provide an explanation for or proof of the challenged activity or claim.

This floor-returning property is a central argumentative characteristic of demands for explanation when they stand on their own in a turn. Like the freestanding relevance challenges discussed above, these moves function as second position questions by which the opponent is required to account for the challenged activity. By obliging the opponent to offer a reason for their prior claim or behaviour the speaker tries to limit the other's freedom of action. Thus, demands for explanation represent another powerful argumentative resource that disputants can effectively employ to exert control over the other's next action, i.e. to exercise discursive power at the structural level of interaction.

Moreover, with regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, demands for explanation that stand on their own in a turn represent face-threatening acts that threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. On the one hand, they threaten the addressee's positive face wants by questioning the legitimacy of her prior activity. In addition, they present a threat to the addressee's negative face by impeding her freedom of action, since they put the recipient in a position to account for the activity in question. Therefore, freestanding demands for explanation provide an argumentative resource available to speakers that they may exploit to exercise interactional power over others at the micro-level of interaction by impeding their freedom of action.

Similar argumentative moves have been observed in non-scripted conflict talk. For instance, in their study of role-played arguments between children Brenneis & Lein (1977) describe "demands for evidence" such as "Prove it." or "How do you know?", which are requests for proof or evidence from the opponent for her preceding argument. Similarly, Eisenberg & Garvey (1981) discuss "requests for explanation" (e.g. "Why?"), which are used in children's disputes to

elicit a reason or justification for an opponent's preceding action or utterance. Muntigl & Turnbull (1998: 230) describe "challenges," by means of which a speaker "questions an addressee's prior claim and demands that addressee provide evidence for his/her claim, while suggesting that the addressee cannot do so." Bliesener (1984: 216) observes oppositional moves like "Beleg-Fordern" and "Details-Einklagen," which are often used in response to accusations. Finally, Spiegel (1995: 185-186) lists "Nachweisforderungen" as types of argumentative activities that are frequently used in naturally-occurring disputes to blockade the progress of the ongoing sequence, for instance by refusing to produce a conditionally relevant response to a preceding first pair part.

While the demands for explanation in the preceding extracts (as well as the phenomena discussed in the above-mentioned studies) are used to oppose the prior speaker's activity without making a specific claim, demands for explanation may also be employed to preface further turn components that offer an alternative position. This is exemplified by the following four extracts:

**example (7): Avenue**

136 MOTHER Now you fix up nice for tonight.  
 > 137 OLGA Why? I've met him before.  
 138 MOTHER This night is special, wear that taffeta dress.

In this segment from *Avenue*, Mother and Olga are arguing about whether Olga has to change her clothes just because Mother's new boyfriend is having dinner with them. The sequence starts with Mother issuing a directive, telling Olga to "fix up nice" for dinner (line 136). However, instead of complying, Olga challenges her mother's request in the next turn. She begins her response with an interrogative ("Why?") that obliges Mother to provide a reason for her demand. In contrast to the preceding examples, however, here "Why?" is a preface to a further component in Olga's turn, which offers an alternative claim. Following the demand for explanation, Olga issues an assertion which challenges the grounds for Mother's request: by saying "I've met him before" (line 137), she brings into play one of the preconditions for valid requests for action, namely that a speaker requesting an addressee to perform an action presumes

that there is a need to perform the action (cf. Labov & Fanshel 1977: 78). By claiming that she has met Mother's boyfriend before, Olga rejects this assumption thereby putting off her mother's request. Thus, while she does not directly refuse to comply with Mother's directive, she argues with Mother's claim by obliging her to provide a reason for her request and proposing an alternative claim that functions to challenge Mother's directive. In response, Mother provides the required reason for her request ("This night is special" line 138) and then renews her prior directive, specifying what she wants Olga to wear.

In the following extract from *Neaptide*, Joyce challenges her daughter's accusation by first requesting Claire to provide evidence for her claim and subsequently producing an assertion, opposing her daughter's complaint:

**example (8): Neaptide I,2**

190 CLAIRE Why do you have to criticise me all the time?  
> 191 JOYCE Me? Criticise? Just what do I criticise you  
193 about?  
194 (*Enter JEAN behind JOYCE.*)  
195 CLAIRE Hi, Jean.  
196 JOYCE Personal cleanliness is the last thing I'd  
197 criticise you for - you can tell that by your  
198 fingernails - spotless. ((...))

The sequence starts with Claire accusing her mother of frequently criticising her (line 190). As noted earlier, by using the extreme formulation "all the time," she formulates Joyce's behaviour as a recurrent violation rather than a random occurrence and thereby legitimises her accusation. In addition, as discussed above, by means of the interrogative format with "Why" her utterance obliges Joyce to offer an account for her offensive behaviour. However, instead of providing the requested account, Joyce challenges her daughter's accusation in the next turn. She initiates her turn with a partial repeat in the form of an interrogative ("Me? Criticise?" line 191), which announces that opposition is going to follow and conveys a particular affective reaction to what Claire has just said. By prefacing her turn with a repetition of her daughter's

utterance, Joyce displays her incredulity at what Claire has just said and portrays her action as inappropriate. In addition, the opposition preface is immediately followed by an interrogative, demanding Claire to provide evidence for her claim ("Just what do I criticise you about?" lines 191-192). But, rather than awaiting Claire's response, Joyce immediately expands on her challenge to Claire's complaint by producing an assertion that functions to counter her daughter's claim ("Personal cleanliness is the last thing I'd criticise you for" lines 196-197). Like "Why?" in the extract above, here the demand for explanation "Just what do I criticise you about?" is used to initiate a turn that challenges the grounds of the opponent's prior claim. Following the demand for evidence, Joyce puts forward a counter-claim that construes Claire's accusation as unfounded.

Similarly, in the extract from *Tell me* below, the daughter's demand for explanation prefaces an alternative claim that disagrees with Mother's assertion:

**example (9): Tell me**

440 MOTHER Oh, my God.  
441 DAUGHTER I'm sorry I told you.  
442 MOTHER Oh, my God.  
443 DAUGHTER Mom, it's not that bad.  
444 MOTHER Not that bad!  
445 DAUGHTER No, it's not that bad. I'm not the only  
446 one. It happens. It happens to lots of  
447 girls.  
448 MOTHER Not to my daughter!  
449 DAUGHTER Look, I'm no different than anyone else.  
450 It could happen to me, and it did. And  
451 anyway, it's nothing so terrible. I'm 21  
452 years old.  
453 MOTHER She says it's nothing so terrible!  
454 DAUGHTER It's not, Mom, not anymore.  
455 MOTHER It's a terrible thing. In the eyes of God  
456 it's a terrible thing, and what will the  
457 neighbors say? Nothing you or any other  
458 smart young person says is going to make it

459                    alright.

> 460 DAUGHTER    How do you know how God looks at things?

461                    Maybe God has grown up, too.

462 MOTHER        What about your father? This is going to

463                    kill him.

Prior to this exchange, the daughter has told her mother that she is pregnant. When Mother expresses shock at the news, the daughter claims that "it's not that bad" (line 443). In line 444, the mother responds by repeating a part of her daughter's preceding utterance ("Not that bad!" line 444), presumably with a falling-rising contour. As discussed above, the use of partial repetition with such an intonation contour signals disagreement and conveys a particular affective reaction (e.g. offence, surprise, or incredulity) to what the other has just said, portraying it as ridiculous or inappropriate. Hence, by repeating a part of her daughter's prior utterance in this a way, Mother displays that she does not share her daughter's opinion on the matter at hand while at the same time expressing disbelief and/or shock at what she has just said. In addition, the raised voice signals high involvement and aggravates opposition.

In reaction to her mother's challenge, the daughter re-asserts her initial position: She repeats her prior utterance and prefaces it with a disagreement token, which serves to affirm her argument: "No, it's not that bad." (line 445). In the remainder of her turn, she offers further support for her view, claiming that she is "not the only one" who got pregnant and that "It happens to a lot of girls." (line 446-447). In the following turn, her mother opposes her again by exclaiming "Not to my daughter!" (line 448). While she implicitly concedes that a lot of girls might unintentionally get pregnant, she claims that the fact that her daughter got pregnant is nevertheless unacceptable. The increase in volume (indicated by the exclamation mark) indicates high involvement and serves to aggravate opposition. The daughter responds with a counter-opposition. She begins her turn with a counter-assertion, claiming that she is "no different than anyone else" (line 449) and that consequently there was a natural probability of her getting pregnant ("It could happen to me, and it did." line 450). She closes her turn by asserting that

considering her age "it's nothing so terrible!" (line 451-452). In the following turn, the mother challenges her daughter's utterance by employing the same strategy as in line 444. By producing a partial repeat of her daughter's prior talk with a falling-rising contour ("She says it's nothing so terrible!" line 453) she expresses disbelief at her daughter's utterance, thereby construing it as inappropriate, while simultaneously displaying her negative attitude towards her daughter's position. Moreover, by prefacing the partial repeat with the verb phrase "She says," in which she refers to her daughter with a third person singular pronoun, Mother seems to conjure up an imaginary audience to which she addresses her utterance and with which she aligns against her daughter. By this means, she is able to both challenge her daughter's utterance and distance herself from her daughter by portraying her as a person who produces such incredible talk. In response to her mother's repeated challenge, the daughter again re-asserts her position by insisting "It's not, Mom, not anymore" (line 454). Apparently, the term of endearment "Mom" as well as the qualifier "not anymore" serve to mitigate opposition, and thus to de-escalate the dispute. However, in line 455, Mother opposes her daughter again, claiming "In the eyes of God it's a terrible thing." This is challenged by her daughter in the subsequent turn with a demand for explanation. In saying "How do you know how God looks at things?" (line 460), the daughter questions her mother's competence to make the assertion she is making, requesting her to provide evidence for her claim. However, instead of waiting for Mother to respond, immediately following the demand for explanation the daughter adds a counter statement ("Maybe God has grown up, too." line 461) rejecting Mother's claim as unfounded. In the subsequent turn, rather than defend her prior position, Mother changes the focus of the talk to the issue of how her husband is going to take the news (lines 462-463).

Like the daughter in the preceding fragment, in the extract from *Alto* below, Florene uses a demand for explanation in the form of "How do you know?" to preface an assertion that explicitly opposes Wanda's prior claim.

**example (10): Alto I,3**

13 FLORENE ((...)) I hope I'm taking enough clothes. I  
14 wonder if I'll need an evening dress.  
15 WANDA (*Uncovers her head.*) You're not going to a  
16 night club!  
> 17 FLORENE How do you know? There's no telling what we'll  
18 do.  
19 WANDA (*Sits up.*) Why can't I come, Mama?

Prior to this fragment, Florene and her daughter have been arguing about whether Wanda can accompany her mother on her visit to her husband. The sequence starts with Florene wondering whether to take an evening dress on the trip (lines 13-14). When Wanda asserts that her parents will not be going to a night club (lines 15-16), Florene challenges Wanda's grounds for her assertion in the next turn. In asking: "How do you know?" (line 17), Florene queries her daughter's justification for making the claim she is making and requires her to offer proof of her assertion. But, instead of waiting for Wanda to respond, immediately following the demand for explanation she adds a counter-assertion ("There's no telling what we'll do." lines 17-18) which explicitly opposes Wanda's claim. In reaction to her mother's challenge, rather than defend her prior claim, Wanda changes the focus of talk, asking Florene why she cannot accompany her (line 19).<sup>62</sup>

As the preceding discussion has shown, disputants can build opposition by utilising a specific second position resource. Demands for explanation such as "What for?", "Like what?", "Why not?", "How do you know?" and so on may be employed to challenge the prior contribution by questioning the grounds or competence for making the claim in question. They can be used to preface further turn components that offer a counter to the opponent's prior activity, for instance by arguing that the claim in question is unfounded. Moreover, they can be employed to challenge the opponent's prior activity without putting forward an alternative position, simply by querying the opponent's reason for doing or saying what she did or said. The crucial aspect of these freestanding demands for evidence is that, apart from questioning the reason for the other's prior activity, they require the opponent to provide an explanation for

the challenged activity, while enabling the speaker to argue without offering an alternative position of her own. By forcing the prior speaker to resume the floor and present a reason for her action in the subsequent turn, demands for explanation that stand on their own in a turn limit the opponent's freedom of action. Hence, freestanding demands for explanation represent attempts at exercising discursive power at the structural level of interaction.

Furthermore, with regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, demands for explanation that stand on their own threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. Firstly, they present a threat to the addressee's positive face wants by questioning the foundation of her prior contribution. In addition, they threaten the addressee's negative face by impeding her freedom of action, since they put the recipient in a position to provide a reason or evidence for the action or claim in question. Therefore, freestanding demands for explanation provide a conversational resource available to speakers that may be exploited to exercise discursive power over others at several levels of the dispute-in-interaction. However, this does not rule out that addressees can offer resistance to a speaker's demand for explanation. As we have seen, recipients can retaliate, for example, by way of disputing the appropriateness of the demand for explanation.

These findings have implications for the study of naturally occurring conflict talk in so far as they reveal underlying knowledge about the workings of argumentative exchanges. As the preceding analyses have shown, the participants in my data do not take an unqualified "No" for an adequate response; nor do they accept an unjustified demand as sufficient grounds for compliance or an unsubstantiated claim as a passable (counter-)argument. Rather, the frequent use of demands for explanation shows that disputants are expected to give an accounting for negative responses, to justify demands and to substantiate claims - and conversationalists can demand reasons for disagreement demands and claims. This reflects a conversational norm that Shantz (98: 288) has formulated as follows: "When you disagree, refuse, or contradict, you don't just say 'no' - you provide a reason." The mother-daughter disputes portrayed in the plays under analysis thus constitute "genuine arguments" (Piaget 1955) or "prototypical arguments" (Jackson &

Jacobs 1980: 254; 1981: 120), in which the participants mutually elicit and offer grounds for supporting or objecting to an utterance in successive turns at talk.

Power is the most persuasive rhetoric.  
(Friedrich von Schiller)

Force is all-conquering, but its victories  
are short-lived. (Abraham Lincoln)

## 7.5 Threats

In the penultimate section, I examined the argumentative use of directives. In the following, I will look at a related activity that recurrently occurs in my data, which I will label "threat."<sup>63</sup> In issuing a threat, a speaker attempts to get the addressee to do, or refrain from doing, something, by indicating that she will perform a future action to the detriment of the addressee if the addressee fails to heed the threat.<sup>64</sup>

Prior studies of conflict talk have found similar oppositional moves. Brenneis & Lein (1977: 51) describe argumentative statements in children's disputes, which constitute a "promise of personal harm to the opponent, those attached to him, or in general" such as, for example, "I'll kill you," or "I'm going to tell the teacher on you." In a study of black working class children's disputes, M. H. Goodwin (1982: 78) observes threats such as "Get off or I'll hit you with ma thing!", or "You better hop off you high horse," which may be used "in attempting to step up one's commitment to a command, or in answering a prior argumentative action." Corresponding moves also occur in Apeltauer's (1978: 98-105) corpus of disputes between adult speakers.

Like all the oppositional moves I have examined so far, threats can take various forms. One construction that is frequently used in my data to package threats is conditional sentences involving an "if - then" relation. For instance, in the following extract from *'night Mother*, Jessie announces that she will kill herself on the spot, if Mama insists on calling her brother, Dawson:

**example (1): 'night Mother**

269	MAMA	(Stands up, moves toward the phone.) Dawson
270		will put a stop to this. Yes he will.
271		He'll take the gun away.
> 272	JESSIE	If you call him, I'll just have to do it
273		before he gets here. Soon as you hang up

274                   the phone, I'll just walk in the bedroom  
275                   and lock the door.

Threats can also take the form of condensed conditional sentences. For example, in the extract from *Tell me* below, Mother repeatedly threatens to send her daughter to her room if she says one more word.

**example (2): Tell me**

303 MOTHER     I don't want to hear another word.  
304                   I've heard all I want to hear.  
305 DAUGHTER   Gee whiz!  
306 MOTHER     All I want to hear.  
307 DAUGHTER   But Mom...  
> 308 MOTHER   One more word and up to your room.  
309 DAUGHTER   But...  
> 310 MOTHER   Another word, and up you go.

Mother's utterances in lines 308 and 310 carry the conversational implicature (Grice 1989) that *if* the girl does not stop arguing, if she utters "one more word," *then* she will be sent to her room as a punishment. In the local context of disagreement, the "x and y" construction expresses a conditional relationship between two actions.<sup>65</sup>

In the preceding examples, the speakers specify the sanction they intend to impose on the addressee in case of non-compliance.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, in the following extract from *My mother*, Margaret threatens her daughter, who has just told her that she has had sex for the first time, by identifying the circumstances that might provoke her to punish Jackie, while leaving unsaid precisely what this punishment will consist of. Her threat is formulated as a subordinate clause, describing the condition of sanctions; the independent clause, which specifies the ensuing result, is omitted.

**example (3): My mother I,4**

41 MARGARET   You could have waited.  
42 JACKIE     Why?  
43 MARGARET   I had to.

44 JACKIE That's it, isn't it?  
 45 (Gets up and goes to the house.)  
 > 46 MARGARET If this affects your A-levels!

Apart from an "if (not) - then" relation, threats can also involve an either-or relationship. For instance, in the extract from *Avenue* below, Mama threatens to turn her daughter adrift, stating that either Olga submits and "changes her ways" or she will have to suffer the consequences and move out and earn her living.

**example (4): Avenue**

421 MOTHER Something about your manner I never liked.  
 422 You better change your ways.  
 423 OLGA It's going to be hard for me to adjust to  
 > 425 MOTHER him. You better or else you can just get out  
 426 and get your own place. You go out and work  
 427 and learn what it is to get money.

Labov & Fanshel (1977: 79) argue that the addition "You better" to a request for action - as in "You better not say that!" - is a mitigating expression, which functions in the same way as "please." By contrast, my data suggests that in the context of disagreement the expression "You better" at the beginning of an utterance indicates that a threat (or a warning) is about to be produced.

In addition, threats can be formulated as declarative statements, which explicitly assert that the speaker will bring about an undesirable consequence should the addressee not change her course of action. Consider, for instance, the following extract from *Raisin*. After Beneatha has ignored her prior reproach, Mama threatens to slap her if she continues to talk about God in a disrespectful way:

**example (5): Raisin I,1**

128 BENEATHA I get sick of hearing about God.  
 129 MAMA Beneatha!  
 130 BENEATHA I mean it! I'm just tired of hearing about  
 131 God all the time. What has He got to do  
 132 with anything? Does He pay tuition?

> 133 MAMA           You 'bout to get your fresh little jaw  
134                   slapped!

Threats can also take the form of imperatives, which state the action the speaker wants the addressee to perform (or refrain from performing), implying that the speaker will punish the addressee should she not comply. This is illustrated in the extract from *Avenue* below.

**example (6): Avenue**

317 OLGA            I never look in your drawers!  
318 MOTHER         If you did, you'd find nothing silly like  
319                   that.  
320 OLGA            I'd find something like jelly!  
> 321 MOTHER         Watch that tongue, you hear me! It's getting  
322                   lazy like you, sleeping all day and thinking  
323                   of dirty things to say to your own mother!

Although Mother does not explicitly state that she will impose a sanction on Olga, the meta-communicative imperative "Watch that tongue" and related expressions are partly formulaic and are conventionally used and interpreted as threats.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, threats can be realised through formulaic expressions such as "You mind me," which customarily count as indicators for threatening, especially in the context of an argument.<sup>68</sup> This format is exemplified in the following sequence from *Alto*:

**example (7): Alto I,2**

57 FLORENE         Wanda, put your shoes on.  
58 WANDA            What for? What's so hot about this old lady?  
59 FLORENE         *(Swatting at her legs as she goes to the door)*  
> 60                   You mind me, Wanda!

Finally, threats may be realised through a meta-communicative statement which states that the addressee is about to overstep the mark and that the speaker is not willing to resume the argument, thus initiating the termination of the sequence.<sup>69</sup> In my data, these meta-comments are typically preceded by a discourse marker, indicating right at the beginning of the turn a break in the ongoing

conversation.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the interruptive placement of these utterances displays the speaker's negative emotional alignment towards what has been said, and thereby stresses antagonism. The combination of boundary marker, terminating move and interruptive placement indicates that the speaker is not willing to put up with continuing opposition and is about to lose her patience. Consider the following two examples:

**example (8): Raisin**

17 MAMA If you use the Lord's name just one more  
18 time—  
19 BENEATHA (*A bit of a whine.*) Oh, Mama—  
20 RUTH Fresh - just fresh as salt, this girl!  
21 BENEATHA (*Drily.*) Well - if the salt loses its savor—  
> 22 MAMA Now that will do. I just ain't going to have  
23 you 'round here reciting the scriptures in  
24 vain - you hear me?

**example (9): Tell me**

308 MOTHER One more word and up to your room.  
309 DAUGHTER But ...  
310 MOTHER Another word, and up you go.  
311 DAUGHTER But Mom ...  
> 312 MOTHER Alright, that's it. That is it. I've heard  
313 enough. It might be a good idea, young lady,  
314 if you went up to your room.

As the two preceding examples show, this format is typically used after a previous threat has been defied and marks an escalation of the dispute. This type of threat appears to act as a boundary marker, signalling that in case of continuing opposition the speaker will adopt stronger measures (e.g. resort to violence or to her superior status) to enforce compliance.<sup>71</sup>

From a sequential standpoint, threats are first pair parts of adjacency pairs and thus make specific second pair parts conditionally relevant. Compliance or submission is the structurally preferred response to threats, as it is to directives. However, as threats not only demand that the addressee perform (or refrain from performing) some activity but also signal that the speaker will

penalise the recipient for resistance, threats are the class of speech activity with the highest degree of obligingness (cf. Apeltauer 1978: 99, 104).

It is not surprising then that threats are among the activities Brown & Levinson (1987: 65-66) list as intrinsically face-threatening acts. Like directives, they pose a severe threat to the addressee's negative face, as they are potentially harmful to the autonomy of the listener. As mentioned above, apart from demanding that the addressee do (or refrain from doing) something, threats indicate that the speaker will instigate sanctions against the hearer should she not comply. In so doing, they put considerable pressure on the listener to act in accordance with the speaker's demands. Thus, threats act to ensure the recipient's compliance or conformity. Hence, by issuing a threat, a speaker directly constrains the addressee's freedom of action by trying to influence her future actions. For this reason, threats are control manoeuvres, or "social control acts," i.e. "moves in which there is a clear intention to influence the activities of the partner" (Ervin-Tripp 1982: 29).

In the following, I will look at the sequential placement of this type oppositional move. As threats are attempts at terminating the sequence at hand, my main focus will be on the sequence preceding the threat to find out what kinds of activities are conducive to the occurrence of threats. I will also examine the sequences following threats, in order to delineate the relational implications of this type of oppositional move.

As we have seen, in case of disagreement, the party disagreed with has the option in the next turn of reasserting or reaffirming her prior action. That is to say, an oppositional move following a previous action can lead prior speaker to insist on her initial position, and thus mark the beginning of a dispute. According to Apeltauer (1978: 257-269) and Franke (1983: 1-4), in insisting, a speaker attempts to enforce a prior claim against the opponent's resistance. This can be done either by simply repeating the initial activity or by combining or replacing it with more aggravated utterance formats or types of action, thereby increasing the degree of bindingness of the original claim.<sup>72</sup>

This is exactly what happens in the extract from *Alto* below. Following Wanda's refusal to comply with her initial directive, Florene at first insists by issuing a more aggravated utterance format (lines 56-57) and then further reinforces her claim with a threat in reaction to Wanda's continued opposition (line 61). As Tsui (1994: 129) maintains, "Mothers often resort to threats when they fail to get compliance from their children," attempting to get them to do something. Correspondingly, in his study of insisting moves in family conversation, Franke (1983: 219) describes threats as one class of third moves in coercing sequences. In his corpus, they are typically produced following another's refusal to comply with a speaker's initial directive, in order to get the addressee to give up resistance and comply with the speaker's demand.

**example (10): Alto I,2**

44 FLORENE     (*Looking out door.*) Now I want you to  
45               straighten up, Wanda. Somebody's coming to the  
46               door. And she drives a convertible.  
47               (*ALTHEA LOCKWOOD enters porch area. She*  
48               *is a pretty, dramatic woman in her late*  
49               *twenties. She wears the apricot taffeta*  
50               *dress described earlier by WANDA.*  
51               *FLORENE hurriedly tries to tidy up things.*)  
52 WANDA       (*Keeps on writing.*)  
53               (*ALTHEA knocks at their door.*)  
54 FLORENE     (*Calls.*) Just a minute! Wanda, put your shoes  
55               on.  
56 WANDA       What for? What's so hot about this old lady?  
57 FLORENE     (*Swatting at her legs as she goes to the door*)  
> 58               You mind me, Wanda! (*Opens door.*) Hello, Miz  
59               Lockwood. Come on in. I just finished your  
60               ironing.  
61               (*WANDA's jaw drops as she hears the name of*  
62               *her music teacher and looks up to see her. She*  
63               *would flee, but realizes it is too late. She*  
64               *is scrambling to put on her shoes and*  
65               *straighten her hair and clothes as ALTHEA*  
66               *LOCKWOOD sweeps in.*)

As discussed above, at the beginning of this sequence, Florene addresses a directive to Wanda, telling her to "straighten up" (lines 44-45). As mentioned above, desire statements constitute a relatively aggravated way of formulating directives and are primarily directed downward to subordinates. Thus, by designing her utterance in this way, Florene proposes a superior social status vis-à-vis Wanda. Subsequently, however, she moderates the imposition of her command, by producing a supporting assertion, which accounts for her request (lines 45-46). But instead of performing the requested action, Wanda ignores Florene's directive and continues her prior activity (line 52), thus signalling her refusal to comply with her mother's command.<sup>73</sup> In reaction to Wanda's disagreement-implicative silence, Florene produces a more aggravated directive format and reinforces her prior command by issuing an imperative: "Wanda, put your shoes on." (lines 54-55). But instead of complying, in the subsequent turn, Wanda challenges her mother's command. She issues a demand for explanation, questioning the assumption underlying Florene's imperative that there is a need to perform the requested action and demanding that Florene provide a reason for her command ("What for? What's so hot about this old lady?" line 56). However, instead of giving the required explanation, Florene swats at Wanda's legs, exclaiming "You mind me, Wanda!" (line 58). Her reaction construes Wanda's prior activity as unacceptable. Moreover, the formulaic "You mind me!" functions as a threat, indicating that Florene is going to punish Wanda if she does not obey. Hence, it represents an attempt to exercise power over her daughter by constraining her freedom of action. In stepping up the obligation to comply, Florene's threat serves to escalate disagreement. In addition, the increase in volume signals high emotional involvement and thereby emphasises opposition. However, although it enables her to counter her daughter's demand for explanation, i.e. to resist her control manoeuvre, in another sense, Florene's threat proves ineffective: Wanda does not perform the requested action until she realises that the visitor whom her mother was announcing is her music teacher. To sum up, in this example, the mother's attempts at regulating her daughter's behaviour by means of increasingly aggravated utterance formats are unsuccessful. This shows that even

though threats (and directives) can be employed as a powerful interactive resource, they are not necessarily always successful.

In the preceding example, Florene resorts to a threat after her preceding directives have failed to get compliance. Conversely, in the following extract from *Tell me*, the mother employs this argumentative device to reinforce her prior rejections of her daughter's permission request. In the face of continuing appeals by the child, she produces increasingly aggravated threats in an attempt to bring the protracted request sequence to an end:

**example (11) Tell me**

285 DAUGHTER Can I?  
286 MOTHER No.  
287 DAUGHTER Why not?  
288 MOTHER Because.  
289 DAUGHTER Because why?  
290 MOTHER Because you're only 12-years-old, that's  
291 why.  
292 DAUGHTER Everybody else can.  
293 MOTHER Well, you're not everyone else.  
294 DAUGHTER Nancy can. Nancy's mother said she could.  
295 MOTHER Well, I'm not Nancy's mother. If Nancy's  
296 mother thinks Nancy's old enough, that's her  
297 business. But I'm your mother, and I say  
298 "no."  
299 DAUGHTER (*Wheedling.*) Mom?  
300 MOTHER No.  
301 DAUGHTER Ah, Mom...  
302 MOTHER I don't want to hear another word. I've  
303 heard all I want to hear.  
304 DAUGHTER Gee whiz!  
305 MOTHER All I want to hear.  
306 DAUGHTER But Mom...  
> 307 MOTHER One more word and up to your room.  
308 DAUGHTER But...  
> 309 MOTHER Another word, and up you go.  
310 DAUGHTER But Mom...  
> 311 MOTHER Alright, that's it. That is it. I've heard

312                   enough. It might be a good idea, young lady,  
313                   if you went up to your room.  
314 DAUGHTER   That's not fair.  
315 MOTHER      Right this minute.  
316 DAUGHTER   Why can't I? Just tell me why?  
317 MOTHER      Because I said so.  
318 DAUGHTER   But all the other kids can, why can't I?  
319 MOTHER      Up to your room, and stay there until you've  
320                   learned not to argue with your mother.  
321 DAUGHTER   Everybody but me! What am I supposed to do?  
322                   And next time they won't even ask me because  
323                   they'll think I can't go. Because I can  
324                   never go anywhere.  
325 MOTHER      Up to your room.  
326 DAUGHTER   But...  
327 MOTHER      Up to bed, young lady.  
329 DAUGHTER   But I...  
330 MOTHER      Not another word. March. ((end of scene))

The sequence starts with a permission request by the daughter ("Can I?" line 285), which her Mother rejects in the next turn with an outright refusal ("No." line 286). As Wootton (1981c) has shown, parents use unmitigated stated refusals in an attempt to rapidly terminate request sequences after an initial request: By selecting a strong rejection form, they signal to the child that further appeal will be fruitless. Accordingly, such non-delayed refusals tend to generate relatively short subsequent appeal sequences. As discussed in detail above, in this example, the mother's rejection is followed by an extended disagreement sequence in which the child's continuing oppositional moves oblige the mother to offer support for her initial rejection. When the mother justifies her refusal by pointing to her daughter's age ("Because you're only 12-years-old, that's why" lines 290-291.), the daughter changes tack and issues a counter-claim,<sup>74</sup> asserting that all her friends have their parents' permission to go: "Everybody else can." (line 292). The ECF with the universal pronoun "everybody" serves to both counter her mother's refusal and legitimise her original request. But Mother counters by saying: "Well, you're not everyone else." (line 293). As discussed

above, the discourse marker "Well" signals right at the beginning of her utterance that what is coming next will be a disagreement. In addition, it indicates that, despite her daughter's intervening action, Mother has not changed her mind about letting her join her friends, i.e. that the girl's argument has failed. In fact, as Wootton (1981c) has shown, "Well" typically precedes parent's responses to their children's requests when those responses reject rather than grant the requests. Moreover, following the disagreement preface, Mother goes on to build her counter by exploiting her daughter's utterance. She picks up her daughter's formulation (changing "everybody" to "everyone") and uses it for her own side, by claiming that it does not apply to the issue at hand. As described above, in so doing, she establishes a strong link at the level of wording, while stressing disagreement at the level of content.

After her ECF has been refuted, the daughter changes tack again, and instead of using a universal pronoun names a specific person who got permission to go to support her claim: "Nancy can. Nancy's mother said she could." (line 294). Again, Mother uses her own words against her. Following the disagreement preface "Well," she goes on to invalidate the girl's argument by pointing out that she is "not Nancy's mother" nor does she share her wide views (lines 295-298). When the daughter still does not give in, she issues a series of meta-communicative statements, explicitly stating her unwillingness to continue the argument: "I don't want to hear another word. I've heard all I want to hear." (lines 302-303). As mentioned above, such desire statements constitute highly aggravated directive formats and are primarily directed downward to subordinates. Thus, through the way in which Mother construes her utterance, she again brings into play her superior status, which authorises her to control her daughter's behaviour.<sup>75</sup> When her daughter expresses her indignation at her reaction with the expletive "Gee whiz!" (line 304), the mother repeats her previous ban on speaking ("All I want to hear." line 305). Instead of complying, the girl insists on her request and starts to produce a counter-claim (cf. below): "But Mom..." (line 306). Before she can finish her turn, however, the mother cuts her off with a threat. She reinforces her prior commands, explicitly stating that the girl will

be sent to her room should she not comply: "One more word and up to your room." (line 307). When the daughter nonetheless initiates another counter-claim ("But..." line 308), she cuts her off again with a repetition (or, more precisely, a reformulation) of her previous threat ("Another word, and up you go." line 309). The interruptive placement of her turns signals high emotional involvement (presumably exasperation) and intensifies opposition. The combination of threats and confrontational interruptions serves to escalate the dispute. Thus, when the girl still continues pleading ("But Mom..." line 310), the mother carries out her previous threats and sends her to her room. She initiates her turn with the discourse marker "Alright," and immediately adds a series of meta-communicative remarks: "Alright, this is it. That is it. I've heard enough." (lines 311-312).

As an argumentative move, her utterance achieves several things. Firstly, as mentioned above, the particle "Alright" acts as a boundary marker, indicating a break in the ongoing conversation.<sup>76</sup> More precisely, it signals her reluctance to discuss the issue further and indicates that further appeal is not worthwhile. This is reinforced by the meta-communicative statements following the prefatory expression, which explicitly state that she is not willing to resume the argument. In addition, the interruptive placement of her utterance displays her negative emotional alignment towards what has been said, and thereby stresses antagonism. The combination of the boundary marker "Alright" with meta-comments and interruptive placement signals that Mother is at the end of her tether, and that she is prepared to resort to violence should the daughter continue her course of action. Therefore, her utterance conveys a threat.<sup>77</sup>

Subsequently, she employs an additional termination technique, issuing a directive, telling her daughter to go to her room ("It might be a good idea, young lady, if you went up to your room." lines 312-313). Although her utterance is formulated as a suggestion rather than a command, there are several cues that indicate that it imposes a strong obligation on the daughter to comply. For one thing, rather than softening the impact of her demand with an endearment term, Mother addresses her daughter with "young lady." While Dunkling (1990: 9) lists social titles (e.g. "Lady" + first name, "Lady" + last name, "my lady," etc.) as well as honorifics

(e.g. "sir" or "madam") as terms of address which speakers can use to indicate their intention of being polite, today, such terms are widely used ironically.<sup>78</sup> In various languages, address terms like "young lady" or "(mein) Fräulein" are conventionally employed in the context of reprimanding children.<sup>79</sup> Thus, by adding the mock honorific "young lady" at the end of her turn, the mother evokes an interactional frame that is characterised by an asymmetrical relationship with her in superior position.<sup>80</sup> For another thing, the daughter's response, "That's not fair" (line 314), displays her construal of her mother's utterance as constituting a command rather than a suggestion, whose force is grounded in the mother's superior status.

To recap, in this example, in the face of continuing opposition, the mother sequentially moves toward increasingly aggravated forms of utterance design: she initially issues some unmitigated denials (lines 286, 300) and, subsequent to continuing demands for explanation, counter-claims and appeals on the girl's part, she moves to more negative formats, namely aggravated directives (lines 302-303, 305) and increasingly aggravated threats (lines 307, 309, 311-312), in an attempt to terminate the extended dispute sequence. She finally enforces her will based on her higher social status. Following continuing opposition on the part of her daughter, in line 319, the mother reinforces her preceding directives by issuing a condensed imperative ("Up to your room"), which demands compliance. Moreover, by formatting her activity in this way, she assumes a position of authority, which allows her to exert control over her daughter's behaviour. In the second part of her turn, she construes her daughter's behaviour as inappropriate by explicitly pulling rank and referring to her superior social status ("and stay there until you've learned not to argue with your mother"), thus trying to terminate the dispute sequence by drawing on her authority. And indeed, following a few last attempts at resistance (lines 321-329), the daughter finally complies.

As we have seen so far, one of the sequential positions in which threats in my data occur is following refusal to comply with a previous directive. Furthermore, speakers can use threats after continuing appeals despite preceding rejections, to signal that 'No' means 'No' and thus terminate the sequence. As the following extract

from *Raisin* shows, threats may also be employed after a preceding reproach has been ignored or defied.

**example (12) Raisin I,1**

1 BENEATHA (*Comes in, brushing her hair and looking up to*  
2 *the ceiling, where the sound of a vacuum*  
3 *cleaner has started up.*) What could be so  
4 dirty on that woman's rugs that she has to  
5 vacuum them every single day?  
6 RUTH I wish certain young women 'round here who I  
7 could name would take inspiration about  
8 certain rugs in a certain apartment I could  
9 also mention.  
10 BENEATHA (*Shrugging.*) How much cleaning can a house  
11 need, for Christ's sakes.  
12 MAMA (*Not liking the Lord's name used thus.*)  
13 Bennie!  
14 RUTH Just listen to her- just listen!  
15 BENEATHA Oh, God!  
> 16 MAMA If you use the Lord's name just one more time-  
17 BENEATHA (*A bit of a whine.*) Oh, Mama-  
18 RUTH Fresh - just fresh as salt, this girl!  
19 BENEATHA (*Drily.*) Well - if the salt loses its savor-  
> 20 MAMA Now that will do. I just ain't going to have  
21 you 'round here reciting the scriptures in  
22 vain - you hear me?  
23 BENEATHA How did I manage to get on everybody's wrong  
24 side by just walking into a room?  
25 RUTH If you weren't so fresh-  
26 BENEATHA Ruth, I'm twenty years old.  
27 MAMA What time you be home from school today?  
28 BENEATHA Kind of late. (*With enthusiasm.*) Madeline is  
29 going to start my guitar lessons today.

At the beginning of this sequence, Beneatha and her sister-in-law Ruth are quarrelling about Beneatha's attitude towards domestic work. In lines 6-9, Ruth counters her sister-in-law's prior depreciative remark on the neighbour's scrupulous cleanliness with an assertion implying that Beneatha might show more involvement with

regard to the household chores. In the following turn, Beneatha literally shrugs off Ruth's implicit accusation with the rhetorical question: "How much cleaning can a house need" (line 10), implying that both Ruth and the neighbour are overacting. The expletive, "for Christ's sakes," at the end of her turn, signals high emotional involvement and serves to reinforce opposition. In the subsequent turn, Mama responds to her daughter's blasphemy by exclaiming "Bennie!" (line 13). As discussed above, the interjection of the vocative signals a negative affective reaction (presumably shock) at what Beneatha has just said and portrays her behaviour as objectionable. It indicates that Mama disapproves of her daughter's verbal behaviour and, hence, functions as a reproach. In addition, it appears to function as an admonition, signalling that she does not wish to hear Beneatha use any more expletives.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the exclamation of the vocative is both a reaction to what was said and a cautionary signal. When Ruth chimes in with her mother-in-law, and issues a meta-communicative imperative, expressing disfavour against Beneatha's verbal behaviour ("Just listen to her- just listen!" line 14),<sup>82</sup> Beneatha exclaims "Oh, God!" (line 15). The interjection of the expletive with the prefatory expression "Oh" signals a negative emotional alignment (e.g. exasperation) at her interlocutors' reactions.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the increase in volume signals high involvement and emphasises opposition.

In response to her daughter's repeated cursing despite her prior reproach, Mama issues a threat, implying that she will discipline Beneatha if she does not change her course of action: "If you use the Lord's name one more time—" (line 16). Before she can specify what measure she intends to adopt should Beneatha not comply, however, Beneatha interrupts her, interjecting "Oh Mama—" in a whining tone of voice (line 17). Similar to her prior turn, the combination of the vocative with the discourse particle "Oh" indexes a negative affective reaction at what Mama has just said and presumably implies that she is overreacting. Before Mama can respond, in line 18, Ruth steps in once more, issuing a negative evaluation of her sister-in-law's conduct: "Fresh - just fresh as salt, this girl!" Self-repetition and the increase in volume indicate high involvement and aggravate opposition. In the following turn, Beneatha parries Ruth's challenge by taking up a part of the

formulaic expression in her utterance and using it for her own side. She initiates her retort with the discourse particle "Well," indicating right at the beginning of her turn that disagreement is going to follow. Following the disagreement preface, she builds the rest of her utterance by picking up the term "salt" from the idiomatic expression used by Ruth and incorporates it in her counter: "Well - if the salt loses its savor—" (line 19). As discussed above, by this means, a close link between the two opposing utterances is established at the word level, while dissent is stressed at the content level. In addition, by parrying the fixed expression used by Ruth with a quote from the bible, Beneatha not only ties her counter to the prior activity at the word level but also at the level of formulaicity, as it were. Before she can elaborate on her counter, however, she is cut off by her mother. In line 20, Mama initiates her turn with the discourse marker "Now," followed by the meta-communicative statement: "that will do." By designing her utterance in this way, Mama accomplishes several things. Firstly, the prefatory expression "Now" points to Beneatha's prior resistance to her mother's repeated reproaches (cf. Aijmer 2002: 90; Schiffrin 1987: 245), thus highlighting opposition. Moreover, the combination of "Now" with a meta-comment acts as a boundary marker, indicating a break between the prior discourse and what is going to follow.<sup>84</sup> In other words, it signals right at the beginning of her turn that she is not prepared to let Beneatha pursue her course of action, and intends to put an end to it. It acts as an "affective intensifier" (Aijmer 2002: 95), emphasising Mama's negative emotional alignment towards what has been said and thereby stressing antagonism. Finally, the interruptive placement of her utterance indexes high involvement and aggravates opposition. Subsequently, Mama adds another meta-communicative remark, explicitly stating that she is not willing to put up with her daughter's cursing any longer: "I just ain't going to have you 'round here reciting the scriptures in vain - you hear me?" (lines 20-22). Although she does not openly state that she is going to punish Beneatha should she not acquiesce, her utterance conveys a threat, as it signals that she is about to lose her temper and that Beneatha had better submit. Mama terminates her turn with the meta-communicative remark "you hear me." The sequential placement of this

meta-comment following a threat alongside the question mark suggests that it is produced with rising intonation and an increase in volume, signalling high emotional involvement and aggravating opposition. Accordingly, the appended meta-communicative remark serves to reinforce the preceding threat, and thus to ensure compliance.<sup>85</sup> In response to her mother's fierce reaction, Beneatha issues a meta-communicative question: "How did I manage to get on everybody's wrong side by just walking into a room?" (lines 23-24). By formulating her utterance as an interrogative, she seems to request that her interlocutors account for their fervent responses. At the same time, the juxtaposition of the extreme formulation "everybody" with the qualifier "just" portrays the women as overreacting. Following another dissent-turn sequence between Beneatha and Ruth (lines 25-26), Mama changes the focus of the conversation by asking Beneatha when she will be home from school (line 27). In so doing, she lays the ground for the termination of the dispute sequence. And indeed, in the next turn, Beneatha provides the requested information (lines 28-29). By mutually accomplishing a topic change and ceasing to produce oppositional turns, the two women collaborate in bringing the argument to a close - at least for a moment.

The closing sequence of this extract is a classic case of a stand-off: a topic change occurs and the participants change the speech activity and drop the conflict form (i.e. they cease to produce opposition turns). If a dispute sequence dissipates in this way, however, the conflict between the parties is not resolved. That is to say, while the dispute ends on the structural level, on the content level the conflicting parties have not reached agreement or a compromise. Rather the difference is put on hold for the time being, with the participants moving on to other activities, with the conflict "waiting in the wings." Hence, it is to be expected that once the contentious issue comes up again, the initial argument sequence will be resumed.<sup>86</sup>

This is exactly what happens during the following course of the conversation. Following a short downtime, the controversial subject resurfaces, and the two women start opposing each other again. Again Mama issues a threat after Beneatha has countered her prior

reproaches. This time, however, the dispute sequence ends with Mama adopting physical measures to enforce her will.

**example (13) Raisin I,1**

120 BENEATHA I am going to be a doctor and everybody  
121 around here better understand that!  
122 MAMA (*Kindly.*) 'Course you going to be a doctor,  
123 honey, God willing.  
124 BENEATHA (*Drily.*) God hasn't got a thing to do with  
125 it.  
126 MAMA Beneatha - that just wasn't necessary.  
127 BENEATHA Well - neither is God. I get sick of hearing  
128 about God.  
129 MAMA Beneatha!  
130 BENEATHA I mean it! I'm just tired of hearing about  
131 God all the time. What has He got to do with  
132 anything? Does He pay tuition?  
> 133 MAMA You 'bout to get your fresh little jaw  
134 slapped!  
135 RUTH That's just what she needs, all right!  
136 BENEATHA Why? Why can't I say what I want to around  
137 here, like everybody else?  
138 MAMA It don't sound nice for a young girl to say  
139 things like that - you wasn't brought up  
140 that way.  
141 BENEATHA Mama, you don't understand. It's all a  
142 matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I  
143 don't accept. It's not important. I am not  
144 going out and be immoral or commit crimes  
145 because I don't believe in God. I don't  
146 even think about it. It's just that I get  
147 tired of Him getting credit for all the  
148 things the human race achieves through its  
149 own stubborn effort. There simply is no  
150 blasted God - there is only man and it is  
151 he who makes miracles!  
152 MAMA (*Absorbs this speech, studies her daughter*  
153 *and rises slowly and crosses to BENEATHA*  
154 *and slaps her powerfully across the face.*

155                   *After, there is only silence and the*  
156                   *daughter drops her eyes from her mother's*  
157                   *face, and MAMA is very tall before her.)*  
158                   Now - you say after me, in my mother's  
159                   house there is still God.  
160 BENEATHA       *(There is a long pause and BENEATHA stares*  
161                   *at the floor wordlessly.)*  
162 MAMA             *(Repeats the phrase with precision and cool*  
163                   *emotion.)* In my mother's house there is  
164                   still God.  
165 BENEATHA       In my mother's house there is still God.  
166 MAMA             There are some ideas we ain't going to have  
167                   in this house. Not as long as I am the head  
168                   of this family.  
169 BENEATHA       Yes, ma'am.  
170 MAMA             *(Walks out of the room.)*

At line 120, Beneatha announces that she wants to become a doctor. In the following turn, Mama expresses her approval of her daughter's plans, emphasising her positive alignment by adding the endearment term "honey" to her utterance. When she closes her turn with the formulaic expression "God willing" (line 123), however, Beneatha opposes her, asserting that God does not play a part in her professional development (lines 124-125). In response, Mama issues a meta-communicative comment, explicitly formulating Beneatha's prior utterance as inappropriate (line 126). Her utterance expresses her disapproval of her daughter's behaviour and thus acts as a reproach. However, Beneatha insists on her position and counter-opposes Mama by saying: "Well, neither is God" (line 127).

As mentioned above, the prefatory expression "Well" indicates that opposition is going to follow, i.e. that in spite of her mother's intervening action Beneatha has not changed her mind about the issue at hand. Moreover, following the disagreement preface, Beneatha constructs her counter by making use of her mother's preceding utterance: She uses the structural skeleton of Mama's statement (i.e. X is not necessary) as a basis for her counter-claim (i.e. neither is Y), thus exploiting Mama's utterance to back up her own position, namely that God is irrelevant. By this means, she

establishes a strong link at the structural level, while emphasising opposition at the level of content. Subsequently, she reinforces her negative stance by stating: "I get sick of hearing about God" (lines 127-128). Mama reacts to her daughter's irreverence by exclaiming "Bennie!" (line 14). As discussed above, the interjection of the vocative signals a negative affective reaction at what Beneatha has just said and portrays her behaviour as highly objectionable. It indicates that Mama disapproves of her daughter's verbal behaviour and, hence, acts as a reproach. In addition, the exclamation functions as an admonition, signalling that Mama does not wish Beneatha to continue her course of action. Thus, it is both a reaction to what was said and a cautionary signal. But, despite the forewarning, Beneatha insists on her position. She begins her turn by exclaiming "I mean it!" (line 130), and immediately adds a slightly modified version of her prior statement: "I'm just tired of hearing about God all the time." The increase in volume as well as the ECF with "all the time" signals high emotional involvement and emphasises opposition. Subsequently, she issues a series of rhetorical questions, daring her mother to disprove her (lines 131-12).

In reaction to Beneatha's continuing disregard of her reproaches, Mama issues a threat, stating that Beneatha is about to overstep the mark and will have to suffer physical consequences for pursuing her line of arguing: "You 'bout to get your fresh little jaw slapped!" (lines 133-134). Here, too, the increase in volume indicates high emotional involvement and aggravates opposition. At line 136, Beneatha challenges her mother's threat, demanding that she account for her restrictive behaviour ("Why? Why can't I say what I want to around here, like everybody else?"). Self-repetition as well as the extreme formulation "everybody else" signal high emotional involvement and reinforce her demand. And in fact, in the following turn, Mama provides the requested explanation. However, when she asserts that Beneatha's parlance is not appropriate for a "young girl" (lines 138-140), Beneatha discards her argument with a challenge to her competence on the topic under discussion: "Mama, you don't understand." (line 141).<sup>87</sup> In the remainder of her turn, she expands on her opposition explaining her stance on the subject of God's existence. Towards the end of her extended turn,

aggravation is signalled by the use of the expletive "blasted" (line 150) and an increase in volume. Mama reacts with physical violence: She carries out her preceding threat and slaps her daughter in the face. Then she adds a meta-communicative imperative commanding Beneatha to repeat her words and acknowledge God's existence: "Now - you say after me, in my mother's house there is still God." (lines 158-159). After an initial disagreement-implicative silence, Mama insists on her demand and repeats her prior imperative, and, eventually, Beneatha complies (lines 163-164). Subsequently, Mama issues a summarising statement, in which she explicitly points to her superior status as "the head of this family" (line 169), which authorises her to determine which views are acceptable and which are not to legitimise her behaviour. Beneatha responds with "Yes, ma'am" (line 169). By adding a honorific after the agreement token, she not only confirms her mother's prior assertion but also her definition of the relationship. As a result, the closing sequence of the episode resembles exchanges that are typical of master-servant interaction.<sup>88</sup>

In this spate of talk, both women can be shown to orient to contextual features of the talk (i.e. the mother-daughter relationship) thus mutually (re-)producing an asymmetrical power relationships in the local, situated context of their talk. By uttering reproaches and threats in an attempt to regulate her daughter's verbal behaviour, the mother assumes a position of authority vis-à-vis her daughter. This is repeatedly challenged by the daughter and the whole sequence consists in a negotiation of this power relationship with Mother enforcing her will in the end (by resorting to physical force and pulling rank). Thus, the dispute represents a relationship-negotiation forum, in and through which the women both achieve and negotiate their standing of the moment vis-à-vis one another.

As the preceding examples have shown, threats provide a conversational resource that disputants can utilise to insist on a prior activity or position. For instance, they can be used to step up one's commitment to a previous command following refusal to comply, to reinforce a preceding rejection of a request after continued appeal, and to add force to a prior reproach after it has been ignored or defied. In the following extract from *'night Mother*,

Jessie employs a threat to reinforce her objection to Mama's intention of calling her brother Dawson:

**example (14): 'night Mother**

262 MAMA Well, I'm calling Dawson right now. We'll see  
263 what he has to say about this little stunt.  
264 JESSIE Dawson doesn't have any more to do with this.  
265 MAMA He's your brother.  
266 JESSIE And that's all.  
267 MAMA (*Stands up, moves toward the phone.*) Dawson  
268 will put a stop to this. Yes he will. He'll  
269 take the gun away.  
> 270 JESSIE If you call him, I'll just have to do it  
271 before he gets here. Soon as you hang up the  
272 phone, I'll just walk in the bedroom and lock  
273 the door.  
274 MAMA You will not! This is crazy talk, Jessie!  
275 JESSIE Dawson will get here just in time to help you  
276 clean up. Go ahead, call him. Then call the  
277 police. Then call the funeral home. Then call  
278 Loretta and see if she'll do your nails.  
279 MAMA (*Goes directly to the telephone and starts to*  
280 *dial,*  
281 *Jessie is fast, coming up behind her and*  
282 *taking the receiver out of her hand, putting*  
283 *it back down. Jessie, firm and quiet.*) I said  
284 no. This is private. Dawson is not invited.  
285 MAMA Just me.

Prior to this exchange, Jessie has revealed to Mama that she intends to kill herself that night. After various unsuccessful attempts at dissuading her daughter from her plan to commit suicide, Mama takes a new approach and decides to call on her son, Dawson, to help her bring Jessie to terms. The sequence starts with Mama announcing that she is going to call Jessie's brother to inform him about his sister's suicidal intentions (lines 262-263). Her use of the dismissive formulation "little stunt" in reference to Jessie's behaviour indicates that Mama does not take her seriously. In the following turn, Jessie opposes her with a counter-assertion,

claiming that her brother has got nothing to do with her decision (line 264). In line 265, Mama counter-opposes her by arguing that Dawson is her brother. By referring to their blood relationship, Mama implies that Jessie's intention to commit suicide obviously also concerns her brother. However, Jessie rejects her objection simply by saying "And that's all" (line 266). While she does not deny her mother's claim that Dawson is her brother, she disputes the assumption expressed in Mama's utterance that their relationship necessarily implies that her decision to kill herself concerns him. But Mama does not give in. She insists on calling her son, claiming that he is going to hinder Jessie from committing suicide by taking the gun away from her (lines 267-269). After her preceding attempts at preventing Mama from calling her brother have failed, Jessie ups the ante and issues a threat, claiming that she will kill herself at once, if Mama does not comply (lines 270-273). Her threat differs from the instances in the preceding examples in that the physical consequences of the action she threatens to perform (i.e. suicide) will be suffered by Jessie herself, but the emotional consequences will be suffered by Mama. In line 274, Mama opposes her with an outright contradiction (cf. below), negating Jessie's prior utterance: "You will not!" Immediately thereafter, she issues an unfavourable comment (cf. below), categorising Jessie's prior utterance as "crazy talk." In so doing, she construes her daughter's activity as unacceptable and thus refuses to comply with her demand to abstain from calling her son. The increase in volume aggravates opposition and turns up the emotional heat of the argument. In the following turn, Jessie reinforces her preceding threat. By illustrating the consequences Mama would have to face if she insisted on calling her son, Jessie implies that she is going to carry out her threat if Mama does not back down (lines 275-278). When Mama nonetheless walks to the phone and starts to dial Dawson's number (lines 279-280), Jessie resorts to physical means to enforce her demand, taking the receiver out of Mama's hand and putting it back down again. She issues a meta-communicative statement, reformulating her oppositional stance: "I said no." (lines 283-284), and subsequently adds a series of assertions, reaffirming her initial position: "This is private. Dawson is not invited." (line 284). Mama responds by simply saying: "Just me." (line 285). In

formulating the gist of Jessie's prior talk, she signals her submission, and thus makes way for the termination of the dispute sequence.

In the examples I have looked at so far, the speakers use threats to reassert their previous claims and enforce compliance. By contrast, in the following extracts from *Avenue*, Mother repeatedly issues threats in reaction to her daughter's offensive utterances:

**example (15) Avenue**

144 MOTHER (*Starts applying eyebrow pencil and eyeliner.*)  
145 Look, do what I say. I do you favors. Who  
146 bought you that damn piano? You think it costs  
147 peanuts? It took me more than seven months to  
148 get the money for that.  
149 OLGA Yes, I know. Didn't you ever get tired and  
150 sore from all that work?  
151 MOTHER (*Stops activity and looks angrily at her.*)  
152 I'm thinking of two ways to take what you just  
> 153 said. And if it's the bad way I'm thinking to  
154 be right, you're gonna get a bar of soap in  
155 your mouth.  
156 OLGA Can't I wear what I have on?  
157 MOTHER (*Looking at her, slowly.*) All right.

Prior to this sequence, Mother and Olga have been arguing about whether Olga has to change her clothes just because Mother's new boyfriend is supposed to be having dinner with them. After Olga has repeatedly refused to comply with her mother's request to dress up, Mother renews her prior imperatives ("Look, do what I say." line 145) and adds a supportive assertion providing reasons for her claim (lines 145-148). Aggravation is signalled by her use of rhetorical opposing questions and the expletive "damn."<sup>89</sup> Olga responds with a partial agreement ("Yes, I know." line 149), and then follows with a negative interrogative: "Didn't you ever get tired and sore from all that work?" (lines 149-150). As Heritage (2002) points out in his study of news interviews, such types of interrogative are usually not understood as questioning in the information seeking sense, but are commonly treated as accomplishing assertions of opinion.<sup>90</sup> More precisely, negative interrogatives involve propositions that

evaluate the interlocutor's conduct in critical, negative or problematic terms. He shows that recipients of negative interrogatives usually respond to them in ways that deny their status as questions in search of information. They often do this by formulating their responses as in (dis)agreement with the speaker's negative interrogative. Furthermore, as noted earlier, Heritage maintains that negative interrogatives are built to prefer "yes" answers. By means of reversing the polarity of the interrogative, they convey the speaker's predisposition to a positive response; in Bolinger's (1957: 99) terms, they display a strong conduciveness for a positive response. In other words, they can be employed to frame negative or critical propositions while still inviting the recipient's assent. The combination of the two actions - asserting a critical position, and following it with a highly conducive negative interrogative - contributes to the argumentative character of this type of activity. Negative interrogatives present a potentially powerful opposition strategy. Since they are built to favour a response from the interlocutor which is in agreement with the negative evaluation of criticism (i.e. which clashes with the interlocutor's own prior statements or actions), these challenges ultimately invite refutation. In fact, Mother's response displays her understanding of Olga's activity as a potential offence rather than a request for information. The "angry" look on her face (line 151) indicates that she is annoyed about what Olga has just said. She begins her response with a meta-communicative statement, remarking on the ambiguity of her daughter's utterance: "I'm thinking of two ways to take what you just said." (lines 152-153). Subsequently, she issues a conditional, threatening to punish Olga if the content of her questions turns out to be hostile: "And if it's the bad way I'm thinking to be right, you're gonna get a bar of soap in your mouth." (lines 153-155).

It is noteworthy that Mother's threat differs from the previous instances in the previous examples. While it is an expression of her intention to inflict punishment on Olga, in contrast to the examples of threats discussed so far, here the potentially impending sanction is not dependent on whether Olga performs (or refrains from performing) an action in the future, but on whether she has (or has not) performed an action in the past. For this reason, rather than



314                   just out of high school and she got mixed up  
315                   with a bunch of college men and-  
316 OLGA            I never look in your drawers!  
317 MOTHER        If you did, you'd find nothing silly like  
318                   that.  
319 OLGA            I'd find something like jelly!  
> 320 MOTHER        Watch that tongue, you hear me! It's getting  
321                   lazy like you, sleeping all day and thinking  
322                   of dirty things to say to your own mother!  
323                   *(Goes to table, gets cigarette out*  
                      *pocketbook,*  
324                   *lights it, sits.)*  
325 OLGA            You don't love that pig, do you?

In this spate of talk, Olga and Mother are arguing about Mother having read Olga's personal notes without permission. After having recaptured her papers, Olga challenges her mother with an accusatory question: "How dare you read my personal property?" (lines 306-307). As discussed above, her interrogative is designed to express outrage rather than to elicit information, and also obliges Mother to account for her transgression in the subsequent turn. And indeed, in line 309, Mother provides the required explanation: "I wanted to see what you write." In the remainder of her turn, however, she changes her course of action and issues an offence, disqualifying Olga's writing as "Just a bunch of junk" (line 311). Subsequently, she starts to report a story she recently read (lines 313-315), presumably in an attempt to shift the topic away from her having nosed through her daughter's personal writings. However, Olga interrupts her description with another (implicit) accusation, thus shifting the focus of the talk back to the issue of Mother's transgression. In asserting that she does not pry into her mother's things ("I never look in your drawers!" line 316) she implies that Mother's behaviour is unacceptable. The confrontational character of her utterance is intensified by the extreme formulation "never" and the volume increase, signalling high emotional involvement. In the following turn, Mother dismisses Olga's argument as irrelevant, asserting that it does not matter whether she looks in her mother's drawers, since even if she did, she would "find nothing silly like

that" (lines 317-318). Olga in turn counter-opposes her by claiming that she would "find something like jelly" (line 319), implying that jelly would be worse than silly. The sequential context of her utterance suggests that with the expression "something like jelly" she is referring to lubricant, and is thus insinuating that her mother frequently has sexual intercourse. In so doing, as in the previous example, Olga seems to suggest that Mother is a trollop. Mother responds by issuing a threat in the form of a meta-communicative imperative: "Watch that tongue, you hear me!" (line 320). Her reaction indicates that she interprets Olga's prior utterance as offensive and inappropriate. Although it does not explicitly specify what sanction she would apply should Olga not heed the threat, the formulaic expression indicates that Mother will punish her if she does not comply.<sup>92</sup> It thus presents an attempt at influencing Olga's future behaviour, i.e. a control manoeuvre. Moreover, by virtue of the imperative construction, Mother's threat evokes a power differential with herself in superior position, which authorises her to censure her daughter's behaviour (Labov & Fanshel 1977: 78).<sup>93</sup> Directly following the threat, Mother adds the meta-communicative remark "you hear me." As discussed above, the sequential placement of the meta-comment in combination with the punctuation suggests that it is produced with rising intonation and an increase in volume, signalling high emotional involvement and thus aggravating opposition. Hence, the appended meta-communicative remark serves to reinforce the preceding threat, and thus ensure compliance. Mother's interpretation of Olga's prior utterance as an insult becomes even more obvious in the remainder of her turn, in which she refers to it as "thinking of dirty things to say to your own mother!" (line 321-322). In this part of her turn, she indicates that Olga's conduct clashes with some preset standard of mother-daughter interaction. In addition, she explicitly draws on her social role as a mother to back up her position, presupposing that by virtue of her superior status she has the right to censure her daughter's verbal behaviour. In sum, by employing a meta-communicative imperative and calling on external contextual factors to support her claim, Mother invokes a power differential with her in superior position. In the following turn, rather than accounting or apologising for what she said, Olga asks "You don't love that

pig, do you?" (line 325). In so doing, similar to the preceding extract, she manages to move the topic of talk away from her own prior utterance to her mother's feelings for her current boyfriend, and thus to deescalate the dispute for a moment while avoiding submitting.

Some time later in the same conversation, however, the women are arguing again, and Olga launches another attack at her mother's reputability. This time, she does not even make the effort of camouflaging her insult, and the dispute quickly escalates when she repeats her offence despite Mother's threat.

**example (17) Avenue**

511 OLGA You know you're always feeling sorry for  
512 everyone, but who's sorry for you?  
513 MOTHER I wanted it. You hear me!  
514 OLGA (*Crosses C. to prepare for "slap."*) Too cheap  
515 to buy protection!  
> 516 MOTHER Take that back, don't let me hear you say that  
517 again.  
518 OLGA Too cheap to buy pro-tec-tion!  
519 MOTHER (*Rises, crosses U. The slap is deliberate, a*  
520 *punishment, not in anger.*) You deserve worse  
521 than that. (*Sits.*)

Mother has just told Olga that she has informed her boyfriend about her pregnancy and expects him to propose to her that night. Olga responds by saying: "You know you're always feeling sorry for everyone, but who's sorry for you?" (lines 511-512). Her utterance indicates that she does not share Mother's conviction that her lover is going to propose to her. Moreover, the second part of her turn ("but who's sorry for you?") implies that Mother is pitiable, and thus calls into question Mother's assessment of the situation. In the subsequent turn, Mother strongly rejects this assumption, claiming that she wanted to become pregnant: "I wanted it" (line 513). The following reinforcement: "You hear me!" and the raised voice signal high emotional involvement and aggravate opposition. In the subsequent turn, Olga opposes her with another insult. In arguing that Mother is "Too cheap to buy protection!" (lines 514-

515), she portrays her as both contemptible and stupid. This argumentative strategy enables her to simultaneously degrade Mother and reject the position expressed in her prior turn. In addition, the volume increase signals high emotional involvement and intensifies opposition. Moreover, as the stage directions indicate (line 514), Olga obviously expects Mother to "slap" her. This signals that she is well aware of the offensive character of her utterance. In the subsequent turn, Mother issues a threat: "Take that back, don't let me hear you say that again" (lines 516-517). Her response construes Olga's prior activity as an offence and implies that she will be punished if she does not apologise or if she continues her line of action. Furthermore, as discussed above, in formulating her utterance as an imperative, Mother assumes a position of authority, which allows her to regulate her daughter's verbal behaviour. Therefore, her utterance constitutes an attempt at exercising control over Olga's behaviour. However, despite her mother's threat, Olga insists on her position and produces a verbatim repetition of her prior utterance: "Too cheap to buy protection!" (line 518). The (presumably) provocative tone of voice along with the raised voice and the chant-like way in which she speaks reinforce the confrontational character of her utterance and thus contribute to the escalation of the dispute. In reaction to her daughter's repeated insults, Mother carries out her previous threat and slaps her. The "deliberate" (line 520) use of physical violence as a means of opposition marks both the culmination and the end of the dispute. Following the punishment of her daughter, Mother issues an assertion, claiming that Olga "deserves worse than that" (line 521). By this means, she formulates Olga's prior utterance as offensive and legitimises her forceful reaction.

In the extract from *My mother* below, Margaret issues a threat not so much to reinforce her own prior activity or to counter her daughter's argumentative action as to assert her position of authority vis-à-vis Jackie.

**example (18) My mother I,4**

- 41 MARGARET You could have waited.  
42 JACKIE Why?  
43 MARGARET I had to.

44 JACKIE      That's it, isn't it? (*Gets up and goes to the*  
45                   *house.*)

> 46 MARGARET   If this affects your A-levels!

47 JACKIE      (*Stops*). What?

48 MARGARET   (*Silence. MARGARET has nothing to say.*)

49 JACKIE      I'm going to make a phone call. Phone Neil.  
50                   (*Goes into the house.*)

Just prior to this extract, Jackie has told her mother, Margaret, that she has had sex for the first time. In line 41, Margaret responds to her daughter's revelation by saying, "You could have waited," presumably in a reproachful tone of voice, signalling disapproval. In the following turn, Jackie issues a demand for explanation ("Why?" line 42), requesting that her mother provide a reason for her claim, as discussed above. In line 43, Margaret offers the requested account, answering "I had to." However, rather than accepting her mother's explanation, Jackie's response reveals that she does not consider Margaret's reference to her own past a legitimate reason to disapprove of her own behaviour: "That's it, isn't it?" (line 44). Her rejection of Margaret's argument becomes even more obvious through her non-verbal reaction. Her abrupt withdrawal from the conversation signals a negative affective reaction (presumably anger) at what Margaret has said and aggravates opposition. In addition, the fact that she simply leaves the conversation without further explanation constitutes a challenge to her mother. In reaction, Margaret issues a threat, implying that she will discipline Jackie should her behaviour affect her school performance: "If this affects your A-levels!" (line 46). In so doing, she assumes a position of power that allows her both to censure her daughter's behaviour and to enforce her position by adopting coercive measures. But instead of expressing submission, in the following turn, Jackie dares her to finish her utterance, i.e. to specify the sanction she would impose ("What?" line 47). By this means, she challenges not only Margaret's power to threaten her but also the definition of the relationship she has put forward. This shows that a speaker who performs a threat "has to rely on the addressee's fear of the undesirable consequence that he will bring about to get the addressee to comply" (Tsui 1994: 129; cf. also Katz

1977: 190). Margaret's ensuing silence (line 48) signals that she has nothing to counter with and thus constitutes a back-down. Following her mother's back-down implicative silence, Jessie announces that she is going to call her boy friend. In issuing an assertion rather than a permission request, she once again asserts her autonomy. This spate of talk again clearly demonstrates that power is not something fixed a speaker possesses and can put to use *ad libitum* but a dynamic relationship that has to be constantly negotiated in the local context of the interaction. The mother's criticism and threat are challenged by the daughter as she negotiates her social status with respect to her mother. This shows once more that participants actively negotiate their relationship in and through conflict talk, and that disputes are a profitable site for the analysis of the ways in which participants jointly (re-) produce and transform social order and their status vis-à-vis one another.

To wrap up, in this section, I have examined the argumentative use of threats, that is, conversational moves by which a speaker attempts to get the addressee to do, or refrain from doing, something, by indicating that she will perform a future action to the detriment of the addressee if the addressee fails to heed the threat. We have seen that threats can take various forms. They can be realised through conditionals, declarative statements, imperatives and formulaic expressions, as well as through meta-communicative statements. Moreover, they can explicitly state that the speaker intends to impose a sanction on the addressee should she not heed the threat, or they can imply that non-compliance will result in undesirable consequences. As the preceding analysis has shown, threats simultaneously operate at various levels of interaction. On the structural plane, they make specific second pair parts conditionally relevant. As in the case of directives, compliance or submission is the structurally preferred response following threats. Furthermore, in projecting compliance - and thus the end of mutual opposition - threats also have a high sequence-terminating potential. Therefore, threats provide a conversational resource that disputants may employ to determine both the opponent's subsequent activity and the subsequent course of the interaction. In my corpus, threats are used to reinforce a prior claim following (1)

refusal to comply with a prior directive; (2) continued appeals despite previous rejections; (3) defiant behaviour in response to a reproach; and (4) sustained opposition subsequent to objections. They are also used in direct reaction to prior argumentative actions, for instance, insults. In sum, threats have both a prospective function (determining the opponent's subsequent action) and a retrospective function (challenging the opponent's preceding activity). At the interpersonal level of interaction, threats are intrinsically face-threatening acts in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987). More precisely, they pose a severe threat to the addressee's negative face, as they are potentially harmful to her autonomy. Threats not only demand that the addressee perform (or refrain from performing) some activity but also indicate that the speaker will instigate sanctions against her should she not comply, and in so doing put considerable pressure on the addressee to act in accordance with the speaker's demands. For this reason, threats are control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts at exercising power over the interlocutor's activities, since they potentially limit the addressee's freedom of action. With the exception of examples (1) and (14), in which Jessie threatens to kill herself on the spot if Mama insists on calling her brother, the threats in my data are exclusively uttered by the mother. Moreover, they occur mainly in those dyads in which the daughter is not yet of age and/or still lives at home, and which are, as a result, characterised by an asymmetrical relationship between the speakers based on emotional as well as material dependence. In uttering a threat, the mother draws on this underlying power differential (which enables her to bring about undesirable consequence for the daughter) to enforce compliance, thereby asserting her authority.<sup>94</sup> This does not mean, however, that daughters are incapable of offering resistance to their mother's threats. As we have seen, apart from challenging the appropriateness or fairness of a prior threat and/or demanding that the mother provide a justification for employing a coercive measure, they can also counter a threat by calling into question the mother's power to threaten them. Consequently, a valid threat presumes that the speaker has the (social, physical, mental, etc.) power as well as the determination to enforce compliance. That is to say, a speaker who performs a threat has to rely on the addressee's fear of

the sanctions announced in the threat and on the addressee's assumption that the speaker is both able and willing to realise these sanctions. In addition, the preceding discussion evidences (once more) that power is not a static social category but a dynamic relationship that is constantly negotiated in and through talk-in-interaction. It also shows that the dynamics of power is most obvious in the open clash of control manoeuvres and resistance in verbal conflict sequences. It demonstrates that participants actively negotiate their relationship in and through conflict talk, and, by the same token, that dispute represents a fruitful site for the analysis of the ways in which participants jointly (re-) construct and transform social order and their status with respect to one another. The escalating quality of threats, potentially leading up to violent non-verbal moves, contributes to the characteristic affective and confrontational key of these disputes sequences and distinguishes them from such types of conflict management as negotiation, discussion and argumentation. Van Eemeren et al. (1993: 28) claim that a "critical discussion," i.e. a normative model of ideal resolution-oriented argumentative discourse, does not contain threats. According to them, threats are unsuited to the resolution of disagreement, since a disagreement cannot be resolved through strategies that end a discussion without mutual consent. In my data, clearly, the interactional goal is not conflict resolution. Instead the participants can be seen to actively design their turns so as to aggravate opposition and escalate the dispute at hand. That is to say, in the plays under analysis, mother-daughter dispute is portrayed as an interaction- or process-centred activity rather than a resolution-oriented activity.

## 7.6 Relevance challenges

Another method by which speakers can challenge the opponent's prior activity is by questioning whether what the opponent has said is actually relevant to the matter at hand. This can be done through the use of what I will call "relevance challenges." Relevance challenges are a class of utterances which oppose the prior speaker's claim on the grounds of its relevance to the matter in question. They tend to be produced without delay, immediately following the opponent's preceding utterance. Relevance challenges vary widely in form. Some examples begin with the discourse marker "So," others are prefaced by phrases such as "I don't care," and "I know."

In producing a relevance challenge, a speaker asserts that the previous utterance is not relevant to the dispute at hand. Accordingly, relevance challenges present a threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987: 66). In addition, claiming that the other's statement is irrelevant conveys a specific view of what is being argued about and what constitutes an allowable contribution to that argument. In this sense, relevance challenges are meta-argumentative acts that comment on the opponent's communicative activity in relation to the ongoing dispute.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, by questioning the relevance of an opponent's remark, speakers attempt to exert control over the content of the ongoing dispute, i.e. to exercise a degree of discursive power. Instances of this argumentative device are illustrated in the following examples.

Prior to the extract from *Avenue* below, Mother and Olga have been arguing about Mother's new relationship.

### example (1): *Avenue*

337 MOTHER He thinks you're a strange one. He says he  
338 saw you on the street calling after a stray  
339 dog that was running away from you. He said  
340 he saw you walking and your goddam shadow  
341 looked so funny.  
342 OLGA (*Turns on the radio and switches it fast*  
343 *to different channels.*)  
344 MOTHER Hey, you're gonna break that radio, switching

345           it fast like that. Someday I just might break  
 346           that radio myself. Don't want nothing in this  
 347           house reminding me of that bastard father of  
 348           yours. Now what was I saying? Oh. About your  
 349           shadow. I finished that, didn't I? Oh, he  
 350           says you're too quiet. You need someone to  
 351           liven you up.  
 352 OLGA       I saw him livening some woman up on liquor  
 353           when I passed him on the street.  
 > 354 MOTHER   So, men are men, whiskey and women go  
 355           together.

The sequence starts with Mother shifting the topic of talk to her boyfriend's opinion of Olga (lines 337-341). Her unmitigated report of his denigrating remarks about Olga conveys both his and her own disapproving view of her daughter. Her utterance creates an image of Mother conspiring with her lover against Olga, talking about her in a way that reduces her to an object of mockery. Moreover, the use of the expletive "goddam" intensifies the deprecation. As a reaction, Olga turns on the radio, thus signalling her withdrawal from the conversation (lines 342-343). However, her action is opposed by Mother, who claims that she is going to break the radio (lines 344-345). Following this brief side sequence, in the remainder of her turn, Mother returns to the original subject of her talk, namely her lover's demeaning comments on Olga (lines 348-351). This time, Olga opposes her, claiming that she saw her boyfriend with another woman (lines 352-353). She builds her counter by incorporating in her formulation the phrase "to liven you up" from Mother's preceding utterance. As discussed above, the use of contrastive mirroring permits her to establish a close link to her mother's utterance at the word level, while emphasising dissent on the content level of interaction. In line 354, Mother responds with "So, men are men, whiskey and women go together."

"So" is a preface to a further component in Mother's turn, which offers a counter to Olga's claim. Following "So," Mother produces a series of clichés ("men are men, whiskey and women go together."), which construe her boyfriend's conduct as standard male behaviour, and thereby discards Olga's assertion as irrelevant. In

other words, Mother uses "So" to begin a turn involving a reason why she considers Olga's claim to be of no consequence for the ongoing dispute.

In the following extract from *Alto*, Wanda and her mother are arguing about whether they should get on the bus to San Antonio to meet Wanda's father there.

**example (2): Alto II, 3**

89 WANDA I'm getting you ready. (*She tries to dress*  
90 *FLORENE*)  
91 FLORENE I said we can't go.  
92 WANDA He's meeting our bus in San Antonio.  
93 FLORENE We won't be on it, Wanda.  
94 WANDA It's what we've been waiting for. He wants us  
95 to.  
> 96 FLORENE I don't care what he wants! That's not enough  
97 of a reason.

The sequence starts with Wanda trying to help her mother get dressed (lines 89-90). When Florene insists that they cannot go (line 91), Wanda counters her, asserting that her father will be expecting them to be on the bus (line 92). Once more, her mother opposes her, maintaining that they "won't be on it" (line 93). When Wanda again objects, arguing that her father wants them to go and meet him (lines 94-95), Florene challenges her claim by saying: "I don't care what he wants! That's not enough of a reason." (lines 96-97).

Like "So" in the preceding extract, here the preface "I don't care" is used to initiate a turn conveying the grounds on which the speaker dismisses the opponent's prior claim as irrelevant to the ongoing dispute. In the remainder of her turn, Florene offers a reason why she considers Wanda's argument to be of no consequence for the discussion at hand: "That's not enough of a reason." (lines 96-97).

To sum up so far, in the examples above, relevance challenges such as "So" or "I don't care" are used to deny the importance of the other's preceding action, arguing that it is irrelevant to the discussion at hand. By contrast, another type of relevance challenge denies the validity of what the other has just said by arguing that

what the opponent is offering in her utterance is not newsworthy.<sup>96</sup> Such moves can be realised by terms such as "I know" or "What's new about that?"

In the fragment below, Joyce informs Claire that she consulted a solicitor about her daughter's problems (line 33). When Claire challenges her, claiming that she already has a solicitor (line 37), Joyce dismisses her objection by arguing that she already knew what her daughter has just told her: "I know that, don't I?" (line 37).

**example (3): Neptide II,3**

33 JOYCE I saw a solicitor about you.  
34 CLAIRE What for? To charge me with slander?  
35 (A look from JOYCE is enough to make CLAIRE say:)  
36 But Mum, I already have a solicitor.  
> 37 JOYCE I know that, don't I? This one specialised in  
38 custody, you should have got one who knew all  
49 about it in the first place.

By responding with "I know," Joyce disputes the relevance of Claire's claim by declaring that the information she is offering in her utterance is not newsworthy. In the remainder of her turn, she provides an explanation of why she considers the fact that Claire already has a solicitor irrelevant (lines 37-40).

In the extract from *Avenue* below, Mother also challenges the relevance of her daughter's objection by calling its newsworthiness into question:

**example (4): Avenue**

231 MOTHER Hey, one day I bought a piece of gum, the kind  
232 that has the fortune in it and what do you  
233 think it said?  
234 OLGA (*Shrugs and turns away.*)  
235 MOTHER Guess, go on, take a guess.  
236 OLGA (*Shrugs again.*)  
237 MOTHER I'll give you a hint. You'd like what it said,  
238 Olga. (*Silence, then looking directly into her*  
239 *eyes, she says the big revelation.*) It said  
240 every dog has its day.

241 OLGA       (*Stares at her.*)

242 MOTHER    Isn't that a good fortune?

243 OLGA       If you're a dog it is.

244 MOTHER    (*Frustrated by Olga again.*) They don't mean it

245             like that! It's just a saying, like birds of a

246             feather flock together. They don't mean birds,

247             they mean people. I mean figure it out, anyone

248             can, except you. First of all, why would they

249             write fortunes for birds and dogs, they ain't

250             human.

251 OLGA       (*Impatient.*) Just what is your point?

252 MOTHER    My day is coming. I mean it has to according to

253             my fortune.

254 OLGA       But what if somebody else got the fortune? It

255             would be theirs.

256 MOTHER    Yeah, cause they bought the gum. So what's new

> 257             about that?

259 OLGA       (*Disgusted; weary.*) Never mind.

In the extract from *Avenue below*, Mother tells Olga that she bought a fortune cookie, which said "every dog has its day" (lines 231-240). When Olga does not express any enthusiasm about her mother's "big revelation" and simply "stares at her" without saying anything (line 241), Mother produces a negative interrogative: "Isn't that a good fortune?" (line 242). As Heritage (2002) has pointed out in a study of news interviews, such types of interrogatives are built to prefer 'yes' answers. By means of reversing the polarity of the interrogative, they convey the speaker's predisposition to a positive response; in Bolinger's (1957: 99) terms, they display a strong "conduciveness" for a positive response. That is to say, by formulating her turn as a reversed polarity negative interrogative Mother projects a 'yes' from Olga.

However, instead of providing the "questioner-preferred" (Sacks 1992, vol. 2: 414) agreement, Olga expresses her scepticism about the applicability of the saying to human beings (line 243). In reaction to her daughter's objection, Mother produces an extensive turn, defending her position by pointing to the figurative meaning of the saying (lines 244-250). Olga responds by saying: "Just what

is your point?" (line 251). With this argumentative move, she questions the relevance of Mother's prior utterance to the matter at hand and at the same time requires her to account for the importance of her remark in the next turn. Her "*impatient*" tone of voice intensifies the oppositional character of her utterance. In the next turn, Mother provides the required explanation, summarising the upshot of her utterance by saying "My day is coming. I mean it has to according to my fortune." (lines 252-253). In reaction, Olga opposes her again, arguing that the fact that Mother got this particular fortune is pure coincidence (lines 254-255). In the subsequent turn, while she concedes that Olga is right ("Yeah, cause they bought the gum." line 256), Mother disputes the relevance of Olga's claim by arguing that what she said is not newsworthy ("So what's new about that?" lines 256-257), and, thus, beside the point.

To recapitulate so far, as the preceding discussion has shown, relevance challenges such as "So" or "I don't care," can be used to argue for the irrelevance of the opponent's prior contribution, when their claim cannot be disputed. They can be used to initiate turns offering reasons why the speaker considers the other's preceding statement to be of no consequence. In addition, relevance challenges can be employed to deny the importance of what the opponent has just said by arguing that it is not newsworthy, i.e. that she has presented something the speaker already knew. Such moves can be realised by phrases such as "I know" or "What's new about that?", which are extremely defying.

In her study of children's arguments, M. H. Goodwin (1990) has found that preadolescent children frequently use a similar argumentative strategy, which she terms "disclaimer" and defines as "an action that denies the *relevance* of a prior action rather than disagreeing with it" (153, original emphasis). Similar phenomena have also been observed in disputes between adults. For instance, Muntigl & Turnbull (1998) describe "irrelevancy claims," i.e. "a type of disagreement by which a speaker asserts that the previous claim is not relevant to the discussion at hand" (229). Correspondingly, Kotthoff (1993a) states that aggravation in disputes can be signalled by repeated tries to deny the relevance of the interlocutor's utterance for the discussed issue, and Spranz-Fogasy (2002) notes that in argumentative stretches of talk,

disputants frequently deny the relevance of interlocutors' prior contributions to the ongoing discussion.

While the relevance challenges in the examples above (as well as the instances discussed by Goodwin and Muntigl & Turnbull) contain reasons why the speaker considers the opponent's prior claim to be of no consequence, relevance challenges also oppose the prior argument's validity without making clear precisely on what grounds its relevance is being challenged. Such moves may function purely as second position moves (as described above) by which the opponent is required to expand on or account for the challenged claim. This is exemplified by the following extracts from *Avenue*.

Prior to the exchange below, Olga and Mother were having an argument about Mother's new boyfriend. The sequence starts with Mother attempting to "make peace" with Olga by promising her that she can take piano lessons after she has got married. In line 458, Olga responds by saying "So":

**example (5): Avenue**

455 MOTHER (Trying to make peace.) After the marriage,  
456 there'll be some money for you to take piano  
457 lessons.  
> 458 OLGA So.  
459 MOTHER You'd like that, wouldn't you?  
460 OLGA If I took lessons, I might become too great.

As an argumentative move, Olga's "So." accomplishes two things: Firstly, it challenges the relevance of Mother's previous utterance within the ongoing talk. Secondly, because it stands alone as a complete turn, it requires Mother to resume the floor and account for the relevance of her remark - which she does in the next turn (line 459).<sup>97</sup> This floor-returning property is an important argumentative feature of the freestanding "So." By challenging the relevance of Mother's utterance and obliging her to account for the validity of what she has said, Olga successfully manages to impose her view of what counts as an appropriate contribution to the ongoing talk and to control her mother's subsequent activity. Thus, "So." represents a powerful argumentative resource that disputants

can effectively employ to exert control over the other's next action, i.e. to exercise discursive power.

As we have seen, in the cases above, "So" prefaces and other relevance challenges are used to deny the importance or relevance of the opponent's prior claim, without disputing its truth. Immediately following these prefaces, second speakers themselves go on to provide grounds for the unimportance or irrelevance of the other's contribution. By contrast, the freestanding "So." used by Olga in preceding example sets up a different relationship between the participants in which it is the first speaker rather than the second who should, in a next turn, account for the validity of what she has said. Consequently, when "So" stands on its own in a turn, it challenges the opponent's activity in both a more extensive and a more confrontational sense than when it is used to preface some following turn component because it enables the speaker to simultaneously discard the other's prior claim as irrelevant and oblige her to provide an explanation for her remark in the subsequent turn.

To sum up the discussion so far, since it forces the prior speaker to resume the floor and offer an account for her claim, thus limiting her freedom of action, the freestanding "So" represents a control manoeuvre, i.e. an attempt at exercising discursive power at the structural level of interaction. Moreover, with regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, relevance challenges that stand on their own represent face-threatening acts that threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. Firstly, they threaten the addressee's positive face wants by questioning the relevance of her prior contribution. In addition, they present a threat to the addressee's negative face by impeding her freedom of action, since they put the recipient in a position to account for the activity in question. Therefore, freestanding relevance challenges provide an argumentative resource available to speakers that may be exploited to exercise interactional power over others at the micro-level of interaction by constraining their freedom of action.

As we have seen, relevance challenges represent a powerful discursive resource by which disputants can put opponents on the defensive about what represents an appropriate contribution to the ongoing argument. However, as the following two examples illustrate,

they may themselves be challenged by the recipient in the subsequent turn. In the extract from *Avenue* below, Olga's "So." is counter-opposed by Mother in the following turn:

**example (6): Avenue**

572 OLGA My head hurts. I have a headache.  
573 MOTHER Get rid of it.  
574 OLGA (*Finished setting table.*) Leave me alone  
575 already.  
576 MOTHER I feel sorry for you.  
> 577 OLGA (*Goes back to high-riser.*) So.  
578 MOTHER So? Take that nasty word back. I don't like  
579 it. It sounds sassy. And whatever you say to  
580 me better be nice. You see, I read my  
581 horoscope and nobody is supposed to say  
582 anything bad about me, including using little  
583 words.

The sequence starts with Olga complaining of a headache (line 572). Rather than expressing commiseration with her daughter, for instance, by comforting her or offering to get her an aspirin, Mother tells her to "get rid of it" (line 573). As a reaction to her mother's unsympathetic response, Olga tells her to leave her alone (574-575). When Mother says that she feels sorry for her (line 576), Olga responds just by saying "So." (line 577). By this means, she is able to challenge the validity of Mother's assertion, while at the same time obliging her to resume the floor and account for the relevance of her remark. In contrast to the preceding extract, however, in this sequence, Mother responds to Olga's relevance challenge with a counter-challenge (lines 578-583). She begins her turn by repeating Olga's prior utterance ("So?"), producing it with falling-rising intonation. As discussed above, (partial) repetition of the interlocutor's prior talk is frequently used as a preface to begin oppositional turns. It announces right at the beginning of the turn that disagreement is going to follow and conveys a particular affective reaction to what the other has just said. By prefacing her turn with a repetition of her daughter's utterance, Mother displays her indignation at Olga's response, and thus portrays her activity

as inappropriate and offensive. Moreover, the repeat is directly followed by further "meta-communicative" talk, i.e. "talk about ways of talking" (Tannen 2001: 9), which explicitly opposes what Olga has said: immediately following the opposition preface, Mother produces an unmitigated meta-communicative directive, which focuses on Olga's verbal behaviour, demanding Olga to "take back" what she said. In addition, she explicitly comments on the offensive character of Olga's utterance by referring to it as "nasty" and claiming that "It sounds sassy" (line 579). Finally, she demands Olga to change her verbal behaviour and be polite ("And whatever you say to me better be nice." lines 579-580) rather than offending her by using "little words" (line 583).

Similarly, in the extract from *My sister* below, Madame Danzard counter-opposes her daughter's relevance challenge rather than accounting for the importance of her own prior claim:

**example (7): My sister 9**

127 MADAME DANZARD Have you turned up your three cards yet?  
 128 ISABELLE Not yet.  
 129 (She sneaks a card into her lap.)  
 130 MADAME DANZARD Well, I absolutely refuse to turn-  
 131 Isabelle! You cheated. I can't believe  
 132 my eyes.  
 133 ISABELLE I did not.  
 134 MADAME DANZARD You did. You moved that jack of hearts  
 135 onto the queen of diamonds.  
 > 136 ISABELLE And-?  
 137 MADAME DANZARD What do you mean - And? You know you  
 138 can't move red onto red. Move it back.

Madame Danzard and her daughter Isabelle are playing cards. In line 131, Madame Danzard accuses Isabelle of cheating. When Isabelle rejects her mother's blame (line 133), Madame Danzard insists on her claim ("You did."), and subsequently elaborates on her complaint by offering a detailed description of Isabelle's violation (lines 134-135). In the following turn, Isabelle responds simply by saying "And-?" (line 136). By means of this opposition strategy, she disputes the relevance of her mother's claim and simultaneously

requires her to account for the importance of her remark in the next turn. However, rather than producing a defence for her own claim, Madame Danzard opposes Isabelle's activity with a counter-challenge. She initiates her response with a return question: "What do you mean - And?" (line 137). While this might be heard as an innocuous request for clarification initiating repair on Isabelle's prior utterance, Madame Danzard's turn displays a number of features that rule out such an interpretation. For instance, as Goodwin (1990: 147) has pointed out, speakers can produce an aggravated opposition preface by preceding a partial repeat (cf. above) with a question word such as "Who" or "What." In the example above, Madame Danzard employs a similar strategy: By repeating Isabelle's prior utterance ("And?") and preceding this repeat with "What do you mean," she indicates right at the beginning of her turn that opposition is going to follow. Moreover, as I noted earlier, repetition of the talk that is being opposed allows the speaker to display a certain affective reaction to what the other has just said. By beginning her turn with a repetition of her daughter's utterance, Madame Danzard signals her irritation at Isabelle's response, thereby portraying her activity as inappropriate. In addition, the disagreement preface is directly followed by a turn component that explicitly opposes Isabelle's action: Subsequent to the repeat, Madame Danzard produces an assertion in support of her prior claim. By referring to the rules of the card game and the fact that Isabelle is familiar with them ("You know you can't move red onto red." lines 137-138), she legitimises her initial complaint and at the same time undermines Isabelle's preceding relevance challenge. This is followed by a directive, with which she commands Isabelle to remedy her failure by moving the card back (line 138).

To conclude, as the preceding discussion has shown, disputants can build opposition by utilising a specific second position resource. Relevance challenges such as "So," "I don't care," "I know" or "What's new about that?" may be employed to argue for the irrelevance of the opponent's prior contribution, when her claim cannot be disputed. They can be used to initiate turns offering reasons why the speaker considers what the opponent has just said to be of no consequence, for instance, by arguing that it is not newsworthy. Thus, relevance challenges represent a discursive

resource by which disputants can put opponents on the defensive about what constitutes an allowable contribution to the ongoing dispute. Claiming that the other's statement is irrelevant to the matter at hand conveys a specific view of what is being argued about and what counts as an acceptable contribution to that argument. Hence, by challenging the relevance of an opponent's remark, speakers attempt to exert control over the content of the ongoing dispute, i.e. to exercise a degree of discursive power. In other words, relevance challenges provide a powerful argumentative resource that can be effectively employed by disputants to take control of the content level of the ongoing interaction. In addition, relevance challenges such as "Just what is your point?", "So." or "And?" may oppose the prior argument's validity without making explicit precisely on what grounds its relevance is being challenged. The important characteristic of these argumentative moves is that, in addition to questioning the validity of the other's prior claim, they require the opponent to defend their claim, while enabling the speaker to argue without putting forward an alternative view of their own. By forcing the prior speaker to resume the floor and offer an account for their remark in the subsequent turn, relevance challenges that stand on their own in a turn limit the opponent's freedom of action. Hence, freestanding relevance challenges represent attempts at exercising discursive power at the structural level of interaction. Furthermore, with regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, relevance challenges that stand on their own represent face-threatening acts that threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. Firstly, they threaten the addressee's positive face wants by questioning the relevance of her prior contribution. In addition, they present a threat to the addressee's negative face by impeding her freedom of action, since they put the recipient in a position to account for the activity in question. Therefore, freestanding relevance challenges provide a conversational resource that speakers have at their disposal to exercise interactional power over others at various levels of the dispute-in-interaction. This does not mean, however, that recipients are incapable of offering resistance to an opponent's relevance challenge. As we have seen, disputants can counter-oppose the prior speaker's relevance challenge, for

instance, by means of question repeats, which contest the activity's appropriateness or legitimacy.

These findings show that the relevance of conversational contributions apparently plays an important part in the accomplishment of arguments and can thus become the focus of oppositional moves.

In the preceding sections, I have proposed a view of dispute as a joint, co-constructed interactional product. That is to say, participants cooperate in creating the (inter)activity of arguing. In fact, although they are clearly engaged in oppositional talk, the disputants in my data noticeably orient to the expectation to act in accordance with Grice's *Cooperative Principle*:<sup>98</sup>

Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (1975: 45; cf. also Grice 1989).

According to Grice, hearers will assume (within limits) that speakers are acting in accordance with the *Cooperative Principle*, and speakers will expect that hearers will make this assumption. Taken by Grice to be a prerequisite for any form of rational, joint interaction, the *Cooperative Principle* encompasses certain values (i.e. sincerity, efficiency, relevance, and clarity) that give rise to the *Conversational Maxims* of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner (Grice 1989: 26-27). These maxims require that participants try to make their contributions be true, efficient, relevant and clear; and speakers can be seen to orient to the expectation of sincerity, informativeness, relevance and clarity in conflict talk just as in friendly conversation. As the preceding discussion demonstrates, the relevance of conversational contributions obviously plays a vital role in the accomplishment of disputes and can therefore become the target of oppositional moves. In other words, any utterance must have a point; otherwise its validity may be challenged. Correspondingly, van Eemeren et al. (1993: 7-11) maintain that in an ideal form of argumentative discourse Grice's *Conversational Maxim* of Relevance has to be acted upon: Contributions to "critical discussions" must be relevant to the purpose of the interaction, i.e. the resolution of disagreement. Similarly, Spranz-Fogasy (2002)

lists "significance" to the (purpose of the) interaction as a basic requirement of contributions to argumentative discourse, which can be disputed or claimed.

It is not necessary to understand things in order to argue about them.

(Caron de Beaumarchais)

### 7.7 Competence challenges

Another way in which the disputants in my data oppose the interlocutor's prior activity is by questioning her competence or status. This can be done by means of an argumentative strategy that I will call 'competence challenge.' Competence challenges are a class of oppositional moves that call into question not simply (an aspect of) the prior talk but the competence or status of the party who produced that talk. More precisely, the person presenting an argument is attacked instead of the argument itself. Speakers can deny the opponent's competence or status by referring to personal qualities such as, for instance, age, profession, social role, mental stability, etc.

Studies of naturally occurring arguments have observed similar phenomena. For instance, Spiegel (1995: 202) lists "incompetence claims" ("Inkompetenzerklärungen") as a type of argumentative moves in everyday arguments. Likewise Spranz-Fogasy (2002) remarks that "denying competence" ("Kompetenz absprechen") is a frequent activity in conflict talk both in institutional and everyday contexts. However, neither discusses concrete examples of this argumentative strategy.

Competence adds force to arguments, whereas lack of competence undermines them (cf. Spranz-Fogasy 2002). Therefore, by disputing an opponent's competence a speaker simultaneously challenges the position put forward by the addressee in the prior activity, or even in the whole exchange. Hence, competence challenges provide a powerful argumentative resource that can be effectively employed to challenge the opponent both on the interpersonal and the content level of interaction. Competence challenges are thus classical arguments *ad hominem*, i.e. attacks against the person. An *ad hominem* is typically intended to undermine an argument or position that a person endorses by challenging the arguer in some way (instead of dealing with the person's point).<sup>99</sup> Competence challenges thus initiate a change from the content level to the interpersonal level of the interaction.

Challenges to competence present a threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987), since they indicate that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the addressee's personal characteristics. Consequently, following a competence challenge, the recipient must either back down, and lose face or prepare a defence against the other's attack. By virtue of limiting the addressee's freedom of action, competence challenges constitute control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts at exercising discursive power in the local context of the interaction.

In addition, claiming that the other is incompetent to argue conveys a specific view of which characteristics and skills mark a competent disputant. In this sense, similar to relevance challenges, competence challenges are meta-argumentative acts. But while the former comment on the opponent's communicative activity in relation to the dispute in interaction, the latter evaluate the opponent's competence as a participant in the ongoing argument. Thus, competence challenges represent a discursive resource that disputants can exploit to put opponents on the defensive about what might be called their 'disputing competence.'

In my data, competence challenges are produced directly following the opponent's preceding utterance or subsequent to other oppositional activities. They typically have the syntactic form of declarative statements containing phrases such as "You don't know," "You don't understand," or "You have no idea." Instances of this argumentative device and possible counter strategies are illustrated in the following fragments.

In the extract from *Home* below, Olivia opposes her daughter's prior accusation by challenging her competence to make the claim she is making:

**example (1): Home**

283 MARY JANE That's all you care about, isn't it? What  
284 the neighbors think and where the neighbors  
285 are moving to. This is my second chance. I  
286 don't know where I'm gonna go now. You're  
287 turning my life upside down.  
> 288 OLIVIA You don't have any idea what it means to  
289 have your life turned upside down.

290 MARY JANE That's ridiculous. That's so utterly  
291 ridiculous.

Prior to this fragment, Olivia and her daughter Mary Jane were having a fierce argument about who is responsible for the failure of Mary Jane's marriage. The sequence starts with Mary challenging her mother, claiming that she only cares about "what the neighbours think" and do (lines 283-285). Subsequently, she shifts the focus of talk to her own current situation ("This is my second chance. I don't know where I'm gonna go now." lines 285-286) and then concludes her turn with an accusation: "You're turning my life upside down." (lines 286-287). In the next turn, Olivia responds by saying "You don't have any idea what it means to have your life turned upside down." (lines 288-289). With this argumentative move, she denies Mary Jane's competence to make the claim she is making and thereby rejects her daughter's utterance as baseless. Olivia constructs her counter by means of contrastive mirroring. She makes use of Mary Jane's turn-final utterance "You're turning my life upside down." and modifies it to her advantage. In so doing, she produces a matching utterance, which serves to oppose her daughter's prior activity. Word-repetition ties the two opposing turns together while simultaneously intensifying thematic opposition and signalling interpersonal involvement. In the subsequent turn, Mary counter-opposes her mother's competence challenge by disqualifying her claim as "ridiculous."<sup>100</sup> The particle "utterly" in the second part of her turn serves to intensify opposition. Moreover, self-repetition aggravates disagreement and displays a particular affective reaction (probably outrage) at what Olivia has just said.

In the following extract from *'night Mother*, like Olivia in the prior fragment, Jessie opposes her mother's prior utterance by explicitly denying her competence to talk about her daughter's emotions, and like Olivia, she uses contrastive mirroring to construct her counter.

**example (2): 'night Mother**

1288 MAMA Nothing I ever did was good enough for you and  
1289 I want to know why.  
1290 JESSIE That's not true.

1291 MAMA And I want to know why you've lived here this  
 1292 long feeling the way you do.  
 > 1293 JESSIE You have no earthly idea how I feel.  
 1294 MAMA Well, how could I? You're real far back there,  
 1295 Jessie.

At the beginning of this sequence, Mama claims that her daughter has never appreciated anything she did ("Nothing I ever did was good enough for you" line 1288) and demands that Jessie provide an explanation for her discontent with her mother's behaviour ("and I want to know why." line 1289).<sup>101</sup> In the following turn, Jessie opposes Mama's utterance by denying the truth of her assertion: "That's not true." (line 1290).<sup>102</sup> Rather than defending her initial claim, in the next turn, Mama produces another directive, demanding that Jessie offer an account for her behaviour (lines 1291-1292). Instead of providing the requested explanation, however, Jessie responds by saying "You have no earthly idea how I feel" (line 1293). With this argumentative move, she claims that Mama is not in a position to form an opinion about her daughter's emotional life, and thus also rejects Mama's prior activity. The use of the particle "earthly" serves to intensify opposition and indicate interpersonal involvement. Like Olivia in the preceding example, Jessie builds her counter by exploiting her mother's previous utterance. In line 1293, she takes up the formulation "feeling the way you do" from Mama's preceding utterance and transforms it into "how I feel," thereby constructing a mirroring utterance, which challenges her mother's prior statement. Verbal shadowing is employed to tie the disagreeing moves together, while simultaneously re-evaluating perspectives on the matter in question (i.e. Jessie's emotions). In this way, a close link is established at the structural level, while contrast is stressed at the content level of the interaction.

In the extract from *My mother* below, Margaret refutes her daughter's demand to be treated like an adult, claiming that she is too inexperienced to assess the consequences of her behaviour:

**example (3): My mother I,4**

1 MARGARET (*Switches off the transistor.*) I should never  
 2 have let you go to that party in Hammersmith!

3 JACKIE Please, Mummy, leave me alone.  
4 MARGARET You said you were staying with his parents!  
5 JACKIE We were. But they didn't mind us sleeping,  
6 together. Not everyone has your hang ups.  
7 MARGARET Oh you can wound me sometimes, Jackie!  
8 JACKIE You sound like Granny now.  
9 MARGARET What am I going to tell Daddy?  
10 JACKIE If you want me to behave like an adult, then  
11 stop treating me like a child!  
> 12 MARGARET (Pause.) You don't know what might happen.  
13 JACKIE I might fall in love.  
14 MARGARET (Trying to ignore this.) You can get pregnant  
15 the first time, you know.  
16 JACKIE Thanks for telling me now.

After a party, Jackie has stayed overnight at her boyfriend's house and, apparently, she has slept in a room together with him. Her mother expresses her outrage at Jackie's behaviour, asking rhetorically "What am I going to tell Daddy?" in line 11. Rather than addressing Margaret's question, Jackie produces a directive ("If you want me to behave like an adult, then stop treating me like a child!" lines 10-11). With this utterance, she portrays Margaret's behaviour as inadequate and, at the same time, demands her to change her conduct and treat her daughter like a mature person. In the following turn, after a short pause, Margaret responds by saying "You don't know what might happen" (line 12). By using this argumentative move, she denies that Jackie is in a position to estimate the possible consequences of her behaviour. In so doing, she challenges her daughter's competence and thereby discards her prior contribution as unfounded. In the subsequent turn, Jackie opposes her mother's challenge with a counter-assertion. By stating that she "might fall in love" (line 13), she implies she does know what might happen, thus contesting Margaret's prior claim. When Margaret puts forward an alternative position in the next turn, claiming that Jackie "can get pregnant the first time" she has sex with somebody (lines 14-15), Jackie responds with the sarcastic retort "Thanks for telling me now" (line 16), implying that the

information Margaret has just given her comes too late, and is therefore useless.

In the preceding examples, competence challenges are produced directly following the opponent's utterance. By contrast, in the following fragments, these argumentative moves are preceded by other oppositional activities. For instance, in the extract from *My sister* below, Madame Danzard's competence challenge is prefaced by return questions, which signal right at the beginning of her turn that opposition is going to follow:

**example (4): My sister 9**

248 MADAME DANZARD What an extravagance! Can you imagine  
249 if someone had seen...  
250 ISABELLE (*Standing up.*) Oh Maman, you go too  
251 far. (*She starts up the staircase.*)  
252 MADAME DANZARD (*Following her.*) Do I? Do I, my dear?  
> 253 You don't know this town like I do.  
254 Imagine if the Flintons had been  
here?  
255 Or Madame Blanchard. Or... Madame  
256 Castelneuve. I can't even think of  
> 257 it... You think I go too far. No my  
258 dear, you haven't lived here nearly  
259 long enough.

In line 248, Madame Danzard expresses her exasperation at the fact that Lea, one of the Danzards' maids, is wearing a pink sweater for work instead of proper work clothes: "What an extravagance!" In the second part of her turn, she suggests to her daughter that it would have caused a scandal if someone had seen their maid wearing such clothes (lines 248-249). However, Isabelle cuts her off, claiming that she is exaggerating: "Oh Maman, you go too far." (lines 250-251). The interruptive placement of Isabelle's oppositional turn, as well as the fact that she is starting to leave the room during her talk indicate that she is unwilling to listen to her mother's tirade. Madame Danzard initiates her response to her daughter's opposition with a repeated return question: "Do I? Do I, my dear?" (line 252). This turn beginning deserves closer examination.

As discussed above, in friendly conversation, the preference for agreement noticeably influences the shape of disagreeing turns. While disagreements are expected to occur in certain environments, agreements are commonly organised as preferred activities and disagreements as dispreferred activities. Since disagreements are treated as actions to be deferred, expressions of disagreement are frequently prefaced by forms expressing pre-disagreement, i.e. components that typically go in front of disagreements and that signal that a disagreement is going to follow. By means of delaying disagreements from early positioning, such components serve as mitigating devices and thus demonstrate an orientation towards the preference for agreement, as discussed above. For instance, disagreement may be delayed by means of partial repeats or requests for clarification which occur as pre-disagreement turns. Such forms are also used to initiate repair on the prior speaker's turn.<sup>103</sup> As Schegloff et al. (1977) have argued, in ordinary conversation there is a preference for self-correction, that is, the party who produces a turn with a trouble source generally corrects him- or herself. When a party other than the speaker initiates repair such a turn is generally occupied with little else than pointing to the trouble source. Other-repair initiators indicate that the current speaker has located a difficulty in something the other has said, but leave it - at least in the first instance - to the prior speaker to clarify, revise or restate their own initial statement in the following turn.

While partial repeats or requests for clarification are designed to locate just what it is in the co-participant's prior turn that the speaker is having trouble with, i.e. the repairable, there is another form of other-repair initiation that does not locate specifically what it is in the prior turn that the speaker is having difficulties with. In employing this form, which is typically realised by such objects as "Pardon?", "Sorry?", "What?", a speaker indicates that she has some problem with the other's prior turn, but does not specify where or what that problem is. In other words, these types of repair initiators do not themselves identify the repairable items in the prior turns, or specify the nature of the difficulty that the speaker has with what her co-participant has just said. For this reason, Drew (1996) calls these forms "open"

class of repair initiations: "they leave 'open' what is the repairable trouble which the speaker is having with the prior turn" (72). In a study of instances of this kind of repair initiation in naturally occurring telephone conversations, Drew (1996) has found that the difficulty addressed through some "open" class repair initiations is not a single specifiable repairable item located precisely in the prior turn but rather concerns aspects of the sequential connection between the prior turn and the preceding sequence. His analysis of the sequential environment in which "open" class repair initiators are employed shows that one environment in which these forms of other-initiated repair are produced is following a co-participant's turn that is perceived as somehow inapposite or inappropriate as a response to what the speaker said in the turn preceding the repairable. In these cases, the speaker apparently perceives that the interlocutor's prior turn is somehow inappropriate in terms of what came before, and this perception triggers repair initiation. Drew shows that the repairable turns can be in various ways sequentially ill-fitted. For instance, speakers may initiate repair in circumstances where they perceive that their co-participants do not fully align or affiliate with them. This suggests that troubles generating "open" class repair initiators are related to incipient differences or conflict between participants.

The return questions produced by Madame Danzard in the preceding fragment ("Do I? Do I, my dear?" line 252) resemble the "open" class repair initiators described by Drew in various aspects. Firstly, they indicate that Madame Danzard has some difficulty with Isabelle's prior turn, but without locating specifically where or what that difficulty is. Secondly, as discussed above, although Madame Danzard's turn is designed to prefer agreement, Isabelle's response to her mother's prior remark is an explicit expression of opposition (line 250-251); and with her return questions in lines 252-253 Madame Danzard construes Isabelle's claim as questionable. That is to say, by producing return questions in reaction to Isabelle's reply, Madame Danzard is treating that reply as an inappropriate response to her own prior action.

However, as discussed above, other repair initiators generally stand alone in a turn and permit the prior speaker to clarify, revise or restate her own initial statement in the following turn.

By contrast, the return questions in Madame Danzard's utterance are immediately followed by a disagreement within the same turn. Subsequent to the preface, Madame Danzard produces a counter to Isabelle's utterance, challenging her daughter's competence to judge by claiming that she does not know the people in the town well enough to foresee their reactions correctly: "You don't know this town like I do." (line 253). The return questions are similar to pre-disagreement moves in that they defer a move of opposition by placing a component that looks like an other-repair initiation at the beginning of the turn; nevertheless, Madame Danzard moves so quickly into the counter that no turn space is provided for Isabelle to come in with a revision or restatement of her initial utterance. Rather both the initial part of the turn marking disagreement and the actual disagreement are produced as a single unit. Since no turn space is provided for a response, the turn moves quickly to a counter to Isabelle's prior activity. Accordingly, we can say that the return questions at the beginning of Madame Danzard's response are used to preface an oppositional turn and announce right at the beginning of the turn that opposition is going to follow.<sup>104</sup> Following the challenge to Isabelle's competence, Madame Danzard goes on to defend her initial position by listing a number of people who, according to her, would have been scandalised at Lea's behaviour (lines 254-257). She closes her turn by picking up Isabelle's prior utterance again ("You think I go too far." line 257) and adding an explicit counter in the form of a disagreement token ("No my dear," lines 257-258). Subsequently, she issues another competence challenge, denying Isabelle's ability to anticipate people's behaviour by claiming that she lacks the necessary experience: "you haven't lived here nearly long enough." (lines 258-259).

This fragment illustrates that, in addition to enabling the speaker to counter the opponent's prior activity, competence challenges provide the speaker with an opportunity for a reciprocal display of expertise. They not only portray the recipient as incompetent but also invoke a particular relationship between speaker and addressee that categorises each of these participants in an alternative way, namely as competent versus incompetent.

While the competence challenge in the preceding fragment is preceded by pre-disagreements in the form of return questions, in the following extract from *Alto*, Florene prefaces the challenge to her daughter's competence with a directive that explicitly opposes Wanda's prior activity (lines 5-6):

**example (5): Alto I, 1**

1 WANDA Now I'm going to ask one more thing. "Ouija,  
2 how old will I live to be and what will I die  
3 of?"  
4 FLORENE (*She jerks her fingers from the planchette.*)  
5 Wanda, don't you be asking about dying!  
> 6 You're just a kid. Besides, we're not  
7 supposed to know things like that.  
8 WANDA I don't see why not. I want to find out if  
9 it knows when people will die. Let me ask  
10 about somebody old.  
11 FLORENE Now, Wanda, don't nose into such ghoulish  
12 stuff.  
13 WANDA Let me test it on Miz Hattie. We'll write down  
14 what it says, and then when she does die,  
15 we'll know whether to believe it about  
16 everything else.  
17 FLORENE Well, it would be nice to have a dependable  
18 source of advice. But Miz Hattie seems like  
19 a good enough landlady so far, and I don't  
20 want to think about her dying either. If she  
21 died, this house would probably sell, and  
22 we'd have to move again.  
23 WANDA Let's ask it anyway. I bet it knows.  
24 FLORENE (*Tentatively placing her fingers on the*  
25 *planchette.*) I just couldn't face another move  
26 any time soon.

Wanda and her mother Florene are asking the Ouija board questions about the future. The fragment starts with Wanda asking the board about the time and cause of her death (lines 1-3). In the following turn, Florene strongly opposes her daughter's activity. She begins her turn with a meta-communicative negative directive, reproaching

Wanda for asking the board about her death. Her utterance construes Wanda's activity as a violation of some underlying social norm, which says that people are not supposed to speculate on matters of death. In addition, the raised voice indicates her indignation at Wanda's question. Subsequently, she makes explicit on what grounds she challenges Wanda's activity. Directly following the directive, she says: "You're just a kid" (line 6). By referring to Wanda's youth, she implies that Wanda is too young to ask about death. She goes on to support her position by making explicit the norm Wanda has violated, stating that people are "not supposed to know things like that" (lines 6-7). In the next turn, Wanda counter-opposes her mother's objection, declaring that Florene's argument has not convinced her: "I don't see why not." (line 8). She goes on to defend her position by giving reason for her activity ("I want to find out if it knows when people will die." lines 8-9), and then adds a directive, asking for her mother's permission to "ask about somebody old" (lines 9-10). After some hesitation, Florene eventually gives in and complies with her daughter's request (lines 24-26).

In the extract from *Alto* below, explicit counters to Wanda's prior activities precede both of Florene's competence challenges:

**example (6): Alto II,3**

101 WANDA ((...)) It's what we dreamed about, Mama!  
 102 FLORENE It's what I dreamed about. Me - not you!  
 > 103 You don't even know yet what you want.  
 104 But you deserve a chance to find out.  
 > 105 WANDA I do! I do too know! You're the one who  
 106 doesn't know anything. You don't even know  
 107 how to love anybody! I bet you never loved  
 108 him!  
 109 FLORENE Don't you ever say that! Ever! I'll always  
 > 110 love him. There are some things you don't  
 111 understand, Wanda.  
 112 WANDA I understand everything, and I love him more!

Prior to this fragment, Wanda and her mother Florene were arguing about whether they should get on the bus to San Antonio to meet

Wanda's father there. While Wanda is eager to see her father again and urges her mother to get ready, Florene refuses to go. The sequence starts with Wanda trying to change her mother's mind, arguing "It's what we dreamed about, Mama!" (line 101). The loud volume of voice indicates interpersonal involvement and reinforces her claim. In the following turn, Florene directly opposes her daughter's activity by means of substitution: Her utterance retains the shape of Wanda's prior statement with the exception of the personal pronoun "We" being replaced by "I" ("It's what I dreamed about." line 102), thus producing what Goodwin (1983) calls an "aggravated correction." Moreover, immediately following the utterance containing the substitution, she adds "Me - not you!" (line 102). By explicitly juxtaposing the pronouns, she intensifies opposition. Moreover, the raised voice signals high emotional involvement and aggravates disagreement. Following the correction, Florene issues a competence challenge, claiming that Wanda is not in a position to make the claim she is making because she is too young to make any informed decisions ("You don't even know yet what you want." line 103) and should have "a chance to find out" (line 104). In the subsequent turn, Wanda directly contradicts her mother's competence challenge through negation ("I do! I do too know!" line 105), thus claiming that her attribution of incompetence is incorrect. She continues to confront Florene by producing a competence challenge in return, claiming that it is Florene not she who is incompetent to judge: "You're the one who doesn't know anything." (lines 105-106). Subsequently, she supports her argument by specifying her mother's deficiency, claiming that she is not capable of loving someone: "You don't even know how to love anybody!" (lines 106-107). Wanda terminates her turn by alleging that Florene does not love her husband (line 107-108). The extreme formulation "never" serves to intensify the confrontational character of her utterance. In the next turn, Florene directly opposes her daughter with a negative meta-communicative directive, explicitly commenting on Wanda's prior assertion. With this move, she portrays Wanda's utterance as offensive and demands her to change her behaviour in the future: "Don't you ever say that! Ever!" (line 109). Self-repetition and volume increase indicate interpersonal involvement and intensify opposition. Following the

directive, Florene contradicts Wanda's utterance by means of negation: "I'll always love him." (lines 109-110). The contrastive use of the extreme formulation "always" in contrast to the adverb "never" in Wanda's utterance serves to reinforce opposition. The contradiction is followed by another competence challenge, by which Florene again claims that due to her youth and inexperience Wanda is not in a position to judge: "There are some things you don't understand, Wanda." (lines 110-111). Again, Wanda directly contradicts her mother's challenge by means of negation: "I understand everything," (line 112). The extreme formulation "everything" as opposed to the formulation "some things" in Florene's utterance serves to aggravate disagreement. Wanda closes her turn by claiming that she loves her father more than Florene does: "and I love him more!" With this last move, she is able to confront her mother without disputing her prior claim that she will always love her husband.

In the extracts discussed so far, one speaker challenges the opponent's prior activity by means of explicitly denying her competence or status. By contrast, the following two fragments show instances of competence challenges in which the speaker implicitly challenges the opponent's competence by alluding to a deficit on her part. For instance, in the following extract from *Avenue*, Olga opposes her mother's prior assertion by suggesting that Mother is not in a position to judge whether somebody is rich, since she thinks that "everybody is rich" (line 369):

**example (7): Avenue**

384 MOTHER You know I had champagne at his place.  
385 (Crosses to bureau.)  
386 OLGA (Sarcastically.) Really?  
387 MOTHER Sure, and only fancy people drink champagne.  
388 He had two bottles and he took one out from  
389 this brown shiny cabinet and he poured me some  
390 and said, "Here, have some champagne." (She  
391 picks up small perfume spray, and sprays  
392 herself.)  
393 OLGA (Spells out.) C-h-a-m-p-a-g-n-e.  
394 MOTHER It sounds pretty, don't it? Oh, he's rich all

395 right. (*Crosses R., sprays room.*)  
> 396 OLGA You think everybody is rich.  
397 MOTHER Compared to us, everybody is.

The sequence starts with Mother telling Olga that she had champagne at her boyfriend's place (lines 384). She ignores the sarcastic tone of Olga's response ("Really?" line 386) and takes it as an invitation to elaborate on her report (lines 387-390). When she rounds her story off with the utterance "Oh, he's rich all right." (lines 394-395), Olga counters her by saying "You think everybody is rich" (line 396). By claiming that Mother's concept of wealth is too broad and induces her to assume that "everybody is rich," Olga implies that Mother is not in a position to judge whether somebody is rich and thereby rejects her mother's prior assertion as unqualified. In line 397, Mother defends her position and counter-opposes her daughter by claiming that in comparison to their own financial situation everybody else is indeed rich ("Compared to us, everybody is." line 397). Similar to Olivia and Jessie in extracts (1) and (2) respectively, Mother builds her counter via contrastive mirroring. She picks up Olga's formulation "everybody is" and incorporates it in her utterance. By this means, coherence is emphasised at the level of wording, while opposition is stressed at the level of content.

In the following extract from *'night Mother*, Mama opposes her daughter's announcement, suggesting that she cannot be taken seriously due to her state of health.

**example (8): 'night Mother**

> 207 MAMA It must be time for your medicine.  
208 JESSIE Took it already.  
209 MAMA What's the matter with you?  
210 JESSIE Not a thing. Feel fine.

Prior to this exchange, Jessie, an epileptic, has told Mama that she is going to kill herself. In line 207, Mama responds to her daughter's revelation by saying "It must be time for your medicine." With this utterance, Mama alludes to Jessie's illness (i.e. her epilepsy), suggesting that Jessie's behaviour must be due to her

medicine wearing off. By this means, Mama implies that Jessie is not of sound mind and thus rejects her daughter's prior remark as invalid. In other words, she implicitly disqualifies her daughter on the grounds that she is mentally unstable. However, in line 208 Jessie counters her mother's challenge, claiming that she has already taken her medicine ("Took it already.") and thus reinforces her initial position. Apparently, however, Mama still doubts her daughter's mental condition. In the next turn, she produces another implicit competence challenge in the form of an interrogative, requesting Jessie to account for her behaviour. Her utterance implies that there must be something wrong with her daughter: "What's the matter with you?" (line 209). But Jessie insists that she feels perfectly alright ("Not a thing. Feel fine." line 210) and thus implies that she is fully competent to make a rational decision.

The preceding discussion has shown that disputants can oppose the interlocutor's prior activity by denying his or her competence or status. Competence challenges such as "You don't know," "You don't understand" or "You have no idea" may be employed to call into question not simply (an aspect of) the prior talk but the competence or status of the party who produced that talk. As the preceding examples have illustrated, speakers can deny the opponent's competence or status by referring to personal qualities such as, for instance, age, profession, social role, mental stability, etc. Competence is a matter negotiated on the interpersonal plane of interaction. Accordingly, by producing a competence challenge, the speaker initiates a change from the content level to the interpersonal level of the ongoing interaction. Challenges to competence present a threat to the addressee's positive face, in showing that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the addressee's personal characteristics. As a result, following a competence challenge, the recipient can either back down, and thus lose face, or put up some defence against the other's attack. Hence, competence challenges are potential control manoeuvres, on that they constrain the addressee's options in formulating a response. Moreover, as we have seen, apart from presenting an argumentative resource that can be employed to counter the opponent's prior activity, competence challenges afford the speaker with an

opportunity for a reciprocal display of expertise. In addition to portraying the recipient as incompetent, they invoke a particular relationship between speaker and addressee that categorises each of these participants in an alternative way, namely as competent versus incompetent disputants. Thus, this argumentative device represents a discursive resource by which disputants can put opponents on the defensive about their 'disputing competence.' Claiming that the other is incompetent to argue conveys a specific view of which characteristics and skills mark a competent disputant. In this sense, similar to relevance challenges, competence challenges are meta-argumentative acts that comment on the opponent's competence in relation to the ongoing dispute. In addition, since competence reinforces arguments, whereas imputations of lack of competence undermine them, disputing the opponent's competence allows the speaker simultaneously to challenge the position put forward by the addressee in the prior activity. Therefore, competence challenges provide a powerful argumentative resource that can be effectively employed to oppose the interlocutor both on the interpersonal and the content level of interaction. However, as we have seen, recipients, too, have a wide range of oppositional strategies at their disposal which they can utilise to counter-oppose the other's competence challenge. As described above, disputants can retaliate, for instance, by disputing the truth value of the opponent's competence challenge or by returning a competence challenge, thus turning the tables and putting the prior speaker in a position to defend herself.

If you can't answer a man's argument, all is not lost;  
you can still call him vile names. (Elbert Hubbard)

## 7.8 Disqualifications

As I have shown in the previous section, one way in which disputants can oppose an interlocutor's prior activity is by means of questioning her competence or status. A related phenomenon that occurs quite frequently in my data is an explicit characterisation of the prior speaker by means of a dispute strategy that I will call 'disqualification.'

Disqualifications provide an argumentative resource that can be used to build a turn that not only opposes prior talk but also explicitly characterises the person who produced it in a negative way. That is, similar to competence challenges, disqualifications allow the speaker to simultaneously challenge both the position put forward in the preceding turn and the actor responsible for stating this position. Speakers can disqualify opponents by attributing a negative value to them, their actions, values or beliefs or to things or people attached to them.

Researchers have found corresponding phenomena in role-played and naturally occurring arguments. For instance, in a study of children's disputes, Brenneis & Lein (1977) describe argumentative statements such as "You dummy" or "Your shirt is filthy," which involve name-calling, or the ascription of a negative value to the opponent or things attached to her. Likewise, M. H. Goodwin (1990) notes that a frequent component of opposition turns in preadolescent children's arguments is pejorative person descriptors and insult terms (e.g. "You is crazy boy." or "You big lips."), which explicitly characterise the person who produced the talk being opposed. Schank (1987) describes "transaktionale Disqualifizierungen" in his study of conflict talk. According to Apeltauer (1978) and Hundsnurscher (1993), insulting or name calling ("Beschimpfen") is a "quarrelling-specific" speech act. Correspondingly, Messmer (2003, Ch.6) shows that negative categorisations of the opponent routinely occur in aggravated, emotionally loaded conflict sequences, which are characterised by a high rate of accusations. Similarly, in a study of controversial discussions in TV talk-shows, Gruber (1996a:164ff) finds that

explicit evaluations of the interlocutor ("direkte Personenwertungen") frequently occur in dispute phases of talk.

In producing a disqualification, a speaker explicitly characterises the opponent in a negative way. By portraying the other as defective, the speaker simultaneously rejects the position put forward by the addressee in the prior turn. Therefore, disqualifications provide an argumentative resource that can be employed to oppose the interlocutor both on the interpersonal and the content level of interaction. Like competence challenges, disqualifications are *ad hominem* arguments, as they are employed to weaken a person's argument or position by attacking that person in some way (rather than the person's point). Disqualifications thus initiate a change from the content level to the interpersonal level of the interaction.

Disqualifications present a severe threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987: 66), since they express the speaker's dislike of one or more of the addressee's wants, acts, personal characteristics, goods, beliefs or values. Consequently, following a disqualification, the recipient must either back down, and thus lose face, or put up a defence against the other's attack. By virtue of limiting the addressee's freedom of action, disqualifications are control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts at exercising discursive power in the local context of the interaction.

The face-threatening, even offensive nature of disqualifications contributes to the sense of hostility in the extracts under analysis and lends these conflict episodes their specific adversative quality. The use of such devices distinguishes the mother-daughter disputes in my data from other, less confrontational forms of conflict talk such as critical discussions or negotiations (cf. O'Rourke 2001; van Eemeren et al. 1993). For instance, Schwitalla (1987: 107f) puts the use of speech activities that involve "eine bestimmte negative, verletzende Behandlung des Selbstwertgefühls des anderen" at the centre of his definition of the activity type "Streitgespräch" (dispute, quarrel) as opposed to other types of verbal conflict. Similarly, Spiegel (1995: 18-19) argues that disputes exhibit an emotional conversational style, which is characterised by the use of negative evaluative lexemes, which refer to characteristics or behaviour of the interlocutor.

In my corpus, disqualifications are produced directly following the opponent's preceding utterance or subsequent to other oppositional activities. They typically have the syntactic form of declarative statements such as "You're a fool!", "You're funny, you are and so stupid." or "Even as a kid you were a brat." The following fragments illustrate several instances of this argumentative device as well as a number of counter-strategies that recipients can employ in response to disqualifications.

The example below contains two occurrences of disqualifications. In lines 185-186, following a number of turn components which challenge Olga's prior activity and support her own position, Mother disqualifies Olga by characterising her as being "stupid about things" (lines 184-186). A few lines later, she issues another disqualification this time insulting Olga by comparing her to a "rotten egg" (line 192). However, as the subsequent turn-by-turn analysis of the exchange shows, both of Mother's disqualifications are counter-opposed by Olga in the subsequent turns.

**example (1): Avenue**

176 OLGA What if he doesn't ask you to marry him?  
 177 MOTHER You ask too many questions. You asked that  
 178 before.  
 179 OLGA What if- it's some sort of plot between him  
 180 and father.  
 181 MOTHER Your father's dead, Olga, the no-good  
 182 sonavabitch is dead and buried.  
 183 OLGA (*Gives her a defiant look.*)  
 184 MOTHER Whatsa matter with you? You know it's true.  
 > 185 We got proof of it. Sometimes you're stupid  
 186 about things. (*Stands, goes U. C.*)  
 187 OLGA I can think better than anyone.  
 188 MOTHER Thinking ain't enough. Do something if you're  
 189 so smart. (*Challenging her.*) Just what can  
 190 you do?  
 191 OLGA Nothing!  
 > 192 MOTHER Did you ever hear of the saying, "rotten  
 egg"?

193 Well, that's you. They made that saying cause  
194 they knew you were around.  
195 (*Crosses to make-up again.*)  
196 OLGA I can say a saying about you, too, but I'm  
not  
197 going to cause I don't want you to hit me.  
198 MOTHER Go ahead. I won't hit you.  
199 OLGA You always say that, but you hit me anyway.  
200 MOTHER (*Retouches her eyes.*) You're getting smart,  
201 Olga.

Prior to this extract, Mother has told Olga that she expects her boyfriend to propose to her that night. In line 176, Olga expresses her scepticism by asking "What if he doesn't ask you to marry him?" In the following turn, rather than answer her daughter's question, Mother opposes her with a meta-communicative accusation: "You ask too many questions. You asked that before." (lines 177-178). By explicitly formulating Olga's prior communicative activity as violating some underlying conversational norm, Mother rejects her daughter's prior utterance and thus manages to avoid providing an answer. However, Olga insists on her critical position and claims that Mother's boyfriend might be conspiring with her father (lines 179-180). In the following turn, Mother rejects her claim with a counter-assertion, arguing that her father is dead (lines 181-182). The use of the swear word "sonavabitch" serves to aggravate opposition. When Olga displays her disapproval of Mother's remark by giving her "a *defiant look*" (line 183), Mother challenges her again in the next turn. She begins her counter with a rhetorical question: "Whatsa matter with you? (line 184). By proposing that there must be something wrong with Olga, she construes her daughter's reaction as inappropriate. She then goes on to support her position by claiming that the death of Olga's father is an established fact, which Olga knows: "You know it's true. We got proof of it." (lines 184-185). She concludes her turn with a disqualification, characterising Olga as stupid on the grounds of her prior action: "Sometimes you're stupid about things." (lines 185-186). By this means, she not only opposes Olga's prior activity but also her way of thinking in general. In the following turn, Olga answers back with a counter-

assertion: By claiming that she "can think better than anyone" (line 187), she disputes the truth value of Mother's preceding assertion. However, Mother does not give in. At the beginning of the next turn, she builds a counter by picking up a part of Olga's formulation and using it for her own position: "Thinking ain't enough." This disputing technique allows her to produce a matching utterance, which serves to counter Olga's prior activity and simultaneously to put forward an alternative position by making use of Olga's talk and transforming it to her advantage. The oppositional moves are tied together through word repetition, and the wording of the preceding utterance is exploited to construct the next. As discussed above, by this means, coherence is established at the structural level, while a pronounced contrast is set up at the content level of interaction. Subsequently, she issues a directive, demanding that Olga prove her claim: "Do something if you're so smart." (lines 188-189). Immediately following the directive, she produces another challenge in the form of an interrogative, requesting that Olga resume the floor and provide evidence for her claim, while suggesting that she cannot do so: "Just what can you do?" (lines 189-190). In fact, in the following turn, Olga confirms this assumption by answering "Nothing!" (line 191). In contrast to line 187, in which she disputed her mother's disqualification with a counter-claim, here Olga makes no further attempt to defend herself. Instead, she accepts and even exaggerates her mother's criticism.<sup>105</sup> The wording of her response seems to signal submission, and thus might serve to initiate a termination of the dispute sequence. However, the volume increase, which suggests an aggressive tone of voice, indicates that, in fact, Olga does not consent to her mother's assessment, i.e. that the conflict is not resolved. Indeed, following Olga's response, the argument continues. In lines 192-195, Mother opposes Olga with a disqualification, equating her with a "rotten egg." In reaction to her mother's insult, Olga claims that she could strike back with a corresponding counter-insult ("I can say a saying about you, too," line 196) but will refrain from doing so for fear of getting punished ("but I'm not going to cause I don't want you to hit me." lines 196-197). This meta-communicative strategy allows her to counter her mother's insult without having to bear the consequences of an explicit offence. When Mother prompts her to "go

ahead," promising that she will not hit her (line 198), Olga opposes her again. By arguing that she will not keep her promise ("You always say that, but you hit me anyway." line 199) she refuses to comply with her mother's request and simultaneously disputes her claim that she will not hit her. In addition, by portraying Mother as someone who frequently breaks her promise, she implicitly accuses her of being a liar. Mother terminates this round of the dispute with a meta-communicative remark. In lines 200-201, she explicitly comments on her daughter's communicative behaviour, claiming that Olga is "getting smart." By construing Olga's activity as violating some underlying norm concerning daughters' verbal behaviour towards their mothers, her utterance functions as an accusation. Moreover, it implies a threat, warning Olga against pursuing her line of arguing.

In the following extract, after the dispute has been centring round a number of other issues for a while, Olga and Mother are arguing about Mother's current relationship again.<sup>106</sup> The sequence starts with Olga confronting Mother by claiming: "I'd rather be alone than settle for him."

**example (2): Avenue**

476 OLGA       (*Confronting her.*) I'd rather be alone than  
477               settle for him.  
> 478 MOTHER   You're a fool! If you were in my position,  
479               (*Crosses D. L. for drink.*) you'd have to.  
480               (*Pours a drink, and swallows slowly.*)  
481               Sometimes I get cravings, like sometimes  
482               it's for sour cream and pickles. (*Faces away*  
483               *from Olga.*)  
484 OLGA        (*Stunned.*) Pregnant?  
485 MOTHER     (*Proud.*) Yeah. (*Toasts with drink.*)  
486 OLGA        (*Sitting back down on high-riser.*) How can  
487               you do this to me? I'm all grown up and  
488               you're going to walk around with a big belly.  
> 489               You disgust me.  
490 MOTHER     (*Crosses U. C. and then goes to sit beside*  
491               *Olga, who is on high-riser.*) Now it's no  
492               disgust. I'm a woman and there's no disgust

493 in what I've done. I thought you hated people.  
494 So what do you care what they think?  
495 OLGA It's for myself, I'm ashamed. When I'll  
496 walk down the street, people are just going  
497 to see how rotten and stupid I feel inside.  
498 (*Crosses D. R.*)  
499 MOTHER It's my business, so don't you go concerning  
500 yourself. Besides, I like what I did. It felt  
501 damn good.  
503 OLGA Does he know?  
504 MOTHER He knows it felt good.  
505 OLGA I don't mean that. I mean about - oh, I can't  
506 even say the word.  
507 MOTHER I told him last night. I called him up and  
508 told him. And tonight, I know he's gonna  
509 propose.  
510 (*Turns, faces up to MOTHER.*) You know you're  
511 OLGA always feeling sorry for everyone, but who's  
512 sorry for you?  
513 MOTHER I wanted it. You hear me!  
> 514 OLGA (*Crosses C. to prepare for "slap."*) Too cheap  
515 to buy protection!  
516 MOTHER Take that back, don't let me hear you say  
that  
517 again.  
> 518 OLGA Too cheap to buy pro-tec-tion!  
519 MOTHER (*Rises, crosses U. The slap is deliberate, a*  
520 *punishment, not in anger.*) You deserve worse  
521 than that. (*Sits.*)

Olga's utterance clearly displays her disapproval of Mother's choice of boyfriend and thus requires Mother to account for her behaviour in the following turn. However, rather than explain why she is having a relationship with the man in question, Mother opposes Olga in the subsequent turn with a disqualification. She characterises Olga as "a fool" (line 478) for having said what she said. The increase in volume signals high involvement and serves to aggravate opposition. Although the evaluation expressed in Mother's response primarily disqualifies Olga as a person, it can only be ascribed to

Olga's prior utterance. That is, Mother disqualifies Olga on the grounds of her opinion rather than on the grounds of any other evidence of her mental ability. Thus, by portraying Olga as a fool, in addition to challenging Olga as a person, Mother simultaneously expresses her rejection of her daughter's stance. Immediately following the disqualification, Mother produces an account in support of her stance: "If you were in my position, you'd have to." (lines 478-480). Subsequently, she expands on her account, specifying precisely what "position" she is in by insinuating that she is expecting a baby. In the following turn, Olga issues a request for clarification ("Pregnant?" line 484) to check whether her understanding of Mother's insinuation is correct. When Mother confirms her inference (line 485), Olga opposes her with a blame-implicative question ("How can you do this to me?" lines 486-487), expressing both shock and indignation at Mother's pregnancy. Subsequently, she elaborates on her accusation, claiming that it is unsuitable for Mother to "walk around with a big belly" at her age (lines 487-488). She concludes her turn with an explicit expression of contempt: "You disgust me." (line 489). By this means, she disqualifies Mother by portraying her as irresponsible and despicable. Moreover, her utterance displays a very negative affective reaction at what Mother has just told her and thus aggravates opposition and escalates the dispute. In the following turn, Mother rejects Olga's depreciation with a negation: "Now it's no disgust." (lines 491-492). She then goes on to support her stance by denying the negative quality that Olga has attributed to her behaviour, arguing that as a woman, getting pregnant is a natural thing to do: "I'm a woman and there's no disgust in what I've done." (lines 492-493). Subsequently, she issues a demand for explanation, obliging Olga to account for her hostile reaction: "I thought you hated people. So what do you care what they think?" (lines 492-494). When Olga provides the requested account, explaining that she feels ashamed and is worried about what people might think of her (lines 495-498), Mother dismisses Olga's argument, claiming that her pregnancy is none of her daughter's business: "It's my business, so don't you go concerning yourself." (lines 499-501). She then goes on to support her position by claiming that she enjoyed what she did and thus suggesting that she has no regrets: "Besides, I like what I

did. It felt damn good." (lines 501-502). In line 503, Olga initiates a topic shift, by asking: "Does he know?" As discussed above, this brings about a short time out from the dispute, as subsequent to Olga's question the mutual exchange of oppositional moves is suspended for a number of turns. Mother's reply ("He knows it felt good." line 504) displays her (real or pretended) understanding of Olga's prior turn as a request for information about her boyfriend's knowledge of her assessment of their sex life.<sup>107</sup> Her response elicits a self-repair (cf. Schegloff et al. 1977) from Olga in the next turn. She clarifies that her question was actually referring to whether Mother's lover is familiar with her pregnancy: "I don't mean that. I mean about - oh, I can't even say the word." (lines 505-506). Mother replies that she has informed her boyfriend of her condition the night before and expects him to propose to her that night (lines 507-509). In the following turn, Olga challenges her by saying "You know you're always feeling sorry for everyone, but who's sorry for you?" (lines 511-512). As discussed earlier, her utterance not only reveals that she doubts that her mother's lover is going to propose to her but also presupposes that Mother is pitiable. In line 513, Mother strongly rejects this presupposition, claiming that she "wanted it" (i.e. the baby). The reinforcement "You hear me!" at the end of her turn and the raised voice signal high emotional involvement and aggravate opposition. In the next turn, Olga opposes her with another disqualification: "Too cheap to buy protection!" (lines 514-515), portraying her as both contemptible and stupid. This argumentative device allows her to degrade Mother and at the same time reject the position expressed in her preceding turn. Here, too, the volume increase signals high emotional involvement and aggravates opposition. In addition, Olga apparently anticipates getting "slapped" and is thus obviously conscious that her utterance conveys an offence. In the following turn, Mother issues a threat: "Take that back, don't let me hear you say that again" (lines 516-517), construing Olga's activity as an insult and implying that she will be punished if she does not back down. In spite of her mother's threat, however, Olga repeats her prior utterance word for word in a chant-like fashion: "Too cheap to buy pro-tec-tion!" line 518. The (presumably) provocative tone of voice and the volume increase

reinforce the confrontational character of her utterance and thus contribute to the escalation of the dispute. As a result, Mother carries out her prior threat and slaps her. The "deliberate" (line 519) use of physical violence marks both the culmination and the end of the dispute. She closes her turn (and the current round of the argument) with the claim that Olga "deserves worse than that" (line 520), thereby legitimising her use of physical violence.

In the extract below, Mother employs a disqualification to oppose Olga's assertion "Ribbons are for dogs":

**example (3): Avenue**

427 MOTHER (*Crosses to kitchen table, takes out a gaudy*  
428 *ribbon from pocketbook.*) This is pretty, but  
429 too bad you can't wear it, cause your hair's  
430 not set. (*Puts ribbon back in pocketbook.*)  
431 OLGA Ribbons are for dogs.  
432 MOTHER (*Sits down, looks in face mirror to recheck*  
> 433 *eyes.*) You mean dogs that win contests.  
You're  
434 funny, you are and so stupid. Sometimes I  
435 think I got more sense than you and I hardly  
436 been educated.  
437 OLGA Maybe you have.  
438 MOTHER There you go agreeing with me again.

At the beginning of this sequence, Mother takes out a ribbon that she has apparently brought for Olga, but then puts it away again because, unfortunately, Olga cannot wear it, since her hair is not set (lines 427-230). Although she does not explicitly criticise Olga, her remark seems to function as a complaint. Mother employs a conversational practice which is regularly used to package complaints, namely the stating of redundant information. As noted earlier, if speakers report a state of affairs when it is redundant to do so, such as the fact that Olga's hair is not set, their remark invites an account of it. In the example above, we can see how Mother employs this conversational practice as a method of blame-giving: Her "noticing" (Schegloff 1988) that Olga's hair is not set construes Olga's appearance as problematic and obliges her to offer an account. However, in the following turn, instead of providing an

explanation, Olga retorts that "Ribbons are for dogs." (line 431). By this means, she challenges the assumption involved in Mother's turn that the ribbon was meant for her and thus manages to avoid addressing the complaint entailed in Mother's utterance. At the beginning of the next turn, Mother produces a formulation of Olga's prior remark: "You mean dogs that win contests." (line 433). Subsequently, she opposes Olga with a disqualification: "You're funny, you are and so stupid." (lines 433-434). By characterising Olga as "funny" (presumably in the sense of odd) and "so stupid" she not only invalidates Olga's prior argument but also disputes her mental ability. In the remainder of her turn, she expands on her position, claiming that despite her inferior education, apparently she "has got more sense" than Olga (lines 435-436). As this example illustrates, like competence challenges, disqualifiers afford speakers an opportunity for a reciprocal display of expertise. They do not simply portray the recipient as defective but also evoke a specific relationship between speaker and addressee that categorises each of these participants in an alternative way - for instance, as stupid versus sensible. In the following turn, Olga issues a downgraded agreement ("Maybe you have." line 437), which indicates that she is backing down, presumably just to get out of the interaction. However, Mother's subsequent turn reveals that she apparently does not hear Olga's reply as an appropriate response to her prior turn. Her meta-communicative utterance "There you go agreeing with me again." (line 438), which explicitly comments on the communicative function of Olga's activity, indicates that she has not expected Olga to produce an agreement and is reluctant to accept her daughter's consent. Mother's utterance clearly shows that in dispute sequences, participants orient to the expectation of disagreement both in the interpretation and production of conversational contributions as discussed earlier.

Like Mother in the example above, in the following fragment, Sadie discards her daughter's prior claim as invalid by categorising Barbs as "stupid" and "not having a clue":

**example (4): Perfect days II, 1**

200 SADIE You just don't know what to be at!  
 201 BARBS On the contrary I have never actually been  
 202 so one hundred percent clear about what I

203                    want.  
 > 204    SADIE    Stupid. You think you are so bloody smart  
 205                    but you don't have a clue. Dream World,  
 206                    that's what you live in. Selfish. Selfish to  
 207                    the core. Think it is a joke to bring up a  
 208                    child on your own?  
 209    BARBS    No. No I don't. You did it well. For the two  
 210                    of us. We turned out all right, me and our  
 211                    Billy.

Directly preceding this extract, Barbs has told her mother that she has just had sex with a gay friend of hers in order to get pregnant. In reaction to her daughter's revelation, Sadie confronts her, claiming that she does not know what do with her life: "You just don't know what to be at!" (line 200). By this means, she not only rejects Barbs' prior activity but also calls into question her common sense. The increase in volume signals Sadie's shock and indignation at what her daughter has just told her and thus serves to intensify opposition. In the following turn, Barbs counter-opposes her mother, defending her position by claiming that she knows exactly what she wants (lines 201-203). In reaction, Sadie opposes her again with a disqualification. She begins her turn by characterising Barbs (and/or the position she has put forward in her preceding utterance)<sup>108</sup> as "Stupid" (line 204), thus rejecting her prior statement as unqualified. Subsequently, she elaborates on her counter, arguing that, contrary to her own assessment, Barbs does not know what she is talking about: "You think you are so bloody smart but you don't have a clue." (lines 204-205). The use of the expletive "bloody" indicates Sadie's annoyance and serves to aggravate opposition. Subsequently, Sadie further elaborates on her commentary on Barbs' position by adding the judgement that a person who would take such a stance must be both unrealistic ("Dream World, that's what you live in." lines 205-206) and self-centred ("Selfish. Selfish to the core." lines 206-207). She concludes her turn with an oppositional move that Gruber (2001) calls "implicit opposing question": "Think it is a joke to bring up a child on your own?" (lines 207-208). This argumentative device allows the speaker to confront the opponent with an unfavourable interpretation of her point of view and obliges her to take a stance towards this

interpretation. In the following, I will examine which aspects of this last component of Sadie's turn contribute to this function.

The second part of the interrogative ("it is a joke to bring up a child on your own") resembles a conversational formulation (cf. Garfinkel & Sacks 1970; Heritage 1985; Heritage & Watson 1979, 1980), by which a speaker summarises, glosses, or develops the gist of an interlocutor's earlier statements. According to Heritage & Watson (1979), "the primary business of formulations is to demonstrate understanding and, presumptively, to have that understanding attended to and, as a first preference, endorsed" (138). However, in contrast to the examples discussed by Heritage & Watson, Sadie's formulation apparently expresses her exclusive interpretation of Barbs' position rather than an understanding that she anticipates her daughter to share. This is indicated by the first part of her remark ("Think"), which marks the utterance as a question for clarification concerning Barbs' attitude towards the upbringing of a child as a single mother. In this respect, Sadie's last remark also resembles the "y'mean X?" other-initiated repair format described by Schegloff et al. (1977), in which the next speaker offers a possible understanding of the prior turn which the previous speaker has to evaluate in the following turn. More importantly, however, it is also similar to the type of formulation that Heritage (1985) has labelled "inferentially elaborative probe." According to Heritage, inferentially elaborative probes are formulations used by interviewers

to test or probe some aspect of an interviewee's actions, intentions, or attitude. This commonly involves thematizing some presupposition of prior talk that, the interviewer proposes, is implied in that talk or its real world context. (1985: 108)

Such moves are expected to be rejected by the interviewee because they portray her as being in conflict with or critical towards some third party. Therefore, Heritage calls these devices "uncooperative formulations" (110). By the same token, Sadie's selective formulation of her daughter's position is expected to be rejected by Barbs in the subsequent turn, since it portrays her as having an unacceptable and unrealistic attitude towards the issue of child

education. In fact, in the following turn, Barbs directly rejects Sadie's interpretation of her position by producing an outright contradiction: "No. No I don't" (line 209). The repetition of the disagreement token "No" serves to intensify opposition and signals high emotional involvement. In the remainder of her turn, she elaborates on her position, arguing that Sadie herself coped well with having to raise two children by herself: "You did it well. For the two of us. We turned out all right, me and our Billy." (lines 209-211).

In all of the preceding extracts, the opponent is explicitly characterised as "a fool," as "stupid," "disgusting," "cheap" or "selfish" for having said what she said or for having done what she did. This unfavourable portrayal of the interlocutor is further intensified with additional accounts (preceding or following the disqualifications) supporting the speaker's and/or rejecting the addressee's position ("You know it's true. We got proof of it.", "If you were in my position, you'd have to.", "Sometimes I think I got more sense than you and I hardly been educated." and "You think you are so bloody smart but you don't have a clue.").

Examples like those above demonstrate that a single opposition turn can contain a variety of components that attend to and operate on various phenomena (e.g. one component of the turn might deal with something said in prior talk, while another addresses the character of the person who produced that talk). The multiplicity of action within individual turns raises questions about the common practice of analysing arguments by glossing a turn at talk as an instance of a particular kind of speech act (e.g. Jacobs 1987, 1989; Labov & Fanshel 1977; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1988; van Eemeren et al. 1993).<sup>109</sup>

While the disqualifications in the prior extracts entail an explicit characterisation of the opponent herself, in the following example, Mother opposes Olga's prior utterance by ascribing a negative value to her daughter's hobbies:

**example (5): Avenue**

365 MOTHER I think you'd better look for a job. You got a  
366 body, go out and work, earn your own keep.  
367 OLGA Next week.

368 MOTHER You been saying that for over fifty weeks.  
369 Over a year, and you even graduated and you're  
370 not doing a thing, just listening to that  
371 radio and mooning over your autograph album.  
372 OLGA I like to.  
> 373 MOTHER You like stupid things. But getting back to  
374 tonight. You fix up the table pretty. Too bad  
375 we don't have a lace tablecloth.

Prior to this extract, Mother and Olga were arguing about Mother's current relationship. The sequence starts with Mother telling Olga to get a job and start earning "her own keep" (lines 365-366). When Olga replies that she is going to start looking for a job the following week (line 367), Mother opposes her, arguing that Olga has put her off for more than a year promising to look for a job but instead has been doing nothing but "listening to the radio and mooning over her autograph album" (lines 368-371). In reaction to her mother's complaint, Olga issues the laconic reply "I like to" (line 372). In the following turn, Mother opposes her again by saying "You like stupid things" (line 373). As an argumentative device, this utterance achieves several things: Firstly, by attributing a negative value to Olga's hobbies, Mother rejects Olga's prior argument as invalid. Secondly, by portraying Olga as someone who likes "stupid things," she disqualifies her daughter as a sensible person. Directly following the disqualification, Mother explicitly initiates a topic change ("But getting back to tonight." lines 373-374) and issues an unmitigated directive, telling Olga to "fix up the table pretty" (line 3764). She moves so quickly into the new topic that no turn space is provided for Olga to come in with a defence of her own position or a counter of her mother's.

As the preceding discussion has shown, disputants can oppose the interlocutor's prior activity by means of an explicit negative characterisation. Disqualifications such as "You're stupid," "You're a fool" or "You like stupid things" may be employed to challenge not simply (an aspect of) the prior talk but the personality of the party who produced that talk. As the preceding examples have illustrated, speakers can disqualify opponents by attributing a negative quality to them, their actions, values or beliefs or to

objects or people attached to them. By producing a disqualification, the speaker initiates a change from the content level to the interpersonal level of the ongoing interaction. Disqualifications present a threat to the addressee's positive face, since they indicate that the speaker disapproves of some aspect of the addressee's personal characteristics, wants, beliefs, values, etc. As a result, following a disqualification, the recipient can either back down, and thus lose face, or put up some defence against the other's attack. Thus, similar to competence challenges, disqualifications represent an argumentative resource by which disputants can put opponents on the defensive about their general competence or status. In fact, they challenge the other's competence in a more fundamental and more confrontational sense. Moreover, as we have seen, apart from presenting an argumentative resource that can be employed to counter the opponent's prior activity, disqualifications provide the speaker with an opportunity for a reciprocal display of expertise. In addition to portraying the recipient as defective, they invoke a particular relationship between speaker and addressee that categorises each of these participants in a different way. As I noted above, disqualifications allow the speaker to simultaneously challenge both a position and the actor who put forward that position. Hence, similar to competence challenges, they provide a powerful argumentative resource that can be effectively employed to oppose the interlocutor both on the content and the interpersonal level of interaction. However, as the preceding examples have shown, recipients have a wide range of counter-strategies at their disposal which they can employ to dispute a preceding disqualification. For instance, they can counter-oppose the prior speaker's disqualification with a counter-assertion. Or they can retaliate, by means of meta-communicative remarks, which contest the activity's appropriateness.

These findings show that a single oppositional turn can comprise a variety of components that address various aspects (e.g. one component of the turn might attend to something said in the preceding turn, while another may refer to the character of the prior speaker). The diversity of action within single turns poses questions about the widespread practice of analysing arguments by

categorising turns as instances of a particular type of speech act. Moreover, the examples in this section demonstrate that in analysing oppositional moves in disputes, besides focusing on the talk through which opposition is produced it is also necessary to take into account how participants are portrayed and constituted through that talk.

## 7.9 Unfavourable comments

In the previous section, I have shown that one way in which the disputants in my data challenge the opponent's prior activity is by explicitly characterising her in a negative way. A related argumentative move that repeatedly occurs in my data involves the negative evaluation of what the prior speaker has just said. This can be done using what I will call 'unfavourable comments.' Unfavourable comments are typically meta-communicative<sup>110</sup> declarative statements that challenge the propositional content or the appropriateness of the opponent's preceding utterance. Meta-communicative evaluations of the other's preceding talk which the disputants in my data use include remarks such as "That's ridiculous," "That's silly," "Nonsense" or "You're acting like a baby." In my corpus, such oppositional moves tend to occur in association with other argumentative actions such as contradictions (cf. below), counter-assertions (cf. below), demands for explanation, or accusations.

Corresponding phenomena have been observed in naturally occurring disagreement sequences. For instance, M. H. Goodwin (1982a: 85; 1990: 153) shows that opposition turns in preadolescent children's arguments frequently involve actions that "comment upon what was said in a prior turn." Likewise, Pomerantz (1984: 87) describes "critical assessments of the prior talk" such as "Oh that's ridiculous." as one type of disagreement with prior speakers' self-deprecations. Similar activities have also been observed in disagreement sequences in institutional contexts. For example, Gruber (1996a: 166) lists explicit evaluations of an interlocutor's prior utterance such as "es is ja a wirklicher Unsinn was sie sagen" as an oppositional strategy in controversial discussions in an Austrian TV-talk-show. Müller (1997: 197-202) observes that one way in which participants in staff meetings reject interlocutors' activities is by producing meta-communicative evaluations of others' prior utterances. In addition, Schwitalla (1997: 132) discusses the use of derogatory comments ("abqualifizierende Kommentare") such as, for example "das=s quatsch" as control manoeuvres in institutional discourse.

As described above, unfavourable comments are meta-communicative remarks that challenge the content or appropriateness

of an interlocutor's prior activity. Such argumentative moves allow the speaker to avoid or put off complying with the sequential requirements established by an interlocutor's previous activity. That is to say, by issuing an unfavourable comment the speaker may evade or delay producing the conditionally relevant response to another's preceding turn. Hence, unfavourable comments provide a discursive resource that disputants can employ to resist an opponent's attempt at constraining their freedom of action.

Unfavourable comments have a deep affinity with disqualifications, as discussed above. Both kinds of argumentative move portray the person being opposed in a negative fashion. However, while disqualifications explicitly characterise the interlocutor in a negative way (e.g. "You're stupid."), unfavourable comments depict the opponent in an offensive way by means of categorising what she has just said (e.g. "That's just silly. You're just being silly now."). Hence, although their face-threatening potential is lower than that of disqualifications, unfavourable comments present a threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987: 66) because they indicate that the speaker has a negative evaluation of the addressee's prior activity. Consequently, meta-communicative evaluations of the opponent's preceding activity provide an argumentative resource that allows disputants to oppose the interlocutor on various levels of interaction.

As mentioned above, unfavourable comments are typically realised by declarative statements which remark on the opponent's preceding utterance. In many instances, coherence between the comment and the talk it opposes is established by means of anaphoric reference, for example, through the use of demonstrative pronouns such as "this" or "that" (e.g. "That's ridiculous." or "That's just silly."). By this means, a close link is established at the structural level of interaction, while disagreement is emphasised at the content level of interaction. This format is illustrated by the following three examples:

**example (1): Home**

165 OLIVIA           The other night I was in the Shop-Rite and  
166                   I ran into Mrs. Harris and her youngest

167 girl. She's getting married and they're  
168 looking for their first house.

169 MARY JANE Yeah?

170 OLIVIA They've been looking and looking all over  
171 town. So I said you should come look at  
172 mine, I have exactly what you're trying  
173 to find.

174 MARY JANE What?

175 OLIVIA She was so thrilled. She took my hands and  
176 said, "Mrs. Dunn, I always loved your  
house  
177 from the outside when I used to pass it  
178 every day on my way to school."

179 MARY JANE It's a development. They all look exactly  
180 the same.

181 OLIVIA She said there was always something  
special  
182 about it. She remembered the white candles  
183 I'd put in the window at Christmas and the  
184 plastic life-size witch I'd hang on the  
185 front door at Halloween to scare all the  
186 kids. She said, "Mrs. Dunn. It's a dream  
187 come true for me to have your house. I  
188 wouldn't do a thing to it." I was so  
189 flattered.

190 MARY JANE **What?**

191 OLIVIA So they're coming to take a look around.

192 MARY JANE Mother.

193 OLIVIA Well, I never said I was happy here.

194 MARY JANE You didn't say anything.

195 OLIVIA Then you should've asked me.

196 MARY JANE But I didn't know there was anything  
197 wrong.

198 OLIVIA How could you not know? How could you  
> 199 think I could stay here? That's just  
200 silly. You're just being silly now. Of  
201 course I can't stay here.

202 MARY JANE I just can't believe this. There's no  
203 reason for this.

At the beginning of this sequence, Olivia is reporting to Mary Jane that she recently met the daughter of one of the neighbours, who is looking for a house (lines 165-168). In line 169, Mary Jane issues the "back-channel signal" (Duncan 1974; Yngve 1970) "Yeah?", which indicates that she is following her mother's story and serves to encourage Olivia to continue her report. When Olivia tells Mary Jane that she has offered to show the young woman her house (lines 170-173) and thus implies that she would be willing to sell it to her, Mary Jane responds by exclaiming the question word: "What?" (line 174). While "Yeah?" in line 169 signals that she is listening and prompts Olivia to go on, the interjection "What?" indicates that Mary Jane's alignment towards her mother's account has changed. More precisely, it displays incredulity and shock at what her mother has just told her and thus construes her action as unexpected, inappropriate and accountable.<sup>111</sup> Yet, in the following turn, Olivia simply carries on with her story without attending to her daughter's interjection (lines 175-178). When she describes the young woman's enthusiastic response to her offer and reports that the girl said she always loved the house "from the outside" (line 177), Mary Jane opposes her with a counter-assertion, claiming that all the houses in the area "look exactly the same" (lines 179-180). Her use of the intensifier "exactly" serves to reinforce the oppositional character of her response. In the following turn, Olivia retaliates with a counter-claim (cf. below), asserting that the girl said "there was always something special about it" (lines 181-182). She immediately goes on to support her argument by listing several details which the girl remembered about the house and reporting that she said it was "a dream come true" for her to have the house and that she "wouldn't do a thing to it" (lines 186-188). Olivia closes her turn by recounting that she was "so flattered" (lines 188-189) at what the girl said, thus suggesting that she took her words at face value and feels inclined to sell her the house. Again, Mary Jane reacts by issuing the question word "What?" with emphatic rising intonation (line 190), once more expressing disbelief and shock at what her mother has just said. Instead of addressing her daughter's affective reaction, in the following turn, Olivia goes on to finish her account by announcing that the young woman and her future husband are going to inspect her house ("So they're coming to take a look

around." line 191). Mary Jane responds to Olivia's story simply by saying "Mother" (line 192), presumably in a reproachful tone of voice. Like her previous interjections, Mary Jane's "Mother" signals incredulity and shock at what her mother has just told her and portrays her behaviour as objectionable. As discussed above, it indicates that she disapproves of Olivia's plan to sell her house and, hence, constitutes an implicit accusation. In the following turn, Olivia attends to the accusatory character of her daughter's activity, and produces an account for her behaviour ("Well, I never said I was happy here." line 193). As noted above, accusations obligate the defendant to produce an account of some sort and thus "to explain untoward behavior and bridge the gap between actions and expectations" (Scott & Lyman 1968: 46). Olivia attempts to "bridge the gap" between her offering Mrs. Harris's daughter to inspect (and eventually buy) her house on the one hand and Mary Jane's obvious expectation that she would keep the house on the other, by claiming that she never said she was happy where she lived and thereby portraying her behaviour as a logical consequence of her discontent rather than an unpleasant surprise. However, Mary Jane is apparently not satisfied with her mother's explanation and opposes her again in the next turn. Although she does not dispute Olivia's assertion that she "never said she was happy," by claiming that her mother "didn't say anything" (line 194) she implies that Olivia failed to prepare her daughter for a decision as crucial as the sale of her parents' house. Hence, Mary Jane's turn represents a complaint. The oppositional character of her utterance is emphasised by means of contrastive mirroring: She builds her counter by exploiting Olivia's prior formulation and transforming it to her advantage. In so doing, she constructs a matching utterance, which enables her to oppose her mother's prior argument while simultaneously putting forward an alternative position. In this manner, coherence is created at the structural level, while a marked contrast is established at the content level of interaction. However, Olivia is not willing to take the blame and counter-opposes her daughter with a return-accusation ("Then you should've asked me." line 195), implying that Mary Jane failed to show an interest in her mother's mental condition. By this means she shifts the responsibility for her daughter's ignorance of her plans on to Mary Jane herself. In other words, she turns the

tables of accusation and forces her daughter to defend her position rather than produce an account for her own behaviour. In fact, Olivia's manoeuvre is successful; in the following turn, Mary Jane provides the requested account and offers an excuse. As described earlier, excuses are accounts in which the defendant (implicitly) admits that the activity in question is in some way inappropriate but denies full responsibility by providing grounds through which it can be understood as excusable, for instance, by arguing that the shortcoming is explainable with reference to insufficient information. By claiming that she "didn't know there was anything wrong" (line 196-197), Mary Jane implicitly concedes that she failed to ask her mother how she felt but denies that she is at fault by arguing that her failure arose from a lack of knowledge rather than a lack of interest. However, Olivia does not accept her daughter's excuse. Instead, she challenges her in the next turn. She begins her counter with two interrogative constructions starting with the question word "How" and the modal auxiliary "could": "How could you not know? How could you think I could stay here?" (lines 198-199). Apparently, Olivia does not expect her questions to be answered; rather she seems to use them as a way of making an exclamation. The two rhetorical questions express both disbelief and indignation at Mary Jane's prior claim of ignorance, and thus serve to reject her excuse as unconvincing and unacceptable. In the remainder of her turn, Olivia further elaborates on her counter: Immediately following the rhetorical questions, she produces an unfavourable comment. With this argumentative move, she rejects Mary Jane's prior claim by characterising it as "just silly" (lines 199-200). Although she does not explicitly insult her daughter, by categorising Mary Jane's utterance like that, she depicts her in an offensive way through portraying her as someone who says silly things. Subsequently, Olivia reinforces her counter by issuing another unfavourable comment, which characterises Mary Jane's behaviour as "being silly" (line 200).<sup>112</sup> Both comments portray Mary Jane in a negative way; in the former case by means of categorising the position she has put forward in the previous turn ("That's just silly.") and in the latter case through categorising her present demeanour ("You're just being silly now."). Olivia concludes her turn with the assertion: "Of course I can't stay here" (lines 200-

201). The intensifier "of course" reinforces her claim and thus aggravates opposition. It construes her own position as self-evident, while at the same time implying that Mary Jane's view is absurd. In the following turn, Mary Jane reacts with disbelief and lack of understanding at what her mother has just said. By claiming that she "just can't believe this" and that "there's no reason for this" (lines 202-203), she displays her disapproval of what Olivia has told her and at the same time construes her mother's actions as both incomprehensible and inappropriate.

A few lines later in the same dispute sequence, Mary Jane opposes Olivia with an accusation ("You were always like this. Always like this." (lines 243-244):

**example (2): Home**

243 MARY JANE You were always like this. Always like  
244 this. I was 19 years old and you coulda  
245 stopped me from going to California  
246 with Jimbo to begin with and my life  
247 woulda-  
248 OLIVIA Nobody coulda stopped you.  
249 MARY JANE You didn't even try! I was your daughter  
250 and you didn't care where I ended up.  
> 251 OLIVIA That's ridiculous. You didn't care where  
252 you ended up.

The ECF with "always" serves to both intensify and legitimate her criticism by construing Olivia's failure to include her daughter in her plans as a non-unique offence rather than a single instance. Moreover, self-repetition serves to stress and underscore Mary Jane's position and thus aggravates the disagreement (cf. Gruber 1998: 491). In the remainder of her turn, Mary Jane elaborates on her blame by citing Olivia's failure to prevent her from going to California with her husband as an example of her mother's inappropriate behaviour (lines 244-247). In line 248, however, Olivia rejects her daughter's accusation with an outright denial, claiming that "Nobody coulda stopped" her. As discussed above, the interruptive placement of her oppositional turn serves to aggravate disagreement. However, Mary Jane insists on her critical position,

and counter-opposes her mother's denial, claiming that Olivia "didn't even try" to stop her and alleging that she "didn't care" about her daughter (lines 249-250). The increase in volume serves to escalate the dispute even further. In the following turn, Olivia once more rejects her daughter's accusations. She begins her oppositional turn with an unfavourable comment, categorising what Mary Jane has just said as "ridiculous" (lines 251). With this argumentative device, Olivia accomplishes at least two things: firstly, she avoids producing the conditionally relevant response to her daughter's turn and thereby resists her attempt at constraining her freedom of action. By returning an unfavourable comment in response to Mary Jane's accusation Olivia manages to avoid giving an account for the violation that is implied by her daughter. Secondly, in characterising Mary Jane's prior utterance in this way, Olivia depicts her daughter in a negative fashion by portraying her as someone who makes ridiculous claims, and thus threatens her positive face. The confrontational character of Olivia's response is reinforced by the remainder of her turn. Directly following the negative evaluation of her daughter's utterance, she launches a counter attack, reversing the original participant roles and obliging Mary Jane to produce an adequate response in the next turn ("You didn't care where you ended up." lines 251-252). By this return-accusation she turns the tables and puts the blame back on Mary Jane, who is now obliged to provide an account in the next turn. She builds her counter-assertion by repeating the exact wording of her daughter's prior utterance ("You didn't care where I ended up.") and simply adjusting the personal pronoun. As discussed above, this technique allows her to reject Mary Jane's activity and at the same time exploit her talk to construct an alternative position. By this means, coherence is established at the level of wording, while dissent is reinforced at the content level of interaction.

In the example above, Olivia uses a meta-communicative evaluation of Mary Jane's prior utterance to preface a counter-accusation. By contrast, in the following spate of talk, Mama employs an unfavourable comment subsequent to a contradiction in order to reinforce her opposition to Jessie's prior threat to kill herself.

**example (3): 'night Mother**

270 JESSIE If you call him, I'll just have to do it  
271 before he gets here. Soon as you hang up the  
272 phone, I'll just walk in the bedroom and lock  
273 the door.  
> 274 MAMA You will not! This is crazy talk, Jessie!  
275 JESSIE Dawson will get here just in time to help you  
276 clean up. Go ahead, call him. Then call the  
277 police. Then call the funeral home. Then call  
278 Loretta and see if *she'll* do your nails.

As discussed above, prior to this exchange, Mama has announced that she is going to phone her son to ask for help in preventing Jessie from killing herself. After her previous attempts to keep Mama from calling her brother have failed, Jessie resorts to a threat: if Mama does not comply, she will shoot herself at once (lines 270-273). In line 274, Mama opposes her with an outright contradiction, negating Jessie's prior utterance: "You will not!" Immediately following the contradiction, she issues an unfavourable comment, categorising Jessie's prior utterance as "crazy talk." The volume increase in combination with the turn-final address term aggravates opposition.<sup>113</sup> By issuing an unfavourable comment, Mama construes Jessie's activity as unacceptable and thus refuses to comply with her daughter's demand to abstain from calling her son. In other words, the meta-communicative evaluation of Jessie's utterance provides an argumentative resource that enables Mama to resist her daughter's attempt at constraining her freedom of action. Moreover, by characterising Jessie's utterance as "crazy talk," Mama portrays her as a person who is acting crazy and therefore cannot be taken seriously. In so doing, she obliges Jessie to defend her position in the following turn and thus limits her freedom of action, because submission would lead to a loss of face (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987: 68). However, in the following turn, Jessie simply reinforces her preceding claim. By illustrating the consequences Mama would have to face if she insisted on calling her brother, she implies that she is going to carry out her threat if Mama does not back down (lines 275-278).

The sequential placement of the unfavourable comments in the two preceding examples indicates that such argumentative moves tend to occur following extended disagreement sequences in which the opponents have mutually opposed each other's positions in various ways without reaching a resolution. Moreover, unfavourable comments allow the speaker to display a negative affective reaction to what the opponent has just said and thus signal high involvement. Hence, they typically 'turn up the emotional heat' of an ongoing dispute.

The preceding instances of unfavourable comments take the form of declarative statements in which anaphoric reference is used to establish coherence between the meta-communicative evaluation and the talk it opposes. By contrast, the following examples are realised by the elliptical declarative "Nonsense." This format is typically used to initiate oppositional turns and is commonly followed by additional disagreeing moves. Similar to partial repeats, these remarks function as opposition prefaces which announce right at the beginning of the turn that opposition is being produced. For instance, in the exchange below, Mother uses this format to preface a contradiction of her daughter's preceding claim.

**example (4): Tell me**

- 1 MOTHER What's the matter?  
2 DAUGHTER I hear something. There's something in the  
3 corner.  
> 4 MOTHER Nonsense. There's nothing in the corner.  
5 DAUGHTER But, Mama, I hear something!  
6 MOTHER (*With a sigh.*) Alright, we'll turn on the  
7 light and take a look. There, you see,  
8 there's nothing in the corner.

This scene portrays a typical goodnight routine: mother is putting her daughter to bed. Apparently, the girl signals that something is bothering her, which prompts the mother to ask her "What's the matter?" (line 1). When the daughter replies that she hears something and claims that "There's something in the corner" (lines 2-3), Mother opposes her assertion in the following turn. She begins her turn with an unfavourable comment, categorising what her daughter has just said as "Nonsense" (line 4). By this means, she

displays opposition at the very beginning of her turn. Immediately following meta-communicative evaluation, Mother adds a contradiction, negating her daughter's prior utterance: "There's nothing in the corner." However, in the following turn, the daughter insists on her position, and repeats her prior claim: "I hear something!" (line 5). The increase in volume serves to intensify disagreement. In response to her daughter's insisting, the mother gives in and agrees to "turn on the light and take a look" (lines 6-8).

In the example above, Mother uses an unfavourable comment to preface a contradiction of her daughter's prior assertion. However, as the next extracts show, such moves can be employed to preface various kinds of oppositional moves. For instance, in the following spate of talk, the mother rejects her daughter's complaint with an unfavourable comment and then goes on to support her position by adding a counter-assertion.

**example (5): Tell me**

550 DAUGHTER You're spoiling him.  
> 551 MOTHER Nonsense. He's just a little frightened,  
552 that's all. Children are afraid of the dark  
553 now and then.  
554 DAUGHTER He was trying to get your attention and he  
555 succeeded. He knows very well there's  
556 nothing in the corner. We go through that  
557 routine every night. It's his way of  
558 getting someone to sit with him.  
559 MOTHER There's no harm in sitting here for awhile.

In this sequence, the mother and daughter are arguing about bringing up children. In line 550, the daughter accuses her mother of spoiling her grandson. In the following turn, Mother rejects her daughter's complaint with an unfavourable comment: By formulating her daughter's claim as "Nonsense" (line 551), she disputes the validity of her accusation. Immediately afterwards, she produces a counter-assertion, claiming that her grandson was "just a little frightened." The phrase "that's all" at the end of her utterance construes her daughter's reaction as exaggerated and thus

intensifies opposition. At the end of her turn, she issues a generalisation: "Children are afraid of the dark now and then" (lines 552-553). By this means, she portrays her grandson's fear of darkness as common and normal, and thus both legitimises her own behaviour and construes her daughter's complaint as unfounded and out of place. In the following turn, the daughter opposes her again, claiming that her son just pretended to be afraid to get his grandmother to stay with him. She supports her position by arguing that she and her son "go through that routine every night" (line 556-557), thus claiming superior knowledge of her son's behaviour. However, in the following turn, her mother discards her claim with a counter-assertion, claiming: "There's no harm in sitting here for awhile" (line 559).

While in the preceding extract, Mother uses the unfavourable comment "Nonsense" to reject her daughter's preceding complaint, in the example below, she employs this format to oppose her daughter's prior assertions:

**example (6): Tell me**

172 MOTHER Big girls don't cry.  
 173 DAUGHTER (*Petulantly.*) I'm not a big girl.  
 174 MOTHER Of course you're a big girl. You're in  
 175 fourth grade. They don't put little girls  
 176 in fourth grade.  
 177 DAUGHTER I hate fourth grade.  
 > 178 MOTHER Nonsense, you love it. Why, just the other  
 179 day you told me you loved your teacher.  
 180 DAUGHTER I don't. I hate her.  
 > 181 MOTHER Nonsense. Why would you hate your teacher?  
 182 DAUGHTER Because she's an old meanie.  
 183 MOTHER Why, she seems just as nice as she can be.  
 184 DAUGHTER She's a mean old meanie.  
 > 185 MOTHER Now that's not nice.  
 186 DAUGHTER Well, she is.

At the beginning of this extract, the daughter is apparently crying. In line 172, Mother opposes her with the cliché "Big girls don't cry." By presupposing that her daughter is a big girl, she portrays

her daughter's behaviour as inappropriate. In line 173, the daughter disputes the presupposition in her mother's utterance, arguing that she is "not a big girl." However, Mother insists on her position and counter-opposes her with a contradiction: "Of course you're a big girl" (line 174). The use of the intensifier "Of course" at the beginning of her turn emphasises disagreement. Directly following the contradiction, she goes on to support her claim by arguing that the fact that her daughter is in fourth grade is sufficient evidence that she is not a little girl anymore (lines 174-176). In the following turn, however, the daughter opposes her with a counter-assertion. By claiming that she hates fourth grade (line 177), she implies that she does not belong there and thereby rejects her mother's claim as invalid. In line 178, Mother rejects her assertion with an unfavourable comment, categorising what she has just said as "Nonsense" and immediately adds a counter-assertion ("you love it." line 178). In the remainder of her turn, she supports her position by citing her daughter's remark that she loved her teacher as evidence (lines 178-179). However, in the next turn, the daughter opposes her again, denying that she loves her teacher ("I don't." line 180) and claiming that, in fact, she hates her. The use of the antonym "hate" (as opposed to "love") creates cohesion at the structural level of interaction, while intensifying dissent at the content level. Once again, Mother opposes her assertion with an unfavourable comment, characterising her utterance as "Nonsense" (line 181). She immediately adds a demand for explanation in the form of an interrogative: "Why would you hate your teacher?", obliging her daughter to account for her claim in the following turn. However, when the girl provides the requested account, claiming that her teacher "is an old meanie" (line 182), the mother does not accept her explanation. Instead, she expresses her doubts about the truth of her assertion, arguing that her teacher "seems just as nice as she can be" (line 183). When the daughter insists on her position and repeats her prior claim ("She's a mean old meanie." line 184), Mother opposes her with another unfavourable comment, characterising her remark as "not nice" (line 185). Although it clearly represents a meta-communicative evaluation of prior talk, this move differs from the preceding instances of unfavourable comments in two respects. Firstly, while the unfavourable comments

in lines 178 and 181 are used to preface additional oppositional moves, the critical remark "Now that's not nice" stands alone in a turn. Secondly, rather than calling into question the propositional content of the prior claim, it challenges the appropriateness of her daughter's preceding remark and obliges her to resume the floor account for her utterance in the following turn. However, in line 186, the daughter responds simply by saying "Well, she is." While the "Well"-preface indicates that she does not dispute her mother's evaluation of her activity, she nevertheless insists on the propositional content of her utterance.

Similar to the critical remark "Now that's not nice" in the preceding extract, the following instances of unfavourable comments are employed to challenge the appropriateness of the opponent's preceding activity.

**example (7): 'night Mother**

720 MAMA Good time don't come looking for you, Jessie.  
721 You could work some puzzles or put in a  
722 garden or go to the store. Let's call a taxi  
723 and go to the A&P!  
724 JESSIE I shopped you up for about two weeks already.  
725 You're not going to need toilet paper till  
726 Thanksgiving.  
> 727 MAMA (*Interrupting.*) You're acting like some little  
728 brat, Jessie. You're mad and everybody's  
729 boring and you don't have anything to do and  
730 you don't like me and you don't like going  
731 out and you don't like staying in and you  
732 never talk on the phone and you don't watch TV  
733 and you're miserable and it's your own sweet  
734 fault.  
735 JESSIE And it's time I did something about it.  
736 MAMA Not something like killing yourself.

Prior to this extract, Jessie has tried to explain to her mother why she wants to put an end to her life. At the beginning of this sequence, Mama tries to dissuade her daughter from committing suicide. She tells her that she has to take her life in hand ("Good time don't come looking for you, Jessie." lines 720-721) and

proposes several activities she could engage in to keep herself busy and make her life more attractive: "You could work some puzzles or put in a garden or go to the store." (lines 721-722). Mama closes her turn with a directive, suggesting that they call a cab and go shopping in the local supermarket: "Let's call a taxi and go to the A&P!" (lines 722-723). Jessie responds by claiming that she has already done the shopping and has even built up a rich supply of household items (lines 724-726). In so doing, she rejects both Mama's suggestion and her attempts at distracting her from her plan to put an end to her life. At the content level of interaction, Jessie's utterance informs Mama that she is "not going to need toilet paper until Thanksgiving" (lines 725-726). At the interpersonal level, however, her remark indicates that she is not willing to discuss her plan to kill herself any further. Moreover, the humorous key of her utterance (cf. Ch. 6.3.2) suggests that she does not take the conversation or her mother's concerns seriously. This prompts Mama to issue an unfavourable comment: By formulating Jessie's activity as "acting like some little brat" (lines 727-728) she rejects her daughter's behaviour as inappropriate, offensive and irresponsible. Hence, her utterance also acts as a reprimand and obliges Jessie to provide an account for her conduct in the following turn. The interruptive placement of Mama's counter signals her indignation and aggravates opposition. In addition, by categorising Jessie's behaviour in such a negative way, she threatens her positive face and thus further reinforces the confrontational character of her utterance. In the remainder of her turn, she elaborates on her accusation, providing a detailed description of her daughter's behaviour (lines 728-734). In the following turn, rather than disputing her mother's accusation or providing an explanation for her behaviour, Jessie confirms Mama's assessment and argues that it is time she "did something about it" (line 735), suggesting that her plan to kill herself is but a logical consequence of the situation Mama has just described. That is to say, instead of putting up a defence against Mama's attack, she exploits her argument and uses it for her own position. In the following turn, Mama disputes the implicature of Jessie's prior utterance, arguing that suicide is not the solution to her problems: "Not something like killing yourself." (line 736).

In the following sequence, Mother uses an unfavourable comment to avoid compliance with her daughter's request:

**example (8): Tell me**

109 DAUGHTER Mama?  
110 MOTHER (*Exasperated.*) What?  
111 DAUGHTER (*In a small voice.*) Sing me a song.  
> 112 MOTHER You're five years old and you're acting like  
113 a baby!  
114 DAUGHTER Please...  
115 MOTHER Alright. If you're going to act like a baby,  
116 I'll sing you a baby song.

Prior to this fragment, Mother has tried for some time to put her daughter to bed. When the girl asks her to sing her a song in line 111, Mother responds with an unfavourable comment. By referring to her daughter's age and claiming that she is "acting like a baby" (lines 112-113), she portrays her behaviour as inappropriate. Hence, her critical remark has an accusatory function. By this means, she manages to put off her daughter's request while at the same time obliging her account for her behaviour in the subsequent turn. The volume increase indicates her exasperation and intensifies opposition. However, when the daughter repeats her request (line 144), the mother eventually complies (albeit grudgingly) and agrees to sing her a song, though one for babies (lines 115-116).

To conclude, the preceding discussion has shown that disputants can oppose an interlocutor's preceding activity by explicitly evaluating what was said in the previous turn in a negative way. Unfavourable comments such as "That's silly," "That's ridiculous," or "Nonsense" may be employed to challenge the propositional content of the prior speaker's talk. In addition, the appropriateness of the opponent's prior activity may be called into question by means of unfavourable comparisons such as "You're acting like some little brat," or "You're acting like a baby." As we have seen, such argumentative moves may be employed to oppose a variety of activities. For instance, they can be used to refuse to comply with another's request, to reject an opponent's accusation or to dispute an interlocutor's claim. They allow the speaker to avoid or put off

complying with the sequential requirements established by the interlocutor's prior activity. That is to say, by issuing an unfavourable comment, the speaker is able to evade or delay producing the conditionally relevant response to another's preceding turn. Hence, unfavourable comments provide a discursive resource that disputants can employ to resist the opponent's attempt at constraining their freedom of action, i.e. at exercising discursive power.

Furthermore, with regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, unfavourable comments present a threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987: 66), in showing that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the addressee's behaviour (i.e. her actions, wants or beliefs). As a result, following an unfavourable comment, the recipient can either back down, and lose face, or put up some defence against the other's attack. Therefore, unfavourable comments provide a conversational resource available to speakers that may be exploited to resist and exercise interactional power at various levels of the dispute-in-interaction.

In a heated argument we are apt to lose sight of the truth. (Publilius Syrus)

All you get from a circular argument is dizzy.  
(Darrin Bell, *Candorville*)

### 7.10 Contradictions

Another common way in which the disputants in my data 'do opposition' is by denying the truth of the prior speaker's utterance. I will refer to this arguing technique as 'contradiction.' Contradictions are a class of utterances that dispute the propositional content of the prior speaker's claim by maintaining the opposite of what she has just said either through a negation or by means of an affirmative sentence. Thus, (in contrast to such arguing techniques as, for instance, relevance challenges or competence challenges) contradictions aim primarily at the content level of utterances rather than other planes of interaction. Contradictions present a threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987), as they indicate that the speaker thinks that the hearer "is wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some issue, such wrongness being associated with disapproval" (66). Consequently, contradictions put the defendant in a position either to back down and accept a loss of face, or to attempt to save face by means of insisting on her prior claim, and thus maintain the disagreement sequence. In this sense, contradictions are control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts at exercising discursive power at the structural level of interaction, because they limit the addressee's freedom of action.

Similar oppositional moves have been described in studies of children's disputes, where they have been referred to as "disagreement" (M. H. Goodwin 1990) or "denial" (Brenneis & Lein 1977). Likewise, in arguments between adults, conflict researchers have observed arguing techniques such as "Zurückweisungen" (Apeltauer 1978), "simple negation" (Vuchinich 1984; Knoblauch 1995) and "contradictions" (Muntigl & Turnbull 1998), in which the speaker utters a negation of the opponent's previous claim. Similar phenomena have been found in disagreement sequences in institutional contexts. For example, in a study of controversial TV-discussions, Gruber (1996a; 1998) describes "overt disagreements," which dispute

the truth of an interlocutor's utterance, for instance, by means of negation. Similarly, Spranz-Fogasy (1986) has observed that the most frequent disagreement technique used in a corpus of mediation hearings is what he calls "Gegenbehauptung," which involves arguing the opposite of what the opponent has claimed, usually by repeating the interlocutor's prior utterance using disagreement markers.

In my data, contradictions tend to be produced immediately following or in overlap with the opponent's prior turn. They stand on their own in a turn or occur in combination with additional oppositional moves. Contradictions often have the syntactic form of a declarative sentence containing negative particles such as "no," "not," "nothing," "never," etc., indicating that the opposite of the prior speaker's claim is true. For instance, in the following extract from *'night Mother*, Mama uses a negative declarative sentence which denies the propositional content of her daughter's utterance:

**example (1): 'night Mother**

2216 MAMA You said you wanted to do my nails.  
2217 JESSIE (*Taking a small step backward.*) I can't.  
2218 It's too late.  
> 2219 MAMA It's not too late!  
2220 JESSIE I don't want you to wake Dawson and Loretta  
2221 when you call. I want them to still be up  
2222 and dressed so they can get right over.

Prior to this sequence, Jessie has announced that it's time for her to leave, implying that, eventually, she is going to carry out her plan to commit suicide. Following several unsuccessful attempts to dissuade her daughter from leaving, in line 2216, Mama tries to hold Jessie back by reminding her that she promised to do her mother's nails. When Jessie refuses to comply with her Mama's implicit request to give her a manicure, claiming "It's too late" (line 2218), Mama opposes her with a contradiction in the form of a negation: "It's not too late!" (line 2219). By this means, she disputes the propositional content of Jessie's prior claim through maintaining the opposite of what her daughter has just said. The increase in volume signals high involvement and serves to intensify

opposition. Her mother's aggravated disagreement prompts Jessie to provide an extended account for her insistence on her schedule (lines 2220-2222).

Similarly, in the following extract from *Tell me*, Mother contradicts her daughter's claim that "There's something in the corner" by means of a negation.

**example (2): Tell me**

1 MOTHER What's the matter?  
2 DAUGHTER I hear something. There's something in the  
3 corner.  
> 4 MOTHER Nonsense. There's nothing in the corner.  
5 DAUGHTER But, Mama, I hear something!  
6 MOTHER (*With a sigh.*) Alright, we'll turn on the  
7 light and take a look. There, you see, there's  
8 nothing in the corner.

This scene portrays a typical goodnight routine; mother is putting her daughter to bed. When the daughter claims that "There's something in the corner" (lines 2-3), Mother opposes her with a contradiction. Like Mama in the preceding example, she constructs this oppositional move by repeating the proposition from her daughter's prior utterance with negative polarity ("There's nothing in the corner." line 4). By negating her daughter's utterance, Mother asserts that the proposition of what the girl has just said is true. In contrast to the previous extract, Mother does not produce the contradiction immediately following the utterance it refers to. Instead, she begins her turn with an unfavourable comment, which reinforces her oppositional stance. As discussed above, by categorising what her daughter has just said as "Nonsense" (line 4), she disputes the propositional content of her utterance. Similar to partial repeats, this meta-communicative evaluation functions as an opposition preface which announces right at the beginning of her turn that disagreement is being produced. In addition, it allows her to display a negative affective reaction to what her daughter has just said and thus serves to emphasise opposition. However, in spite of her mother's aggravated opposition, in the following turn, the daughter insists on her prior claim (line 5). The increase in volume

serves to intensify disagreement. Eventually, the mother gives in and agrees to "turn on the light and take a look" (lines 6-8).

In the following extract from *'night Mother*, Jessie uses negation to contradict her mother's claim that her epilepsy was effectuated by something she (Mama) did. In contrast to the preceding examples, in which the speakers provide no alternative position but simply challenge the interlocutors' prior utterance by negating its propositional content, here Jessie's contradiction is followed by an elaboration of her own standpoint.

**example (3): 'night Mother**

1734 MAMA (*Beginning to break down.*) Maybe I fed you  
1735 the wrong thing. Maybe you had a fever  
1736 sometime and I didn't know it soon enough.  
1737 Maybe it's a punishment.  
1738 JESSIE For what?  
1739 MAMA I don't know. Because of how I felt about  
1740 your father. Because I didn't want any more  
1741 children. Because I smoked too much or  
1742 didn't eat right when I was carrying you.  
1743 It has to be something I did.  
> 1744 JESSIE It does not. It's just a sickness, not a  
1745 curse. Epilepsy doesn't mean anything. It  
1746 just is.

At the beginning of this passage, Mama speculates about possible causes for Jessie's disease. When in her turn-final utterance, she hypothesises that her daughter's epilepsy might be "a punishment" (line 1737), Jessie challenges her with a demand for explanation ("For what?" line 1738), requesting that she resume the floor and provide a reason for her claim. Indeed, in the following turn, Mama accounts for her prior utterance by listing a number of lapses on her part, for which she might deserve punishment, and closes her turn claiming that "It has to be something I did" (line 1743). At line 1744, Jessie opposes her with a contradiction. By negating Mama's utterance ("It does not."), she disputes the validity of her claim. In the remainder of her turn, she elaborates her oppositional position, arguing that her state of health is not a consequence of her mother's failures.

Contradictions provide a discursive resource that can be employed to challenge various kinds of activities on the part of an opponent. In the exchanges above, this argumentative device is used to dispute an opponent's prior assertion. By contrast, in the following extract from *My sister*, Madame Danzard uses this oppositional move to deny the truth of her daughter's preceding accusation.<sup>114</sup>

**example (4): My sister 9**

22 ISABELLE One, two, three ... begin. Maman - that  
23 is not fair.  
24 MADAME DANZARD What's not fair?  
25 ISABELLE You started at two.  
> 26 MADAME DANZARD I did not. I absolutely did not.  
27 However, if you insist, we'll start  
28 again.

Madame Danzard and her daughter Isabelle are playing cards. When Isabelle complains that her mother is being unfair, claiming that she has started too early (line 25), Madame Danzard rejects her daughter's utterance by means of a negation: "I did not." (line 26). By maintaining that the opposite of what Isabelle has just said is true, she disputes the truth of her daughter's claim. Moreover, the immediate repetition of the negative declarative in combination with the intensifier "absolutely" displays her indignation at Isabelle's allegation and serves to intensify opposition. Nevertheless, subsequent to her aggravated denial, she offers a compromise proposing to restart the game, thus resolving the disagreement sequence.

As mentioned above, a speaker contradicts by uttering the negated proposition expressed by the previous claim. That is, if the prior speaker has uttered an affirmative statement, the contradiction consists in a negative declarative sentence containing negative particles such as "no," "not," "nothing," etc., as in the examples above. If, by contrast, the talk that is opposed already contains negative particles, the contradiction consists in an affirmative declarative sentence, as the following extract from *My sister* shows:

**example (5): My sister 12**

15 MADAME DANZARD I want you to wear it Friday when we go  
16 to the Flintons'.  
17 ISABELLE But it won't be ready in-  
> 18 MADAME DANZARD (*Interrupting.*) It will be ready. She  
19 hardly has anything to do.

In this scene, Isabelle is trying on a new dress that needs adjustments. The sequence starts with Madame Danzard telling Isabelle that she wants her to wear the dress the following Friday at their next visit to the Flintons' (lines 15-16). When Isabelle objects that the dress "won't be ready" by then (line 17), her mother opposes her with a contradiction. She constructs her oppositional move by repeating her daughter's prior statement but using the opposite polarity ("It will be ready." line 18), thus denying Isabelle's utterance. The interruptive placement of the contradiction indicates high involvement and serves to aggravate disagreement. Directly following the contradiction, Madame Danzard produces an assertion providing evidence in support of her claim. By arguing that the maid "hardly has anything to do" (line 19), she implies that she will be able to finish the adjustments in time.

Contradictions that do not contain negative particles often contain positive disagreement markers, such as, for instance, "yes" or "too," which assert the opposite of a negated prior claim, as the following two examples illustrate:

**example (6): 'night Mother**

1407 MAMA Ricky is too much like Cecil.  
1408 JESSIE He's not. Ricky is as much like me as it's  
1409 possible for any human to be. We even wear  
1410 the same size pants. These are his, I think.  
1411 MAMA That's just the same size. That's not you're  
1412 the same person.  
1413 JESSIE I see it on his face. I hear it when he talks.  
1414 We look out at the world and we see the same  
1415 thing: Not Fair. And the only difference  
1416 between us is Ricky's out there trying to get

1417 even. And he knows not to trust anybody and  
 1418 he got it straight from me. And he knows not  
 1419 to try to get work, and guess where he got  
 1420 that. He walks around like there's loose  
 1421 boards in the floor, and you know who laid  
 1422 that floor, I did.  
 1423 MAMA Ricky isn't through yet. You don't know how  
 1424 he'll turn out!  
 > 1425 JESSIE (*Going back to the kitchen.*) Yes I do and so  
 1426 did Cecil. Ricky is the two of us together for  
 1427 all time in too small a space. And we're  
 1428 tearing each other apart, like always, inside  
 1429 that boy, and if you don't see it, then you're  
 1430 just blind.

In this extract, Mama and Jessie are arguing about the character of Jessie's son Ricky. The sequence starts with Mama claiming that he "is too much" like his father Cecil (line 1407). In the following turn, Jessie opposes her with a contradiction ("He's not." line 1408), and then goes on to argue that, in fact, Ricky bears an unusually close resemblance to her. She closes her turn with a supportive assertion providing evidence for her claim by pointing out that she and her son "even wear the same size pants" (lines 1409-1410). In the following turn, Mama dismisses her argument as invalid by disputing that the fact that they wear the same size implies that they also have a similar character (lines 1411-1412). However, Jessie insists on her position; she cites a considerable number of characteristics that she and her son have in common as evidence of their similarity (lines 1413-1422). Although Mama apparently cannot dispute her daughter's claim, she does not surrender without a struggle. While she implicitly concedes that Jessie is right in claiming that her son takes after her, by arguing that Ricky is still in his adolescence and therefore Jessie does not know "how he'll turn out" (line 1424), she implies that he might still change. The increase in volume signals high involvement and serves to reinforce opposition. However, in the following turn, Jessie again counters her with a contradiction. Her turn begins with the positive disagreement marker "Yes," which asserts the opposite

of her mother's negated prior claim. This is followed by a repetition of the verb phrase from Mama's prior statement produced with the opposite polarity ("Yes I do" line 1425). In the remainder of her turn, she expands on her position, arguing that her son's problems are obvious (lines 1426-1430).

Likewise, in the extract from *Alto* below, Wanda twice opposes her mother's preceding negative statements by means of contradictions containing positive disagreement markers:

**example (7): Alto II,1**

119 WANDA (*Scared, moves back, crying.*) I don't want to  
120 die.  
121 FLORENE (*Still fanning HATTIE.*) Nobody does. Now stay  
122 over here, and calm down. See how brave Miz  
123 Hattie is?  
124 WANDA It's easy for her to be brave. She's old and  
125 already had her life. I haven't even started  
126 to live yet.  
127 FLORENE I haven't either. Not really.  
> 128 WANDA You have too. You've been to Galveston and  
129 Wichita Falls and had cocktails at nightclubs.  
(...)  
138 WANDA And you've had a chance to sing.  
139 FLORENE I never had a chance to sing!  
> 140 WANDA Yes, you did! You just didn't do it!  
141 FLORENE The only time I ever got to sing was at that  
142 nightclub in Galveston.

Outside, a fierce thunderstorm is raging, threatening to blow away the house. Apparently, Wanda is very frightened; she is crying and says she does not want to die (lines 119-120). Rather than comforting her daughter, Florene tells her to step back from the window and calm down (lines 121-122). She supports her position by referring to the exemplary behaviour of their landlady, Miz Hattie (lines 122-123). In the following turn, Wanda dismisses her mother's argument as invalid claiming that, due to a considerable difference in age, Miz Hattie's and her own situation are incommensurable (lines 124-1269). When Florene picks up her daughter's turn-final utterance at line 127 and states that like Wanda, she has not really

"started to live yet," Wanda opposes her with a contradiction. She builds her counter by repeating Florene's statement but producing it with the opposite polarity ("You have" line 128), and then adds the positive disagreement marker "too," which asserts the affirmative of her mother's negated prior claim. In the remainder of her turn, she cites a prior trip of Florene to Galveston as evidence for her antagonistic position (lines 128-129). Following a brief side sequence between Florene and Miz Hattie (lines 130-137), Wanda provides another piece of evidence in support of her argument, claiming that - unlike her - Florene has had the opportunity to practice her singing (line 138). In the following turn, Florene opposes her with an aggravated contradiction ("I never had a chance to sing!" line 139). By way of negation, she disputes the propositional content of Wanda's utterance. Moreover, the ECF "never" as well as the increase in volume serves to intensify opposition and signals high involvement. But Wanda insists on her position and counter-opposes her mother with another contradiction: "Yes, you did!" (line 140). Her turn begins with the positive disagreement marker "Yes," asserting the affirmative of her mother's negated claim. This is followed by a repetition of Florene's prior statement produced with the opposite, i.e. positive, polarity.

Contradictions may also involve emphatic adverbs such as "of course" or "sure," which reinforce the speaker's claim that the opposite of the opponent's prior utterance is true, as exemplified by the following two extracts:

**example (8): Tell me**

213 DAUGHTER Why am I left-handed? Nobody else in my class  
 214 is left-handed.  
 215 MOTHER Because you were born that way.  
 216 DAUGHTER Why was I born that way? Nobody else in my  
 217 class was born that way.  
 > 218 MOTHER Of course they were.  
 219 DAUGHTER I'm the only one!  
 220 MOTHER That's very strange. There are usually a lot  
 221 of left-handed children in a class.  
 222 DAUGHTER Well, I'm the only one.

At the beginning of this sequence, the daughter asks her mother why she is left-handed (line 213). Directly following the request for information, she adds an assertion, claiming that "Nobody else" in her class is left-handed (lines 213-214). In using the extreme expression "nobody," she construes her left-handedness as an uncommon property and thus legitimises her query. In the following turn, the mother answers her daughter's question with the brief statement "Because you were born that way" (line 215). At line 216, the daughter issues another "Wh"-question, requesting that her mother provide a more detailed account for her daughter's left-handedness. She builds her request for information by picking up a part of her mother's preceding statement and transforming it into an interrogative ("Why was I born that way?" line 216). In doing so, she formulates her mother's prior turn as an unsatisfactory response to her initial question, which requires further elaboration. Moreover, immediately following the interrogative, she adds an assertion, claiming that "Nobody else" in her class was born that way (lines 216-217). As in her prior turn, the extreme formulation "nobody" formulates her left-handedness as something atypical, and thus serves to justify her inquisitiveness. At line 218, instead of answering her daughter's question, the mother opposes her with a contradiction: "Of course they were." By issuing an affirmative declarative sentence that asserts the affirmative of her daughter's negated prior utterance, she disputes the propositional content of her daughter's claim. Furthermore, the emphatic "of course" formulates as obvious her claim that the opposite of what the girl has just said is true, and thus serves to intensify disagreement. However, in spite of her mother's aggravated opposition, the daughter insists on her position, and maintains that she is "the only one" in her class born left-handed (line 219). In addition, the increase in volume signals high emotional involvement and serves to further escalate disagreement. In response to her daughter's insisting, the mother backs down. Although she maintains that "usually there a lot of left-handed children in a class" (lines 220-221), she does not dispute her daughter's claim any longer. The sequence ends with the daughter repeating her assertion that she is "the only one" (line 222).

In the extract from *'night Mother* below, Jessie prefaces her contradiction with the intensifier "sure" to add force to her claim that the opposite of Mama's prior assertion is true.

**example (9): 'night Mother**

1953 MAMA (Quickly.) Jessie. I can't just sit here and  
1954 say O.K., kill yourself if you want to.  
> 1955 JESSIE Sure you can. You just did. Say it again.  
1956 MAMA (Really startled.) Jessie! (Quiet horror.)  
1957 How dare you! (Furious.) How dare you!

As noted above, prior to this brief extract, Mama has repeatedly - but unsuccessfully - tried to dissuade Jessie from committing suicide. At the beginning of this sequence, Mama launches another attempt, claiming that Jessie cannot expect her to accept that she is planning to kill herself without a word of protest, let alone explicitly encourage her to do so (lines 1953-1954). At line 1955, Jessie opposes her mother's claim by means of a contradiction. She constructs her turn-initial move by picking up the verb phrase of Mama's prior negative declarative statement ("I can't") and producing it with the opposite polarity ("you can"). In addition, she prefaces the contradiction with the emphatic adverb "Sure," and thereby intensifies disagreement. Subsequently, she adds an assertion supporting her position, pointing out that Mama has just produced exactly the utterance she claims she cannot make ("You just did"). Finally, she concludes her turn with a directive, telling Mama to repeat her prior statement ("Say it again."). Mama's subsequent response reveals that she is completely taken aback by her daughter's reasoning. She begins her turn by exclaiming her daughter's first name ("Jessie!" line 1956), presumably in a reproachful tone of voice. The interjection signals incredulity and shock at what her daughter has just said and portrays her action as both unexpected and inappropriate. Her response indicates that she strongly disapproves of Jessie's behaviour and, hence, constitutes an accusation. This interpretation of her turn-initial utterance is corroborated by the subsequent moves. Following the blame-implicative address, Mama produces the formulaic interrogative construction "How dare you!", expressing both shock and indignation

at Jessie's prior utterance. The modal auxiliary "dare" construes Jessie's preceding activity as an offence. As discussed earlier, the interrogative construction "How" + modal auxiliary "dare" + second person pronoun is a conventionalised format for accusations and is generally oriented to as such by conversationalists in the production and interpretation of utterances. In addition, the volume increase signals a negative affective reaction (i.e. horror and anger, as indicated by the stage directions) at what Jessie has just said and thus serves to aggravate disagreement. Moreover, the subsequent repetition of the accusatory question signals high emotional involvement and further aggravates opposition.

Contradictions are a class of argumentative moves by which a speaker denies the truth of the prior speaker's claim. They are concerned with the content of the opponent's previous utterance, with its sense and reference. As Jackson & Scott (1980) have pointed out, this involves "what is predicated in an utterance, as well as all those attendant propositions that are presupposed or entailed by a speaker in making the utterance" (255). In other words, besides negating the proposition of the opponent's prior utterance, as in the extracts above, contradictions may also dispute a presupposition expressed in the interlocutor's preceding statement, as the following two examples illustrate:<sup>115</sup>

**example (10): Tell me**

172 MOTHER Big girls don't cry.  
 > 173 DAUGHTER (*Petulantly.*) I'm not a big girl.  
 174 MOTHER Of course you're a big girl. You're in  
 175 fourth grade. They don't put little girls  
 176 in fourth grade.

At the beginning of this sequence, the daughter is obviously crying. Rather than comforting her daughter, at line 172, the mother challenges her with the cliché "Big girls don't cry." By presupposing that her daughter is a big girl - and as such should not cry - she portrays the girl's behaviour as inappropriate. In the following turn, the daughter opposes her mother's claim with a contradiction. She disputes the presupposition of her mother's utterance, arguing that she is "not a big girl" (line 173), and

thereby also dismisses her mother's criticism as invalid. Her "petulant" tone of voice indicates a negative affective reaction at her mother's unsympathetic behaviour. However, Mother insists on her position and counter-opposes her daughter with a reciprocal contradiction: "Of course you're a big girl." (line 174). As described above, the intensifier "of course" at the beginning of her turn emphasises disagreement. She immediately goes on to support her position by citing the fact that her daughter is in fourth grade as evidence for her claim (lines 174-176).

In the following extract from *'night Mother*, Jessie employs the same device to challenge her mother's preceding utterance.

**example (11): 'night Mother**

1373 MAMA I married you off to the wrong man, I admit  
1374 that. So I took you in when he left. I'm  
1375 sorry.  
> 1376 JESSIE He wasn't the wrong man.  
1377 MAMA He didn't love you, Jessie, or he wouldn't  
1378 have left.  
> 1379 JESSIE He wasn't the wrong man, Mama. I loved Cecil  
1380 so much. And I tried to get more exercise and  
1381 I tried to stay awake. I tried to learn to  
1382 ride a horse. And I tried to stay outside with  
1383 him, but he always knew I was trying, so it  
1384 didn't work.

Prior to this extract, Mama and Jessie have been arguing about Jessie's failed marriage. While Mama initially claimed that she never liked Jessie's ex-husband Cecil, following a series of disagreements, she eventually concedes that she engaged him as a carpenter in order to set him up with Jessie: "I married you off to the wrong man, I admit that." (lines 1373-1374). She apologises to Jessie for her failed matchmaking and explains that she was trying to make amends by taking Jessie in after her husband split up with her. In line 1376, Jessie opposes her with a contradiction disputing the presupposition of her initial utterance: "He wasn't the wrong man." But Mama counter-opposes her with a counter-assertion. She cites the fact that Cecil left her as evidence that he did not love

her (lines 1377-1378), and thus implies that he was the wrong man. Yet, Jessie insists on her standpoint and repeats her prior contradiction (line 1379). In the remainder of her turn, she expands on her position providing an alternative explanation for why their marriage did not work out (lines 1379-1384).

As the preceding examples have illustrated, contractions can be employed to negate the proposition of the opponent's prior utterance as well as a presupposition expressed therein. In addition, contractions can be used to dispute a pre-condition of the interlocutor's preceding statement, as the following two extracts exemplify:

**example (12): Home**

344 MARY JANE But Ma. I can't go back to California. I  
345 don't have any money to go anywhere. As  
346 soon as you called me and ASKED me to come  
347 here I started thinking about all kinds of  
348 things and it started looking up again.  
349 Coming back kind of washed away all my  
350 mistakes. I can't explain it but it did.  
351 It did.  
352 OLIVIA Don't be silly.  
> 353 MARY JANE I'm not being silly.  
354 OLIVIA Well you're not making any sense. I hope  
355 you don't go around talking to people like  
356 this.

Previous to this brief exchange, Olivia and Mary Jane have been talking about Mary Jane's future plans. The sequence starts with Mary Jane explaining to her mother why she cannot go back to California. When she asserts that her return home seems to have "washed away" all her mistakes (lines 349), Olivia challenges her with a meta-communicative directive ("Don't be silly." line 352). By this means, she construes Mary Jane's prior statements as inappropriate (i.e. silly) and demands that she change her behaviour. In the subsequent turn, Mary Jane counters with a contradiction: "I'm not being silly" (line 353). Mary Jane brings into play one of the preconditions for valid requests for action pointed out by Labov & Fanshel (1977: 78), namely that there is a

need for the request. In issuing the imperative "Don't be silly," Olivia presumes that Mary Jane is being silly and hence, there is a need to make the request. Mary Jane contests this precondition by denying that she is being silly, and thereby disputes the validity of her mother's claim.<sup>116</sup> However, Olivia insists on her position and maintains that Mary Jane is "not making any sense" (line 354). As described above, the discourse marker "Well" at the beginning of her turn not only signals that what is coming next will oppose the prior talk in some way. It also indicates that in spite of Mary Jane's contradiction, Olivia persists in her opinion that her daughter's communicative behaviour is inappropriate and that she had better not talk to people "like this" (lines 355-356).

In the extract from *'night Mother* below, Jessie too uses this device to challenge one of the preconditions of Mama's preceding request:

**example (13): 'night Mother**

209 MAMA      What's the matter with you?  
210 JESSIE     Not a thing. Feel fine.  
211 MAMA      You feel fine. You're just going to kill  
212             yourself.  
213 JESSIE     Waited until I felt good enough, in fact.  
214 MAMA      Don't make jokes, Jessie. I'm too old for  
215             jokes.  
> 216 JESSIE    It's not a joke, Mama.

In reaction to her daughter's revelation that she plans to shoot herself, Mama demands that Jessie account for her behaviour by asking her: "What's the matter with you?" (line 209). Her response displays that Jessie's assertion leads her to the assumption that something must be wrong with her daughter. When Jessie claims that she feels fine (line 210), Mama reacts with sarcasm. She repeats Jessie's claim and juxtaposes it with her prior announcement that she is going to kill herself (lines 211-212). The combination of two emotional states that are commonly perceived as mutually exclusive, namely "feeling fine" versus "being at risk to commit suicide" sets up a potentially humorous clash of frames. Moreover, the use of the adverb "just," which is commonly associated with pettiness and

triviality, in combination with a topic as sensitive and serious as suicide contributes to the paradoxical frame, and thus reinforces the sarcastic tenor of her utterance. In the subsequent turn, Jessie maintains the paradoxical frame set up by Mama's prior utterance by claiming that she waited until she felt good enough (line 213). At line 214, Mama opposes her with a meta-communicative directive explicitly commenting on the humorous potential of Jessie's utterance: "Don't make jokes, Jessie." Her negative imperative formulates Jessie's remark as inappropriate considering the seriousness of the topic at hand (i.e. her suicidal intentions). Subsequently, she adds a supportive assertion legitimising her claim: "I'm too old for jokes." However, in the following turn, Jessie counter-opposes her with a contradiction. Like Mary Jane in the preceding example, Jessie challenges the precondition that there is a need for her mother's request. By negating Mama's assumption that she was joking ("It's not a joke, Mama." line 216), she disputes the validity of her mother's directive.<sup>117</sup>

To recapitulate so far, contradictions are a class of oppositional moves that can be used to negate the propositional content, presupposition or precondition of the prior speaker's utterance. As the preceding examples have illustrated, they can be employed to initiate turns expressing the speaker's own standpoint or providing an account for their dissent. Immediately following these prefaces, speakers themselves may go on to provide a formulation of their own stance or a reason for their disagreement.<sup>118</sup> However, more often than not, a commitment to an alternative position on the matter in question is avoided. As we have seen, in many instances, speakers neither offer an alternative view for the opponent to argue with nor do they give a reason for why they disagree. Rather, they oppose the prior speaker's argument simply by negating its propositional content. Some contradictions are used to preface a following turn component in which the speaker provides a formulation of her own standpoint or an account for her oppositional stance. Other contradictions stand on their own in a turn; they establish a different relationship between the participants, in which the prior speaker rather than the current speaker is required in the following turn, to account for the truth of what she has said. For this reason, freestanding contradictions

function as second position moves by means of which the speaker challenges the other's prior claim and simultaneously obliges her to build a defence for her stance in the subsequent turn.<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, with regard to the interpersonal plane of interaction, contradictions that stand on their own represent face-threatening acts that threaten both the hearer's positive and negative face. Firstly, they threaten the addressee's positive face wants by denying the truth of her prior contribution. Secondly, they present a threat to the addressee's negative face by impeding her freedom of action, since they put the recipient in a position of accounting for the activity in question. Therefore, freestanding contradiction provides an argumentative resource available to speakers that they may exploit to exercise control over others at the micro-level of interaction by constraining their freedom of action.

As we have seen, the contradictions in the previous examples are constructed by uttering the negated proposition or by negating some presupposition expressed by or precondition of the opponent's previous claim. They are closely tied to the preceding utterance and allow only a change in its polarity (unless a formulation of the speaker's own stance is provided in the remainder of the turn). In this manner, a close link between the contradiction and the utterance it refers to is established at the structural level of interaction, while disagreement is emphasised at the content level. Therefore, freestanding contradictions do not contribute to the resolution of a dispute but rather increase the disagreement between two parties. The use of this kind of oppositional move often results in a series of mutual, consecutive rejections of the opponents' views, i.e. "negative reaction cycles" (Spranz-Fogasy et al. 1993) without any topical progression, and thus without any chance of resolving the disagreement at hand.<sup>120</sup> This is illustrated by the following two examples:

**example (14): My mother I,7**

130	DORIS	He's reversing straight into my lily of the
131		valley!
> 132	MARGARET	He's not.
> 133	DORIS	He is.

> 134 MARGARET He's not, just parking.  
135 DORIS Curious method of parking.

In this scene, Doris and her twenty-year-old daughter Margaret are in the garden folding the washing, when Margaret's boy friend Ken arrives in his new car. The sequence starts with Doris claiming that the young man is crushing her flowers with his car: "He's reversing straight into my lily of the valley!" (lines 130-131). The volume (and presumably high pitch) with which she delivers her utterance signals a negative affective reaction (e.g. annoyance) at what she sees and displays disapproval. In line 132, Margaret opposes her with a contradiction, negating the propositional content of her utterance: "He's not." However, Doris insists on her initial claim, and counter-opposes her daughter in the following turn by issuing a reciprocal contradiction, maintaining the affirmative of Margaret's negated prior claim: "He is." (line 133). In line 134, Margaret retaliates by repeating her preceding contradiction ("He's not"), and immediately adds a counter-assertion, by which she puts forward an alternative interpretation of her boyfriend's activity as "just parking." This prompts a sarcastic remark from Doris ("Curious method of parking." line 135), which displays that she is not convinced by Margaret's re-evaluation of what Ken is doing.

In this extract, both speakers insist on their respective position without putting forward an alternative view the other might argue with and without accounting for their oppositional stance. Rather, the disagreement sequence progresses by the simple recycling of opposing turns (i.e. "He is." - "He's not." - "He is." - "He's not."). In other words, the disputants are going around in circles without approaching a (re)solution. By means of mutual negation, coherence between the oppositional turns is established at the structural level of interaction, while disagreement is emphasised at the content level. Moreover, as mentioned above, the short turn length of the oppositional moves signal aggravation.

Likewise, in the extract from *Alto* below, the disputants oppose each other's arguments in series of mutual contradictions without elaborating on their respective points of view.

**example (15): Alto I,2**

30 WANDA It might be too late then. He'll find a way if  
31 I ask him.  
> 32 FLORENE No, he won't!  
> 33 WANDA Yes, he will!  
34 FLORENE He'll say yes, and then leave it up to me to  
35 find a way! (*Catches herself.*) Of course he'd  
36 find a way if he could. But he can't. That's  
37 all.  
38 WANDA (*Defiantly.*) I'm going to write my daddy.  
39 (*Gets pencil and paper from the coffee table*  
40 *and flings herself dramatically on sofa,*  
41 *starting to write.*)

Prior to this brief exchange, Florene and Wanda have been arguing about whether Wanda might take singing lessons. After an extended series of disagreements, Florene has offered Wanda a compromise, promising her that once her father has established his career and earns enough money, she will be allowed to take lessons. However, Wanda rejects her mother's offer of compromise, arguing that by then, "it might be too late" (line 30) and claims that her father will "find a way" to fulfil her wish if she asks him. In line 32, Florene challenges her with a contradiction, negating the propositional content of Wanda's turn-final utterance: "No, he won't!" The increase in volume signals high emotional involvement and intensifies opposition. However, Wanda insists on her initial claim and issues a counter-contradiction: "Yes, he will!" (line 33). Similar to Florene's preceding turn, the volume increase turns up the emotional heat of the argument and thus escalates the dispute. In response to Wanda's insisting, Florene takes a new tack: Instead of counter-opposing Wanda with another contradiction, she issues a counter-assertion expressing her standpoint, thus breaking out of the interactional cycle. She initiates her turn by claiming that even though her husband might permit Wanda to take singing lessons, it would still be up to her to find a way to finance them (lines 34-35). The volume of her utterance indicates annoyance and aggravates disagreement. But after a short pause, Florene "catches herself" (line 35) and slightly modifies her prior statement. By granting

that her husband would "find a way if he could" (line 36), but insisting that "he can't" (line 37) she accounts for her extended disagreement. However, Wanda does not accept her mother's explanation and insists on her original plan to write to her father (line 38).

Similar to the extract just above (example 14), in the beginning of this sequence, each speaker insists on her own standpoint without providing an account for her oppositional stance. The mutual contradictions do not contribute to the topical development of the dispute but rather increase the disagreement between the two parties, as the disagreement sequence moves forward by the simple recycling of opposing turns (i.e. "He will." - "No, he won't!" - "Yes, he will!"), as well as by means of escalation through the increase in volume. The spiral progression of the dispute engendered by the mutual exchange of contradictions is not terminated until one of the speakers changes course and employs another arguing technique, providing an explanation of her position. Nevertheless, the disagreement is not resolved and the dispute sequence ends with neither party acquiescing.

In the two preceding examples, the speakers contradict each other by picking up a part of the opponent's prior utterance and producing it with the opposite polarity. By contrast, in the following extract from *Tell me* (which shows the continuation of the conversation in example 2), the disputants construct their contradictions by repeating the opponent's entire utterance and changing its polarity.

**example (16): Tell me**

- 141 DAUGHTER Mama!
- 142 MOTHER (*Sitting up with a jolt.*) What?
- 143 DAUGHTER There's something in the corner of my room!
- > 144 MOTHER (*Absolutely exasperated.*) There is nothing  
145 in the corner of your room!
- > 146 DAUGHTER Mama, there's something in the corner of my  
147 room, and I'm scared.
- > 148 MOTHER There's nothing in the corner of your room,  
149 do you hear? Absolutely nothing. There's  
150 nothing to be frightened of. Now I've had

151                    just about enough, young lady, now you go to  
152                    sleep!

Prior to this scene, the mother has put her five-year-old daughter to bed. In line 141, the daughter suddenly issues a summons ("Mama!"), startling her mother from sleep and prompting her to ask "What?" (line 142). In reply to her mother's question about the reason of her summons she claims: "There's something in the corner of my room!" (line 143). Instead of trying to soothe her, the mother opposes her with a contradiction (presumably, because she is familiar with that routine). She repeats her daughter's complete utterance but produces it with the opposite polarity, substituting the absolute "nothing" for the pronoun "something" (lines 144-145). The volume of her utterance and the tone of voice signal high emotional involvement and intensify opposition. However, the daughter insists on her claim, and repeats her own prior statement, adding that she is scared (lines 146-147). Again, instead of comforting her, the mother opposes her with a contradiction, recycling her own prior negation (line 148-149). The subsequent repetition of the extreme formulation "nothing" in combination with the intensifier "absolutely" emphasises disagreement. Following the contradiction, the mother elaborates her standpoint, claiming "There's nothing to be frightened of" (line 150). She terminates her turn - and the dispute at hand - with a directive, telling her daughter to go to sleep, thus drawing on her superior social status as a mother.

As the three preceding examples have shown, contradictions that are not followed by a formulation of the speaker's own standpoint or an account for their disagreement may give rise to negative reaction cycles, in which the disputants oppose each other in a series of mutual, consecutive rejections of their positions. Since neither participant offers an alternative view that the other might argue with or gives a reason for their oppositional stance, the arguments proceed without any topical progression, and thus without any chance of resolution. Hence, disputes that move forward by means of reciprocal contradictions often end in a stand-off with participants continuing to maintain opposing positions, as illustrated in examples (14) and (15). Alternatively, such argumentative sequences

might end in a submission terminal exchange with one party signalling submission either verbally or nonverbally, thus accepting a subordinate position. This form of conflict termination is illustrated in example (16), where after a series of mutual contradictions the daughter eventually complies with her mother's demand to go to sleep.<sup>121</sup>

The preceding discussion has shown that in using a contradiction, a speaker denies the truth of the opponent's prior claim, maintaining the opposite of what she has just said. Contradictions are characteristically constructed by repeating a phrase from the opponent's preceding utterance but using the opposite polarity. In this manner, at the structural level of interaction, they establish a close link to the utterance they refer to, while stressing disagreement at the content level.

Another practice that can be used to dispute the truth of the prior speaker's claim involves explicit expressions of contradiction such as "That's not true" or "That's a lie." While in the instances above, coherence between the contradiction and the talk it opposes is established through word repetition, here the opposing turns are tied together by means of anaphoric reference, i.e. through the use of the demonstrative pronoun "that." Corresponding expressions, such as "Das stimmt nicht," "Das ist nicht wahr" or "Das ist gelogen" have also been observed in naturally occurring disagreement sequences in German (Apeltauer 1978: 197; Gruber 1996a: 153; Spranz-Fogasy 1986: 35-37). It appears that these constructions represent conventionalised formats for contradictions and are oriented to as such by conversationalists in the production and interpretation of utterances.

As the following examples illustrate, such explicit expressions of contradiction can take the form of negative declarative statements that explicitly deny the truth of the opponent's preceding utterance.

**example (17): 'night Mother**

1136 MAMA ((...)) But I bet you wouldn't be killing  
1137 yourself if he were still alive. That's a  
1138 fine thing it to figure out, isn't?  
> 1139 JESSIE (*Filling the honey jar now*) That's not true.

1140 MAMA Oh no? Then what were you asking about him  
 1141 for? Why did you want to know if I loved  
 1142 him.  
 1143 JESSIE I didn't think you did, that's all.

Prior to this extract, Jessie has asked Mama whether she loved her husband. After reminiscing about her unhappy marriage, Mama returns to the topic of Jessie's suicide and claims that Jessie would not kill herself if her father was still alive (lines 1136-1137). In the subsequent turn, Jessie opposes her with an explicit expression of contradiction, challenging the truth of the proposition in Mama's utterance: "That's not true." (line 1139). In the following turn, rather than putting up a defence for her own prior claim, Mama turns the tables and calls into question the truth of Jessie's preceding assertion by means of a return question: "Oh no?" (line 1140).

As noted above, the particle "Oh" at the beginning of a turn marks that the speaker has arrived at a realisation. By the same token, the "Oh"-preface at the beginning of Mama's turn seems to suggest that Jessie's preceding contradiction has made her aware that actually the opposite of her own prior claim is true. However, the remainder of her turn reveals that in fact she does not agree with Jessie's statement: directly following the return question, she adds a series of interrogatives, demanding that Jessie provide evidence for her claim by accounting for her questions about her parent's marriage (line 1140-1142). In the following turn, Jessie provides the required explanation, stating she asked Mama whether she loved her husband simply because she wanted to confirm her own assumptions: "I didn't think you did, that's all." (line 1143).

Some time later in the same conversation, Mama complains that Jessie has never appreciated anything she did, and demands that she provide an explanation for her alleged discontent (lines 1288-1289):

**example (18): 'night Mother**

1288 MAMA Nothing I ever did was good enough for you  
 1289 and I want to know why.  
 > 1290 JESSIE That's not true.  
 1291 MAMA And I want to know why you've lived here  
 1292 this long feeling the way you do.

1293 JESSIE You have no earthly idea how I feel.

As in the extract above, Jessie opposes her with an explicit expression of contradiction ("That's not true." line 1290), denying the validity of her assertion. However, in contrast to the previous exchange, rather than defending her own prior claim or directly counter-opposing Jessie's contradiction, in the next turn, Mama ignores her daughter's counter and produces another demand for explanation (lines 1291-1292). Instead of providing the requested account, however, Jessie counters her mother's request by claiming that Mama is not in a position to form an opinion about her emotional life: "You have no earthly idea how I feel" (line 1293).

Like Jessie in the preceding example, in the following extract from *Stuck*, Lula explicitly denies the truth of her mother's prior utterance by claiming that what she has just said is "not true":

**example (19): Stuck 6b**

129 MOM Ohhhh... nothing's ever been good enough  
130 for you, Lula-  
> 131 LULA That's not true.  
132 MOM What's so great about you anyway?  
133 LULA Nothing-

In the interaction preceding this exchange, Lulu has suggested that she might leave home some day, triggering an extended series of disagreements. After several unsuccessful attempts at dissuading Lulu from her plans, Mom issues a complaint, claiming that her daughter is impossible to please ("nothing's ever been good enough for you"). The ECFs with "nothing" and "ever" construe Lula's discontent as a character trait rather than a random occurrence, and thus serve both to reinforce and legitimate Mom's claim. In the following turn, Lula opposes her with an explicit expression of contradiction, challenging the truth of the proposition in her utterance: "That's not true." (line 131). The interruptive placement of her opposing turn displays high emotional involvement and aggravates opposition. Like Mama in the example above, in the following turn, Mom passes over her daughter's contradiction and produces another challenge, asking her: "What's so great about you

anyway?" (line 132). By constructing her turn in this way, Mom presupposes that Lulu considers herself "great," and demands that she substantiate her assumed superiority, while suggesting that she cannot do so. Indeed, in the following turn, Lulu responds by saying "Nothing" (line 133). By this means, she corroborates her mother's suggestion that she cannot provide evidence that she is superior, while at the same time maintaining her initial position that she is not fastidious or considers herself superior.

In the preceding examples, the contradictions are realised by negative declarative statements that dispute the truth of the prior speaker's claim. As the following extract from *Home* displays, such moves can also take the form of a meta-communicative affirmative statement explicitly formulating opponent's preceding utterance as "a lie":<sup>122</sup>

**example (20): Home**

257 OLIVIA           You make one mistake after another for 20  
258                   years and you never took responsibility  
259                   for one second! You brought babies into  
260                   this world that you could barely feed  
261                   'cause that husband of yours couldn't  
262                   hold down a job.  
> 263 MARY JANE     That's such a lie! How could you say that?  
264 OLIVIA           (Overlapping.) Oh, keep your voice down.

Prior to this exchange, Mary Jane and her mother have been arguing about whether Olivia has been taking enough interest in her daughter's life. Mary Jane has repeatedly accused her mother of neglecting her, while Olivia has persistently denied her daughter's allegations. At the beginning of this sequence, Olivia issues a series of accusatory claims, which portray Mary Jane's behaviour as irresponsible (lines 257-262), thus shifting the blame back to her. In the following turn, Mary Jane issues an explicit expression of contradiction ("That's such a lie!" line 263), disputing the truth of her mother's prior claim by maintaining that what Olivia has just said is a lie. Her utterance presents a severe threat to Olivia's positive face, as it explicitly calls into question her veracity. Moreover, by virtue of implying that Olivia has lied, it functions

as an accusation.<sup>123</sup> The accusatory character of Mary Jane's utterance is reinforced by the subsequent turn component. Immediately following the contradiction, she issues a blame-implicative question ("How could you say that?" line 263), which, as discussed above, construes Olivia's prior utterance as an offence and obliges her to account for her claim in the subsequent turn. However, instead of providing the required account or putting up a defence against Mary Jane's claim, Olivia issues a meta-communicative directive telling Mary Jane to "keep her voice down" (line 264).

To conclude, with a contradiction a speaker denies the truth of the opponent's prior claim, maintaining the opposite of what the other has just said. This is usually done by uttering the negated proposition expressed by the opponent's previous utterance. That is, if the prior speaker has uttered an affirmative statement, the contradiction consists in a negative declarative sentence containing negative particles such as "no," "not," or "nothing," etc. If, by contrast, the talk that is opposed already contains negative particles, the contradiction will be cast in positive terms. Contradictions that do not comprise negative particles often contain positive disagreement markers, such as "yes" or "too," which assert the affirmative of a negated prior claim. In addition, contradictions may involve emphatic adverbs such as "of course" or "sure," which reinforce the speaker's claim that the opposite of the opponent's prior utterance is true. Besides negating the proposition of the opponent's prior utterance, contradictions may also dispute a presupposition or precondition embodied in the interlocutor's preceding statement.

Contradictions provide a discursive resource that can be employed to challenge various kinds of activities on the part of an opponent such as assertions or accusations. They tend to be produced immediately following or in overlap with the opponent's prior turn. They can be used to initiate turns expressing the speaker's own standpoint or providing an account for her dissent. Immediately following these prefaces, speakers themselves go on to provide a formulation of their own stance or give a reason for their disagreement. Contradictions can also stand on their own in a turn. Such freestanding contradictions dispute the prior argument's truth

value without making clear on what grounds its propositional content is being negated and without providing an alternative position that the opponent might argue with. The important characteristic of these moves is that they require the opponent to defend her position, while enabling the speaker to argue without putting forward an alternative view of her own. In this way, freestanding contradictions function as second position moves by which the speaker challenges the other's prior claim and simultaneously obliges her to build a defence for her stance in the subsequent turn. By forcing the prior speaker to resume the floor and put up a defence for her claim in the subsequent turn, contradictions that stand on their own in a turn limit the opponent's freedom of action. Hence, they represent attempts at exercising discursive power at the structural level of interaction. Moreover, contradictions that are not followed by a formulation of the speaker's own standpoint or an account for her disagreement often result in negative reaction cycles, in which the disputants oppose each other in a series of mutual, consecutive rejections of their positions. Since neither participant offers an alternative view that the other might argue with or gives a reason for her oppositional stance, the arguments proceed without any topical progression, and thus without any chance of resolution.

Besides negating the proposition, preconditions or presuppositions expressed by the prior speaker's utterance, disputants may also deny the validity of an opponent's preceding claim by means of explicit expressions of contradiction. These can take the form of negative declarative statements which explicitly deny the truth of the opponent's preceding utterance, as in "That's not true." Alternatively, they may be formulated as meta-communicative affirmative statements, which formulate the opponent's preceding utterance as a lie (e.g. "That's a lie"). In these cases, coherence between the contradiction and the talk it opposes is established by means of anaphoric reference (rather than by way of word repetition). Obviously, these constructions represent conventionalised formats for contradictions and are oriented to as such by conversationalists in the production and interpretation of utterances.

Contradictions present a threat to the addressee's positive face, since they indicate that the speaker thinks the hearer is wrong, misguided or unreasonable about some issue, and thereby express disapproval. They oblige the defendant either to back down and accept a loss of face or to attempt to save face by means of insisting on her prior claim. Freestanding contradictions also present a threat to the hearer's negative face by impeding her freedom of action, since they put some pressure on the recipient to defend her position. Therefore, they provide a conversational resource that disputants have at their disposal to exercise discursive power at the structural level of interaction.

However, although contradictions represent a powerful discursive resource by which disputants can put opponents on the defensive about the validity of their claim and even about their own credibility, this does not mean that recipients are incapable of offering resistance. As we have seen, they may turn the tables by means of a counter-contradiction. In addition, they may simply ignore the opponent's contradiction and carry on with their own line of argument. Alternatively, they may issue a meta-communicative utterance, challenging the appropriateness of the interlocutor's activity.

These findings show that the truth value of conversational contributions plays a crucial part not only in consensus-oriented conversations but also in dispute-sequences of talk, and can thus become the focus of oppositional moves: As noted above, like conversationalists engaged in friendly talk the disputants in my data can be seen to orient to the expectation to act in accordance with Grice's (1975, 1989) *Cooperative Principle* and the *Conversational Maxims* of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner it encompasses. The maxim of Quality requires speakers to try to make their contributions true, refraining from saying anything believed to be false and avoiding statements for which there are inadequate grounds for belief (Grice 1989: 26-27). This maxim thus prohibits utterances which are insincere. As the preceding discussion demonstrates, contributions to disputes must be true; otherwise their validity may be challenged. This finding corresponds to the ideal model of argumentation proposed by van Eemeren et al. (1993: 7-11). They maintain that in "critical discussions" the Gricean maxim of Quality

has to be acted upon, i.e. contributions must be sincere. Likewise, Spranz-Fogasy (2002) lists "integrity" as a prerequisite of appropriate contributions to argumentative discourse, which can be disputed or claimed.

### 7.11 Confrontational corrections

In the preceding section, I looked at contradictions, that is, oppositional moves by which a speaker denies the truth of the opponent's preceding utterance. A related arguing technique that recurs in my data involves challenging a specific element (i.e. a word or phrase) in the prior speaker's talk.<sup>124</sup> I will label this argumentative device 'confrontational correction.'

One of the ways the disputants in my corpus correct an element in the opponent's preceding talk is by employing a technique which Halliday & Hasan (1976: 146) call "substitution," or "the replacement of one item in a sentence with another having a similar structural function." When correction is done by means of substitution, a speaker repeats (some of) the opponent's prior talk while changing the item being challenged, as in the substitution of "tell" for "see" in the paired utterances "There's just not that much to things that I could ever see - That you could ever tell, you mean" in lines 980-981 from *'night Mother*:

**example (1) 'night Mother**

971 MAMA I hate those birds. She says I don't  
972 understand them. What's there to understand  
973 about birds?  
974 JESSIE Why Agnes likes them, for one thing. Why they  
975 stay with her when they could be outside with  
976 the other birds. What their singing means.  
977 How they fly. What they think Agnes is.  
978 MAMA Why do you have to know so much about things,  
979 Jessie? There's just not that much to things  
980 that I could ever see.  
> 981 JESSIE That you could ever tell, you mean. You  
982 didn't have to lie to me about Agnes.  
983 MAMA I didn't lie. You never asked before!

Prior to this sequence, Mama and Jessie have been talking about the fact that Mama's friend Agnes has many birds as pets. At the beginning of the extract, Mama expresses her dislike of the animals ("I hate those birds." line 971), which, according to her friend, is

due to her ignorance of birds. In her turn-final utterance, she issues a request for information, asking her daughter: "What's there to understand about birds?" (lines 972-972). Considering her obvious negative stance towards the animals, Mama's request for information seems to suggest that, in fact, there is nothing to understand about birds, and thus, that she does not really expect an extended answer from Jessie. Thus, her interrogative represents a rhetorical question.<sup>125</sup> When Jessie gives an extensive reply nonetheless, listing a whole range of things that might be worth knowing about birds (lines 974-977), Mama opposes her in the subsequent turn. She begins her turn with an interrogative starting with the question word "Why": "Why do you have to know so much about things, Jessie?" (line 978). As noted earlier, "Why"-questions are frequently used by disputants for the packaging of criticism. In addition, the sequential placement of the interrogative within the context of disagreement contributes to its contextualisation as an expression of disapproval rather than a request for information. Moreover, rather than providing Jessie with an opportunity to answer her question, directly following the interrogative, Mama issues an assertion, accounting for her critical position: "There's just not that much to things that I could ever see." (lines 979-980). In the following turn, Jessie opposes Mama's statement with a contradiction: In line 981, she repeats Mama's prior utterance with an adjusted personal pronoun and substitutes the verb "tell" for "see" in Mama's statement: "That you could ever tell, you mean." Directly following the correction, she issues an assertion, expressing disapproval of something Mama said at an earlier point in their conversation: "You didn't have to lie to me about Agnes." (lines 981-982). By presupposing that Mama lied to her, Jessie's utterance functions as a complaint. In the subsequent turn, instead of providing an account for her assumed failure, Mama rejects her daughter's criticism by means of a denial: she disputes the presupposition expressed in Jessie's utterance ("I didn't lie." line 983) and subsequently proposes an alternative view of the issue in question, claiming that Jessie "never asked before." The increase in volume signals a negative affective reaction, e.g. indignation, at Jessie's imputation and aggravates disagreement.

The argumentative character of Jessie's corrective action in line 981 becomes obvious if we look at the preceding extract against the background of the organisation of corrective sequences in everyday, consensus-oriented conversation. As Schegloff et al. (1977) have argued, in ordinary conversation, there is a preference for self-correction. Conversely, other-correction is a structurally dispreferred activity and is highly constrained in its occurrence. They found that in everyday talk, the party who produces a turn with a trouble source generally corrects it herself. When a participant other than the speaker initiates a repair, such a turn is usually occupied with little else than pointing to the trouble source in the prior speaker's turn; the competence to correct an error is attributed to the first speaker by the second. Even though the second speaker could provide the repair, she allows the prior speaker another opportunity to do the correction herself. Thus, other initiation in second position presupposes full competence of the original speaker and amounts to a request for self-correction. This is illustrated by the following example from Schegloff et al. (1977: 377):

**example (2) GTS1:II:2:54**

Ken: 'E likes that waider over there.  
> Al: Wait-er?  
Ken: Waitress, sorry.  
Al: 'At's bedder,

As this sequence shows, the other-initiated repair format exhibits two characteristic features. Firstly, the discovery of an error is typically modulated through the use of markers of uncertainty. Rising intonation is utilised over the term singled out for revision, as indicated by the question mark following the partial repeat "Wait-er" in Al's first turn. This intonation contour displays uncertainty and requests that the prior speaker assist in clarifying what is formulated as a problem. Secondly, locating the trouble source is frequently the only activity performed in the turn. The activities of locating the trouble and providing a remedy are separated into distinct turns performed by different individuals. Although Al points to something problematic in Ken's talk, Ken is allowed to do the correction himself. By restricting

the activity in his turn to locating the trouble, the second speaker proposes that the party who produced the error has the competence to remedy it, and provides the initial speaker with an opportunity to do so. In fact, following the repair initiation, in turn 3, Ken produces a revised version of the term in his initial utterance ("Waitress"), which is then ratified by Al in the final turn of the sequence ("'At's bedder").

By contrast, correction done through replacement does not provide the party being opposed a place to remedy the trouble source on her own. For instance, if Jessie in example (1) had wanted to do her correction as other-initiated repair rather than as opposition, she could have issued a turn consisting only of "That you could ever see?" produced with tentative rising intonation. Such a turn would have provided Mama an opportunity to attempt a remedy on her own. Instead, by skipping the partial repeat preface and producing a correction immediately following the utterance containing the repairable, Jessie does not leave a specific place for Mama to revise her initial utterance prior to the correction.

Moreover, at the interpersonal level of interaction, rather than proposing the competence of the party whose turn contains the repairable to self-correct, unmodulated corrections like Jessie's portray the prior speaker as lacking the competence to remedy the error on her own. The correction marker "you mean" at the end of Jessie's utterance suggests that she knows better than Mama herself what she (Mama) intended to say in her prior turn.<sup>126</sup> This is quite presumptuous, since, as Norrick (1991) points out, in interaction between speakers with approximately equal speaking ability, status and background knowledge, "the only significant imbalance consist in the current speaker alone knowing what he or she intends to say" (78). Unmitigated corrections thus indicate a perceived asymmetry in ability to accomplish the correction successfully.<sup>127</sup> For this reason, like contradictions, corrections pose a potential threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987), because they convey a judgement by the speaker about a gap in the interlocutor's linguistic competence or world knowledge. As a result, corrections put the recipient in a position either to back down and accept a loss of face, or to attempt to save face by means of insisting on her prior formulation, and thus sustaining

disagreement. In this sense, corrections represent control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts at exercising discursive power, as they constrain the addressee's freedom of action.

Furthermore, the confrontational character of unmitigated corrections may be reinforced by a number of structural and prosodic features. Whenever correction in my corpus is done by means of substitution, the utterance containing the replacement frequently comprises several devices that increase the salience of the term being offered as a correction, and thus aggravate opposition. Firstly, the speaker characteristically repeats a part of the interlocutor's preceding talk while changing the item being challenged. Repetition of the opponent's talk frames the term being replaced and serves to emphasise that what is being produced is a correction of something the other person said. Moreover, the parallel structure of the utterance which contains the correction in combination with the sequential position of the corrective action suggest that the replacement term is spoken with a "contrastive stress" (Ladd 1980: 78), placing special emphasis on the substitute element and thereby intensifying opposition.<sup>128</sup> Thus, in example (1), the verb "tell" in Jessie's utterance "That you could ever tell, you mean." (line 982) is presumably produced with emphatic stress, and is thus marked as an alternative to "see" in Mama's preceding statement.

The following section from *Alto*, also illustrates this phenomenon very nicely:

**example (3): Alto II,3**

97 FLORENE I'm sorry, Wanda. We can't live that way.  
98 WANDA I can. I can live any ole way as long as I  
99 can be with Daddy. It's what we dreamed about,  
100 Mama!  
> 101 FLORENE It's what I dreamed about. Me - not you!  
102 You don't even know yet what you want.  
103 But you deserve a chance to find out.

Prior to this extract, Wanda and her mother have been arguing about whether they should get on the bus to San Antonio to meet Wanda's father there. Following a sequence of aggravated disagreements, in

line 97, Florene tries to make peace. She apologises to her daughter ("I'm sorry, Wanda."), and provides an explanation for her repeated refusal to comply with her request to get on the bus. However, rather than accept her mother's apology and explanation, Wanda opposes her with a contradiction, denying Florene's prior utterance: "I can." (line 98). Subsequently, she restates and elaborates on her initial contradiction, thus reinforcing disagreement. Wanda builds her oppositional move by systematically modifying her mother's prior utterance. The structure of Florene's statement is retained, but the phrase "that way" is changed to "any ole way", the pronoun "We" is change to "I", and the negation is deleted (lines 98-99). In this way, coherence is signalled at the word level, while opposition is emphasised at the content level of interaction, as discussed above. Wanda concludes her turn with a supportive assertion. In a desperate attempt to persuade Florene to get on the bus, she claims that they had been looking forward to living together as a family for a long time ("It's what we dreamed about" line 99). She reinforces her claim by terminating her turn-final utterance with the exclamation "Mama!" (line 100). The volume increase in combination with the kin term signals high emotional involvement and emphasises her request.<sup>129</sup> Yet, Florene does not comply. Instead, she opposes Wanda with a correction. Like Jessie in example (1), she uses the substitution format to package her oppositional move. Her turn initial-utterance is a verbatim repetition of Wanda's prior statement, with the exception of "we" being replaced by "I": "It's what I dreamed about." (line 101). As mentioned above, the identical shape of Florene's utterance serves to underline that what is being offered is a correction of something Wanda said, and thus to emphasise disagreement. In addition the structural as well as the sequential aspects of the corrective action suggest that the replacement term "I" is produced with emphatic stress, and is thereby marked as a substitute of "we" in Wanda's preceding statement. The confrontational character of Florene's correction is further intensified by her subsequent move. Directly following the corrective utterance, she produces an utterance that even more clearly indicates that Wanda is in error: By contrasting the objective first person singular pronoun "Me" with the second person singular pronoun "not you!" (line 101), Florene puts additional

emphasis on the replaced item and in so doing, further stresses disagreement. Moreover, the raised voice signals emotional agitation and exacerbates opposition. Following the two corrective utterances, Florene issues a competence challenge, disputing Wanda's capacity to discuss the issue in question: "You don't even know yet what you want." (line 102). She closes her turn with an assertion, legitimising her resistance against Wanda's appeals by claiming that she wants to provide her with an opportunity to find out what she wants for herself (line 103).

As the preceding examples have shown, when using the substitution format to build an oppositional move, speakers can be seen to employ a number of devices to highlight the substitute element, and thus to increase the salience of their utterance as argumentative action. For instance, they typically repeat a part of the opponent's preceding talk while changing the item being challenged. Furthermore, the replacement term is usually spoken with a contrastive stress, putting special emphasis on the term being offered as a correction, and thereby intensifying opposition.

As mentioned above, in ordinary conversation, there is a preference for self-correction, whereas other-correction is marked as a dispreferred activity and is highly constrained in its occurrence. There are, however, environments in which other-correction does occur. For instance, in the context of the telling of a story in conversation, a participant may use other-correction of the teller as a bid to become a co-teller of the story (cf. Schegloff et al. 1977: 380). Another environment which is conducive to unelicited, unmodulated other-correction is interaction between adults and children, in particular between parents and children. Schegloff et al. (1977) suggest that the status of the child as not-yet-competent may account for the different preference structure of corrective sequences in this environment. In this context, other-correction appears to be "a vehicle for socialization ... a device for dealing with those who are still learning" (381). Likewise, Norrick (1991: 71) argues that parent-child interaction illustrates the structural preference for corrective action by a more competent speaker, in particular for parental correction of children's errors, typically in the immediately following turn, suspending the

preference for self-correction in ordinary conversation discussed above. He gives the following examples:

**example (4): Norrick (1991: 71)**

1 Coco (2,10): Make these flowers here-in.  
> 2 Father: Put 'em in here.  
3 Coco: Yeah.

**example (5): Norrick (1991: 71)**

1 Nick (4,3): Frosch haben die Haken vorne.  
> 2 Mother: Frösche haben die Haken vorne.  
3 Nick: Ja.

In both extracts, the correction of the child's error is produced as a preferred action, i.e. without any markers of mitigation, in second position. Since the child is assumed incapable of self-repair, the parent, following a pedagogical motivation, produces an unmodulated correction immediately following the turn containing the error. As in examples (1) and (3), the corrective move is constructed by repeating a part of the child's prior talk and replacing the item being challenged. In example (4), the father substitutes "put" for "make" and in example (5), the mother substitutes "Frösche" for "Frosch."

According to Norrick (1991), the organisation of corrective sequences like those above is based on such factors as the asymmetry in language ability in favour of adults, as well as their goal of improving their children's language behaviour, and their willingness to let children finish their utterance before they initiate a corrective sequence, thereby changing the focus of the interaction to one of language learning.<sup>130</sup>

As the preceding examples illustrate, an unmitigated correction appears to be less face threatening if the addressee regards it as an act of support (rather than a control manoeuvre) in the ongoing interaction. Thus, in both sequences, the parent's unmodulated correction of the child's language error is accepted and ratified by the recipient in the subsequent turn. In addition, the family setting might be conducive to the use of unmitigated corrections.

Nevertheless, taking corrective action on another's speech might be received as uncalled-for imposition, (rather than accepted as well-meant help), just as any linguistic token can be produced

and received either as an expression of solidarity or an attempt to exert control (cf. Tannen 1986a, 1987, 1993, 2001, 2003). As the following extract from *Tell me* shows, a parent's correction of a child's language error might well be perceived as a control manoeuvre, in particular in the context of disagreement:

**example (6) Tell me**

198 DAUGHTER I don't want the dumb old thing anyway.  
199 MOTHER Well, of course you do. If everyone else  
200 in the class has one, you'll want one, too.  
201 It's only natural.  
202 DAUGHTER No I don't neither.  
> 203 MOTHER Either.  
204 DAUGHTER What?  
205 MOTHER Either. No you don't, either.  
206 DAUGHTER I already said I don't.

In the interaction prior to this sequence, the eight-year-old daughter has told her mother that she hates her teacher. When the mother inquires about the reason for her aversion, the girl tells her that except for her, every child in her class got a reward. In line 198, the daughter takes comfort in telling herself that she does not feel she has missed anything, reinforcing her claim by referring to the item in question with the derogatory phrase "the dumb old thing". In the following turn, the mother opposes her with a contradiction, asserting the affirmative of her daughter's negated assertion: "Well, of course you do." (line 199). The emphatic adverb "of course" reinforces her claim that the opposite of her daughter's prior utterance is true. Subsequently, she issues a number of supportive assertions, corroborating her claim: "If everyone else in the class has one, you'll want one, too. It's only natural." (lines 199-201). However, in line 202, the daughter counter-opposes her with another contradiction, insisting on her prior claim: "No I don't neither." In the following turn, instead of responding to her daughter's insisting, Mother issues a correction. In contrast to the preceding examples, however, she does not use the substitution format described above. Rather than construct the corrective move by repeating a part of her daughter's prior talk and replacing the item

being challenged, she simply produces the corrected version of the error in her daughter's utterance: "Either" (line 203). By introducing a corrective sequence, she shifts the focus of the ongoing interaction to one of language learning. In so doing, she brings about a local asymmetrical relationship and thus a new "footing."<sup>131</sup> As this example shows, linguistic competence provides a resource which disputants can exploit to produce an asymmetric relationship. However, in contrast to the examples cited by Norrick (1991), in which the parent's correction is accepted and ratified by the recipient in the following turn, here, the daughter at first questions and then rejects the mother's correction. Immediately following her mother's corrective action, the daughter initiates a repair sequence herself, by issuing a request for clarification ("What?" line 204), signalling trouble in understanding. This prompts her mother to repeat the replacement term, and subsequently to elaborate on her correction by adding a substitution format: "Either. No you don't, either." (line 205). Yet, following the inserted repair sequence, rather than ratifying her mother's elaborated correction the daughter dismisses it as invalid, claiming: "I already said I don't." (line 206).

To summarise so far, taking unmitigated corrective action on another's speech poses a potential face threat, since it not only suggests that the prior speaker's utterance contains a mistake but also that she lacks the competence to remedy the error on her own. Correspondingly, in ordinary, consensus-oriented conversation, unmitigated other-correction is structurally marked as a dispreferred activity and is highly constrained in its occurrence. The potential face threat of unmodulated corrections might be toned down in interactions which are characterised by a mutually perceived asymmetry in the speakers' respective responsibility for correctness and ability to achieve it (e.g. adult-child interaction, talk between teacher and student, and interaction between native and non-native speakers), which overrides the usual organisation of corrective sequences as described above. In these contexts, the recipient usually appears to view the corrective action as friendly help in the ongoing interaction, rather than as a control move. However, as the preceding example has demonstrated, even in situations in which speakers interact with apparently different

linguistic competence, rather than accept an interlocutor's correction as a well-meant attempt to facilitate further interaction, the recipient may treat it as unnecessary imposition. One environment that seems to be particularly conducive to the perception of another's corrective action as a control manoeuvre is dispute sequences.

In the extract above, in spite of the obvious difference in the participants' linguistic competence, the mother's correction of her little daughter's language error is rejected as an unwanted intrusion. The confrontational nature of unmodulated corrections becomes even more obvious, in conversations between speakers with approximately equal status, linguistic ability and background knowledge. Consider, for instance, the following extract from *Neptide*, in which Joyce's reaction to her daughter's unmitigated correction reveals her assessment of Claire's corrective action as an unnecessary and unwelcome imposition:

**example (7): Neptide I, 2**

79 JOYCE What a life, I ask you. I tell you I need  
80 one of those *Help* programmes all to myself.  
81 I thank God I'm not a Catholic, that's all I  
82 can say, not that he's not the best pope so  
83 far, this one.  
84 VAL (*Flatly.*) Hurray, hurray, it's Mother's Day.  
85 JOYCE What's got into you these days, Val? You  
86 used to be so sensitive.  
87 CLAIRE Mum!  
88 JOYCE (*To CLAIRE.*) Which is more than I can say  
89 for you, I'm afraid, young lady.  
> 90 CLAIRE Woman.  
91 JOYCE Oh Claire, where is all this nitpicking  
92 getting you? (*Firmly.*) I'll tell you one  
93 thing for nothing: when you were born, they  
94 didn't say to me, "Mrs Roberts, you've got  
95 a lovely little baby woman."  
96 CLAIRE I'm sure they didn't say "You've got a  
97 lovely little baby lady" either.

Prior to this extract, Joyce has been complaining to her daughters Claire and Val that her neighbours are making noise at night, disturbing her sleep. The sequence starts with Joyce continuing to lament, moaning over life in general and the catholic church in particular (lines 79-83). When Val issues a sarcastic remark, rather than commiserate with her mother ("Hurray, hurray, it's Mother's Day." line 84), Joyce challenges her in the next turn. She initiates her turn with an interrogative, expressing disapproval of Val's behaviour ("What's got into you these days, Val?" line 85). By designing her utterance in this way, she both presupposes that lately, Val's behaviour has been somehow and obliges her to account for her demeanour. As discussed above, the utterance-final address term signals a certain affective reaction (e.g. disbelief or exasperation) at Val's remark and reinforces her criticism. Directly following the blame-implicative question, she adds an assertion, claiming that Val "used to be so sensitive" (lines 85-86). By using the past tense, Joyce implies that Val is not sensitive any more. Her utterance thus amounts to an expression of disapproval. In reaction to her mother's attack on her sister, Claire simply exclaims: "Mum!" (line 87), presumably in a reproachful tone of voice. As discussed above, the exclamation of the term of address signals a negative affective reaction such as incredulity or shock at what her mother has just said and portrays her behaviour as inappropriate and objectionable. The vocative thus constitutes a blame-implicative address.

However, her reproach is completely ignored by Joyce, who simply goes on with her tirade, now focusing her criticism on Claire. In saying: "Which is more than I can say for you, I'm afraid" (lines 88-89), she suggests that, in contrast to her sister Val, Claire has never been sensitive, and in so doing expresses disapproval. Moreover, the phrase "I'm afraid" signals that she considers Claire's alleged lack of compassion as a character flaw, and thus reinforces her criticism. Finally, Joyce's oppositional stance is further emphasised by the (grammatically optional) term of address "young lady" at the end of her turn.

As noted earlier, Leech (1999) has shown that turn-final vocatives usually combine an addressee-identifying function with a relationship-maintenance function. Similarly, Lerner (2003) has

found that post-positioned address terms are often used to display a particular stance towards the relationship with a recipient. Hence, adding an address form to the end of a turn may serve to underscore a personal concern for a problem. Likewise, Bernardy (1996) and Kramer (1975) maintain that address terms at the close of utterances may serve to emphasise activities and underline the speaker's emotions. Moreover, in addressing her daughter with a social title rather than her first name or a term of endearment, Joyce reduces the degree of intimacy (cf. McConnell-Ginet 1978; Wardaugh 1986; Zwicky 1974), and thus emphasises her critical stance towards Claire. In addition, as noted earlier, while the use of social titles like "my lady" and honorifics like "madam" used to indicate the speaker's intention of being polite, today, such address terms are generally used ironically. In fact, the term of address "young lady" is conventionally employed in the context of reprimanding children. Thus, the mock-polite address term "young lady" at the end of Joyce's turn, indicates a perceived asymmetry in authority with Joyce in superior position. In the subsequent turn, rather than contesting the content of her mother's claim, Claire opts for a meta-linguistic remark, challenging her mother's word choice. At line 90, she produces a correction, issuing the corrected version (i.e. "Woman") of what she considers a trouble in her mother's utterance (i.e. "lady"). Switching from the content to the meta-linguistic level of interaction and introducing a corrective sequence enables her to break the frame Joyce invoked in her prior utterance, and shift the focus of the conversation from her temperament to her mother's speech. However, in the next turn, Joyce dismisses her daughter's correction as "nitpicking" (lines 91-92) prefacing her turn with a change of state token and an address term "Oh Claire," presumably signalling exasperation. Following the meta-communicative remark, she adds a supporting assertion, corroborating her claim by stating that when Claire was born, people did not refer to her as "a lovely little baby woman" (lines 92-95). In so doing, she ridicules Claire's insistence on being referred to as a "woman" rather than a "lady." But Claire does not give in. Although she does not dispute the truth of her mother's claim, she counters by arguing that she was surely not referred to as "a lovely little baby lady" either (lines 96-97). Claire constructs her turn by systematically

transforming her mother's preceding utterance into a counter to that very talk. The skeleton of its structure is retained, but Joyce's "a lovely little baby woman" is changed to "a lovely little baby lady". In an almost literal sense, then, Joyce's own words are used against her. As described above, in this way, a close link is established at the word level, while disagreement is stressed at the content level of interaction.

As we have seen, speakers may correct an element in another's preceding talk either by using the substitution format, i.e. repeating (part of) the prior talk while replacing the item being challenged, as in examples (1), (3), (4) and (5), or by simply issuing the corrected version of the trouble source, as in examples (6) and (7).

When correction is done through substitution, the utterance containing the replacement regularly comprises a number of structural and prosodic devices that increase the salience of the term being offered as a correction, and thus intensify opposition. For instance, the speaker typically repeats a part of the opponent's preceding talk while changing the item being challenged. Other-repetition frames the term being replaced, and serves to emphasise that what is being offered is a correction of an error in the opponent's prior utterance. In addition, the parallel structure of the opposing utterances in tandem with the sequential position of the corrective action suggest that the replacement term is spoken with a contrastive stress, putting special emphasis on the substitute element, and thereby aggravating disagreement.

When, in contrast, the corrective utterance consists only of the corrected version of the supposed error, it may contain a term of address, contributing to the argumentative character of the activity,<sup>132</sup> as illustrated by the following extract from *Perfect days*:

**example (8): Perfect days I, 2**

- 35 SADIE And if you don't want them yourself you can  
36 always take them into the saloon, save you a  
37 few bob's worth of glossies.  
> 38 BARBS Salon, mother, salon.  
39 SADIE I know... (*Gives a withering glance of*

40                    *contempt at her wee joke having been*  
41                    *misunderstood.)*  
42    BARBS        -For Christsake you make me feel like Miss  
43                    Kitty out of Cat Balou. Anyway, c'mon...

Sadie has brought her daughter some magazines. When Barbs does not show any enthusiasm for her small present, Sadie tells her that if she does not want to read them herself, she can take them to her hair salon for her customers to read (lines 35-37). In the following turn, rather than accepting her mother's suggestion, Barbs issues a correction, producing the corrected version of the mistake in her mother's utterance. Subsequently, she immediately adds a term of address and then repeats the correction ("Salon, mother, salon." line 38).

As address terms are optional syntactic elements and generally admit some variation from a particular addresser to a particular addressee, they provide a crucial resource for displaying alignment towards the addressee or something she has said or done. In terms of semantic content, like "Mama" in example (3) and "Mum" in example (7), "mother" is a kin term, indicating a high degree of intimacy between the interlocutors, and as such, at first glance, appears to be functionally equivalent to these terms. However, a closer look at the sequential context in which it is uttered reveals that it conveys a particular alignment.

Dickey (1997: 260) distinguishes between marked and unmarked forms of address for given dyads and suggests that the communicative function of address terms lies in the fact that they are not the normal forms for a given dyad and thus convey a particular emotion. Extending the scope to communities of practice, McConnel-Ginet (2003: 77) maintains that the significance of specific forms of address lies in the history of patterns of usage within and across a particular community of practice and in the connection between addressing and other aspects of social practice that create social relations and mark them with deference and liking or with condescension and aversion.<sup>133</sup>

From this perspective, it is noteworthy that in the interaction preceding the above sequence, Barbs exclusively uses the term "mum" to address Sadie. In line 38, she deviates from this usage pattern

for the first time, addressing her with "mother". So, in this dyad, "mum" appears to be the unmarked term of address. By contrast "mother" is marked and therefore conveys a specific affective reaction at or alignment towards Sadie's prior activity.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, according to Wardaugh (1986: 260), using a nickname or pet name shows greater intimacy than first name. He maintains that our choice of address terms is governed by a variety of social factors such as, for example, the participants' social relationship, the transactional status (i.e. service encounter, doctor-patient, etc.) and the particular occasion. Correspondingly, we might argue that by using "mother" rather than an abbreviation like "mum", Barbs distances herself from Sadie and thus emphasises her oppositional stance. Finally, the repetition of the corrected element at the end of her turn also serves to emphasise disagreement.

In the subsequent turn, Sadie responds to her daughter's correction simply by saying "I know" (line 39). In so doing, she disputes the need for Barbs' corrective action by declaring that the item she is offering as a correction is not newsworthy.<sup>135</sup> By claiming that her daughter has presented something she already knew, Sadie construes Barbs' correction as an uncalled for imposition. By the same token, she rejects the underlying assumption that she lacks the competence to correct the trouble item herself, suggesting that she was making a play on words. By insinuating that Barbs did not recognise the pun, she turns the tables of communicative ability, calling her daughter's humour competence into question.

In response to her mother's rejection of her correction, Barbs issues another challenge. She initiates her turn with an expletive: "-For Christsake" (line 42). By this means, she turns up the emotional heat of the argument and signals right at the beginning of her turn that opposition is going to follow. Moreover, the interruptive placement of her turn aggravates disagreement. Subsequent to the opposition preface, she produces an accusation, complaining that by referring to her hair salon as saloon, Sadie makes her feel "like Miss Kitty out of Cat Balou" (lines 42-43). However, directly following the rebuke, she switches the topic and prompts Sadie to leave with her for dinner: "Anyway, c'mon ..." (lines 44-45). The argument thus ends in a stand-off, with the

participants changing the speech activity and dropping the conflict form.

While in the preceding examples the corrective actions are produced directly following the utterance containing the trouble item, they may also be preceded by other oppositional moves. For instance, in the extract from *'night Mother* below, Jessie's correction at line 1245 is heralded by a contradiction:

**example (9) 'night Mother**

1239 JESSIE (As she starts to clean out the  
1240 refrigerator.) Now, you know the milkman  
1241 comes on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and he  
1242 leaves the order blank in an egg box, and  
1243 you give the bills to Dawson once a month.  
1244 MAMA Do they still make that orangeade?  
> 1245 JESSIE It's not orangeade, it's just orange.  
1246 MAMA I'm going to get some.

At the beginning of this exchange, Jessie explains the delivery terms and payments arrangement she has made with the milkman to Mama (lines 1239-1243). When Mama asks her whether the milkman still produces orangeade (line 1244), instead of answering her question, Jessie issues a correction, challenging an item in Mama's utterance. She begins her turn with a negative statement ("It's not orangeade"), disputing Mama's assumption that the product in question is called orangeade, and immediately adds an assertion, providing the corrected version the trouble item: "it's just orange" (line 1245). However, Mama passes over her daughter's correction, and announces that she intends to order a quantity of the beverage under discussion (line 1246). Her reaction reveals that she takes Jessie's response as a 'Yes.'

As the following extract from *Perfect days* shows, the "it's not x, it's y" construction is one routine way of packaging contradiction-cum-corrections:

**example (10): Perfect days I, 2**

120 SADIE I was a widow before I was thirty.  
121 BARBS Christ, mother I wish you wouldn't always say

122                   that: "I was a widow before I was thirty."  
 123   SADIE    I was. I was a widow before my thirtieth  
 124                   birthday.  
 125   BARBS    OK. But... Bloody saying it like that. "My  
 126                   Life Story"...

> 127   SADIE    It's not a story, it's a fact. You and Billy  
 128                   were my whole life.  
 129   BARBS    I know. I know...

Prior to this exchange, Barbs and her mother have had a difference of opinion about whether, at the age of sixty-one, Sadie is old. While Barbs has claimed that she is not, Sadie has countered that she did not have a chance to do something with her life. In line 120, she supports her position by asserting: "I was a widow before I was thirty." Her utterance is challenged by Barbs in the following turn. She initiates her oppositional turn with an expletive followed by an address term: "Christ, mother" (line 121). As discussed above, by this means, she displays a negative affective reaction at what Sadie has just said, and signals right at the beginning of her turn that disagreement is going to follow. Subsequently, Barbs issues a meta-communicative statement, expressing disapproval of Sadie's preceding remark: "I wish you wouldn't always say that" (lines 121-122). The ECF with "always" construes Sadie's activity as a recurring (rather than a random) occurrence, and thus serves to both legitimise and reinforce Barbs' criticism. Moreover, by subsequently repeating her mother's prior utterance verbatim - presumably in a mocking tone of voice - (line 122), Barbs is able to caricature Sadie by portraying her action as inappropriate or disproportionate.<sup>136</sup> But Sadie insists on her position, and issues a slightly altered version of her initial claim: "I was. I was a widow before my thirtieth birthday." (lines 123-124). In the following turn, Barbs seems to back down at first. She prefaces her turn with the agreement token "OK." (line 125). However, immediately following the partial agreement, she issues a disagreement marker ("But" line 125), signalling that opposition is about to follow. In fact, after a short pause, she produces a move which clearly signals that she insists on her preceding criticism. She initiates her utterance with an expletive ("Bloody"), thus reinforcing the argumentative character of her utterance. Subsequently, she produces a meta-

communicative utterance ("saying it like that. 'My Life Story' ..." lines 125-126), remarking on what Sadie has just said or, to be more precise, how she has said it. As in her own preceding turn, by imitating her mother's utterance, she ridicules Sadie, portraying her action as inappropriate. In the following turn, Sadie issues another counter-opposition. She initiates her turn with a contradiction, challenging the adequacy of Barbs' prior utterance, and immediately adds a correction, substituting the term "fact" for "story": "It's not a story, it's a fact." (lines 127). She closes her turn with a supportive assertion, legitimising her position by claiming: "You and Billy were my whole life." (lines 127-128). In line 129, Barbs concedes and ratifies her mother's prior assertion - though probably in a tone of voice signalling exasperation - ("I know. I know ..."), and thereby terminates the disagreement sequence.

In the following extract from *Raisin*, Beneatha also prefaces her correction with a contradiction. But due to the structure of the utterance containing the trouble source ("why you has to flit" line 57), her turn displays a different structure than the two preceding instances; rather than an "It's not x, it's y" construction, Beneatha's turn exhibits an "I don't x, I y" structure:

**example (11): Raisin I, 1**

51 MAMA           Why you got to flit so from one thing to  
52                   another, baby?  
53 BENEATHA       (Sharply.) I just want to learn to play the  
54                   guitar. Is there anything wrong with that?  
55 MAMA           Ain't nobody trying to stop you. I just  
56                   wonders sometimes why you has to flit so  
57                   from one thing to another all the time. You  
58                   ain't never done nothing with all that  
59                   camera equipment you brought home-  
> 60 BENEATHA     I don't flit! I- I experiment with different  
61                   forms of expression-

Prior to this sequence, Beneatha has informed Mama that she is planning on taking guitar lessons. Instead of encouraging her, Mama's reaction to Beneatha's announcement reveals that she has

reservations about her daughter's endurance. She calls Beneatha's stamina into question, citing her short-lived memberships in a play-acting group and a horseback-riding club as examples of her flightiness. The extract begins with Mama asking her: "Why you got to flit so from one thing to another, baby?" (lines 51-52). As discussed above, "Why"-questions are frequently used by disputants to package criticism. By designing her utterance in this way, Mama presupposes that Beneatha is in the habit of flitting from one thing to another and obliges her to account for her demeanour in the following turn. In addition, the sequential placement of the "Why"-question within the context of disagreement contributes to its contextualisation as an expression of disapproval rather than a simple request for information. In fact, Mama makes allowance for the accusatory character of her by adding a term of endearment ("baby") at the end of her turn, which serves to soften or redress the face threat of her utterance (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987: 108). In the following turn, rather than explicitly attending to her mother's assumption of inconsistency, Beneatha accounts for her sudden decision to start taking guitar lessons simply by saying: "I just want to learn to play the guitar" (lines 53-54). The "sharp" tone of voice indicates a negative affective reaction (e.g. anger or defiance) at Mama's criticism. In addition, she closes her turn with a challenge in the form of an interrogative, daring Mama to criticise her again: "Is there anything wrong with that?" (line 54). In reaction to Beneatha's challenge, at first, Mama seems to back down, ensuring her that no one intends to keep her from learning to play the guitar: "Ain't nobody trying to stop you." (line 55). However, following the partial concession, she restates her initial claim that Beneatha keeps taking up new hobbies but does not stick to them: "I just wonders sometimes why you has to flit so from one thing to another all the time." (lines 55-58). Self-repetition reinforces her claim, and the extreme-case formulation with "all the time" portrays Beneatha's change of hobbies as a frequent activity rather than a random occurrence and thus serves to legitimise her complaint. Subsequently, Mama issues a supportive assertion, substantiating her claim about Beneatha's fickleness by citing the fact that she bought photo equipment but did not use it: "You ain't never done nothing with all that camera equipment you brought home—"

(lines 57-59). The extreme formulations "never", "nothing" and "all" serve to reinforce her claim and thus aggravate opposition. In the following turn, instead of addressing the content of Mama's utterance, Beneatha issues a correction, challenging her mother's choice of words. By way of switching from the content to the meta-linguistic level of interaction, she is able to shift the focus of the conversation from her alleged unsteadiness to her mother's speech. She initiates her turn with a contradiction ("I don't flit!" line 60), disputing the presupposition built in Mama's utterances that she keeps flitting "from one thing to another." Subsequently, she offers an alternative formulation ("I - I experiment with different forms of expression-" lines 60-61) as a correction of the repairable in her mother's statement. The interruptive placement of her counter and the volume increase signal high emotional involvement and intensify disagreement.

In the following extract from *Alto*, we find still another contradiction-cum-correction format, notably "I'm not mad at x, I'm mad at y." The different constructions that are used in my data originate from the dissimilar trouble sources prompting the corrections: In extracts (9) and (10), both Jessie and Sadie replace a noun ("It's not orangeade, it's just orange; "It's not a story, it's a fact."), thus producing an "It's not x, it's y" construction. By contrast, in extract (11), Beneatha substitutes a verb: "I don't flit! I - I experiment." Hence, her utterance exhibits an "I don't x, I y" structure. In the example below, Florene replaces a prepositional phrase ("I'm not mad at her! I'm mad at you!"). Consequently, her counter takes the form "I'm not mad at x, I'm mad at y":

**example (12): Alto I, 3**

72 WANDA I don't see why you're mad at her.  
 > 73 FLORENE I'm not mad at her! I'm mad at you! You deceived  
 74 me, Wanda. Talked me into spending my hard  
 75 earned ironing money to take you to the picture  
 76 show. And let me think you wanted us to see it  
 77 together so we could have it to remember for a  
 78 long time to come, like we always have when we  
 79 saw picture shows.

80 WANDA I wanted us to see it.  
81 FLORENE Hah! I might as well have stayed at home. Once  
82 we got there all you did was talk about Althea  
83 Lockwood and her interpretation of it. You  
84 never once asked me my opinion.

Prior to this extract, Florene and her daughter have been talking about Wanda's music teacher. In the course of their conversation, Florene has passed a number of sarcastic remarks about Miz Lockwood. This prompts Wanda to say, "I don't see why you're mad at her" (line 72). With this utterance, she accomplishes several things. Firstly, by presupposing that Florene is "mad" at her music teacher, she attributes a specific emotion to her mother. Moreover, by introducing her turn with the phrase "I don't see why," she signals lack of understanding for her mother's attitude, and implicitly demands that Florene provide an explanation for her alleged anger. However, in the following turn, rather than providing the requested account, Florene opposes her. Florene's turn contains multiple elements: Firstly, she issues a contradiction, which negates the presupposition built in Wanda's utterance, and thus openly states that she is in error: "I'm not mad at her! (line 73). This is followed by a correction, in which the personal pronoun "her" is replaced with "you": "I'm mad at you!" Florene's raised voice reinforces the confrontational character of her utterance. Subsequently, she produces an accusation, claiming that Wanda "deceived" her pretending that she wanted to go to the movies with her (lines 73-79). In the following turn, Wanda rejects her mother's accusation, claiming that she wanted to see the movie with her (line 80). However, Florene insists on her standpoint. She supports her position by claiming that during the film, Wanda only talked about her music teacher's view of it and did not show any interest in her mother's opinion (lines 81-84).

Contrary to the preceding examples, in the following extract from *Perfect days*, Barbs' correction of her mother's prior talk is preceded by two alternative argumentative techniques, namely a contradiction and a competence challenge:

**example (13): Perfect days I, 2**

135 BARBS I don't see how I can possibly be pushing  
136 forty when I still don't even know what I  
137 want to be when I grow up.  
138 SADIE Peak of your profession! Fabulous salary!  
> 139 BARBS I don't have a salary. You don't even know  
140 what a salary is do you? I have a business.  
(...)

At the beginning of this sequence, Barbs expresses her unease at the fact that she is almost forty and is still not sure what she wants in life (lines 135-137). Her mother opposes her in the following turn with a counter-assertion (cf. below). In claiming that Barbs is at the "peak of her profession" and has a sizable income (line 138), Sadie challenges the presupposition in her daughter's prior utterance that she still does not know what she wants in life. The volume increase signals an affective reaction (e.g. disbelieve) at what Barbs has just said and aggravates disagreement. In the subsequent turn, Barbs counter-opposes her mother with a series of argumentative moves. She initiates her turn with a contradiction in the form of negation, disputing the presupposition in her mother's prior utterance that she has a salary: "I don't have a salary." (line 139). Subsequently, she adds a competence challenge (cf. above), calling into question Sadie's capacity to talk about the subject of income: "You don't even know what a salary is do you?" (lines 139-140). Barbs' competence challenge is designed in a way that prefers a 'no' answer: By formulating her utterance as a negative assertion followed by a tag question, Barbs projects a negative response from her mother (cf. Sacks 1992, vol 2: 414). This "questioner-preferred answer" (ibid), however, would confirm Barbs' negative evaluation of Sadie's competence. The combination of asserting a critical position and following it with a tag question inviting a "no" contributes to the argumentative character of Barbs' utterance. Since Barbs' utterance is built to favour a response from Sadie which is in agreement with her daughter's competence challenge, it ultimately invites disagreement. However, Barbs does not provide Sadie with an opportunity to come in with a response. Immediately following the competence challenge, she adds a

correction, replacing the term "salary" in her mother's utterance with "business" (line 140).

The following extract from *'night Mother*, illustrates yet another correction format. Jessie packages her correction of Mama's prior utterance as an imperative:

**example (14): 'night Mother**

1312 JESSIE Cecil left me because he made me choose between  
1313 him and smoking.  
1314 MAMA Jessie, I know he wasn't that dumb.  
1315 JESSIE I never understood why he hated it so much when  
1316 it's so good. Smoking is the only thing I know  
1317 that's always just what you think it's going to  
1318 be. Just like it was the last time, right there  
1319 when you want it and real quiet.  
1320 MAMA Your fits made him sick and you know it.  
> 1321 JESSIE Say seizures, not fits. Seizures.  
1322 MAMA It's the same thing. A seizure in the hospital  
1323 is a fit at home.  
1324 JESSIE They didn't bother him at all. ((...))

Jessie and Mama are talking about the reasons for the failure of Jessie's marriage. When Jessie claims that her husband Cecil left her because she did not give up smoking (lines 1312-1313), Mama opposes her with a counter-assertion (cf. below), stating that she knows Cecil better than to accept her explanation as true: "Jessie, I know he wasn't that dumb." (line 1314). In the following turn, instead of addressing her mother's counter, Jessie continues contemplating the merits of smoking (lines 1315-1319). But Mama will not drop the issue. In line 1320, she produces another counter to Jessie's initial claim. She argues that Cecil was revolted by her epileptic seizures, suggesting that they are the reason he left: "Your fits made him sick and you know it." Moreover, in claiming that her daughter is well aware of Cecil's real motive for leaving her, she implies that Jessie was lying before, thus aggravating opposition. In the subsequent turn, rather than contesting the truth of her mother's claim, Jessie opts for a meta-communicative remark, challenging her mother's word choice. In line 1321, she issues a

correction in the form of an imperative, demanding that Mama substitute the term fit for seizures when referring to her epilepsy: "Say seizures, not fits. Seizures." By introducing a corrective sequence, Jessie brings about a switch from the content to the meta-communicative level of interaction, thus shifting away the focus of the conversation from her relationship problems to her mother's diction. Self-repetition signals high emotional involvement and aggravates opposition. However, in the next turn, Mama dismisses her daughter's correction as invalid, claiming that the terms in question are synonyms, whose use solely depends on the context: "It's the same thing. A seizure in the hospital is a fit at home." (lines 1322-1323). After her correction has been invalidated, Jessie switches back to the content level of interaction and issues a contradiction, disputing the truth of Mama's penultimate claim: "They didn't bother him at all." (line 1324). The emphatic adverb "at all" serves to reinforce disagreement.

To conclude, as the preceding discussion has shown, besides taking up an oppositional stance towards the truth of the prior speaker's utterance (in issuing a contradiction), a speaker may take up an oppositional stance towards a single element in the prior speaker's utterance, challenging a word or phrase in the opponent's talk. I have labelled this type of argumentative move confrontational correction. Corrections can be produced directly following the utterance containing the trouble item or they can be preceded by other oppositional moves such as contradictions or competence challenges.

One of the ways a speaker may correct an element in the opponent's preceding talk is by means of substitution. In contrast to repair operations in consensus-oriented conversation, which are generally done in a mitigated way, corrective actions done through substitution are not modulated or delayed in any way. Other-initiated repair by means of a partial repeat produced with tentative rising intonation, provides an opportunity for the prior speaker to correct the trouble item herself. By contrast, correction done through replacement does not afford the party being opposed a place to remedy the error on her own: By skipping the partial repeat preface and producing a correction immediately following the utterance containing the repairable, the speaker does not leave a

specific place for the interlocutor to revise her initial utterance prior to the correction.

Forms of confrontational correction occur repetitively throughout my data, and indeed, the participants can be seen to shape their turns so as to emphasise their confrontational character.<sup>137</sup> As described above, when correction in my corpus is done by means of substitution, the utterance containing the replacement frequently contains a number of features that increase the salience of the term being offered as a correction, and thereby aggravate opposition. The utterance correcting a prior one frequently maintains the structure of the prior utterance with the exception of the element being replaced. Other-repetition serves to frame the substitute term and to emphasise that what is being produced is a correction of something the opponent said. Moreover, the structural and sequential aspects of the corrective action suggest that the replacement term is spoken with a contrastive stress, putting special emphasis on the substitute element and thereby intensifying opposition. When, in contrast, the corrective utterance only consists of the corrected version of the supposed error, it may contain a term of address, contributing to the argumentative character of the activity.<sup>138</sup>

At the interpersonal level of interaction, rather than proposing the competence of the party whose turn contains the repairable to self-correct, unmodulated corrections portray the prior speaker as lacking the competence to remedy the error on her own. In other words, unmitigated corrections indicate a perceived asymmetry in ability to accomplish the correction successfully. For this reason, like contradictions, corrections pose a potential threat to the addressee's positive face in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987), because they convey a judgement by the speaker about a gap in the interlocutor's linguistic competence or world knowledge. As a result, corrections put the recipient in a position either to back down and accept a loss of face, or to attempt to save face by means of insisting on her prior formulation, and thus sustaining disagreement. In this sense, corrections can be considered control manoeuvres, as they constrain the addressee's freedom of action.

Moreover, as we have seen, corrections can be employed as a means of diversion. They provide an argumentative resource that disputants can use to oppose the prior speaker's talk when the content of her utterance cannot be disputed. For instance, following requests for information they may be used to avoid providing the conditionally relevant response, as in example (9). In addition, subsequent to accusations, by introducing a corrective sequence and switching from the content to the meta-linguistic level of interaction, the speaker is able to shift the focus of the conversation from her alleged failure to the inaccuracy of the prior speaker's speech, as in examples (7) and (11). In this sense, corrections may act as attempts to control the content level of interaction.

However, recipients have several techniques at their disposal that they can employ to counter-oppose an opponent's correction. As we have seen, disputants may dismiss another's correction as invalid, for instance, by claiming they did not produce an error, as in example (6), or that the trouble item and the replacement term are synonyms, as in example (14). Moreover, corrections may be challenged by means of meta-communicative remarks, portraying them as inappropriate, as in example (7). In addition, as illustrated in example (8), an addressee may retaliate by challenging the relevance of the corrective action, claiming that she already knew the item the speaker has presented and produced the repairable on purpose. Finally, corrections may simply be ignored, as in example (9).

## 7.12 Counter-claims

Another way in which the disputants in my data recurrently oppose one another's prior activity is by way of an oppositional move that does not directly contradict or challenge the other's claim but achieves opposition indirectly by means of presupposition or implication. I will refer to this type of argumentative speech act(ion) as 'counter-claim' or 'counter-assertion' respectively.

Counter-claims do not use overt, direct negative linguistic constructions to express opposition but rather rely on indirect devices such as presupposition and implication to achieve pragmatic negation (Goffman 1983; Grice 1975; Labov 1972; Labov & Fanshel 1977; Searle 1979; Tsui 1994). In this type of oppositional move, information about the basis of opposition is not overtly specified but may be inferred.

Similar oppositional moves have been described in prior studies of conflict interaction. For instance, in a study of role-played children's disputes, Brenneis & Lein (1977), describe "negating or contradictory assertions," i.e. statements that are in direct contradiction to a preceding assertion, without being simple statements of a negative. Corresponding arguing techniques have also been observed in arguments between adults, both in casual settings, where they have been labelled "indirect negations" (Vuchinich 1984), "counter-assertions" (Coulter 1990), or "counterclaims" (Muntigl & Turnbull 1998), and in institutional contexts, where they have been referred to as "Alternativbehauptungen" (Spranz-Fogasy 1986) or "pragmatic disagreements" (Gruber 1996a, 1998).

Counter-claims commonly have the syntactic form of a declarative sentence. In my data, they tend to be produced immediately following or in overlap with the opponent's prior turn. They can stand on their own in a turn or occur in combination with other argumentative devices, indicating their argumentative character, and thus contextualising them as oppositional moves.

Counter-claims can be used to oppose a variety of actions on the part of the opponent. For instance, they can be employed to challenge a prior directive. In the fragment below, the mother first puts off her daughter's request with a counter-claim and then openly rejects it.

**example (1): Tell me**

104 DAUGHTER Tell me a story.  
> 105 MOTHER Your Daddy told you a story.  
106 DAUGHTER Tell me another story.  
107 MOTHER No more stories tonight.

In line 104, the daughter issues a directive, asking her mother to read her a story.<sup>139</sup> In the following turn, instead of complying with the girl's request, the mother responds with a counter-claim: "Your Daddy told you a story." (line 105). While she does not openly refuse to comply with her daughter's request, she challenges one of the preconditions for valid requests for action mentioned above, namely that there is a need to perform the requested action (cf. Labov & Fanshel 1977: 78; Tsui 1994: 173). By claiming that the action requested by her daughter has already been performed (albeit by someone else), Mother contests this precondition thereby putting off the request. In reaction to the temporisation, the daughter renews her request, drawing on another mechanism of discourse: If a request has been put off by giving an accounting, it is possible to renew the request if the conditions governing the accounting can be shown to have changed (cf. Labov & Fanshel 1977: 88). By asking her mother to tell her "another story" (line 106), the daughter changes the conditions mentioned in the mother's temporisation, which allows her to reinstate her initial request. This time, Mother responds with an outright, unaccounted refusal, declining to perform the requested action and also closing the topic of bedtime stories: "No more stories tonight." (line 107).<sup>140</sup>

In the following fragment, Mama opposes her daughter's demand to "get the manicure tray and sit down" (line 1728) with a counter-claim challenging the underlying assumption that she (still) wants a manicure.

**example (2): 'night Mother**

1724 JESSIE If I'd known I was an epileptic, Mama, I  
1725 wouldn't have ridden any horses.  
1726 MAMA Make you feel like a freak, is that what I  
1727 should have done?  
1728 JESSIE Just get the manicure tray and sit down!

> 1729 MAMA (Throwing it to the floor.) I don't want  
1730 a manicure!  
1731 JESSIE Doesn't look like you do, no.

Prior to this fragment, Mama has revealed to Jessie that her epilepsy is not really the result of a riding accident but that in fact she already had epileptic seizures as a child. In reaction to this revelation, Jessie complains that she would not have done something as dangerous as horse riding if Mama had told her about her illness (lines 1724-1725). In the following turn, Mama counters her daughter's complaint with a challenging question. By asking Jessie whether she should have made her "feel like a freak" (line 1726), Mama implies that she only wanted to protect her and thus had no alternative but to keep quiet about her epilepsy. In so doing, she rejects Jessie's criticism as unjustified. In the following turn, rather than answer her mother's question, Jessie initiates a topic change by issuing an imperative, telling Mama to "get the manicure tray and sit down" (line 1728). The aggravated format in tandem with the increase in volume signal emotional agitation and reinforce her demand. But although during the interaction preceding this extract, Mama has repeatedly reminded Jessie that it is time for her weekly manicure, instead of complying, she produces a counter-claim that challenges the grounds for Jessie's directive: by issuing a negative assertion, claiming that she does not want a manicure (line 1729), Mama disputes the assumption underlying Jessie's imperative that there is a need for the requested action, and thereby rejects her daughter's directive.<sup>141</sup> Her raised voice and her non-verbal reaction accompanying the counter (she throws the manicure tray to the floor) indicate emotional agitation and aggravate opposition.

In my data, counter-claims are also used to oppose a preceding assertion. In the following three extracts, one of the disputants puts forward a competing claim about the issue referred to by the opponent's prior utterance, presenting an interpretation of reality that is incompatible with (and considered superior to) that of the opponent.

**example (3): Avenue**

638 OLGA       (*Looking at her hand.*) I have a wart on my  
639               hand.  
640 MOTHER     (*Goes to sit beside her again, examines it,*  
641               *touches her hand gently; soothingly.*)  
642               Warts are from playing with frogs.  
> 643 OLGA       (*Pulling her hand away.*) It's from the cold.  
644               I know it is.  
645 MOTHER     (*Becoming angry.*) Why you complaining now,  
646               after all these years!

At the beginning of this fragment, Olga remarks that she has a wart on her hand (lines 638-639). In response, Mother sits beside her and strokes her hand, in an attempt to soothe her (lines 640-641). When she states that "Warts are from playing with frogs" (line 642), however, Olga challenges her with a counter-claim. By maintaining that "It's from the cold" (line 643), she implicitly disputes her mother's prior assertion. Her subsequent assertion: "I know it is." (line 644) serves to support her counter-claim and emphasises opposition. Moreover, the fact that she pulls her hand away signals irritation or frustration and further intensifies disagreement. Mother's response displays that she interprets her daughter's utterance as a challenge. She explicitly formulates Olga's activity as complaining: "Why you complaining now, after all these years!" (lines 645-446), with her raised voice signalling indignation and reinforcing opposition.

**example (4): My mother said I, 4**

35 MARGARET    It's a serious step you've taken, you've no  
36               idea—  
> 37 JACKIE     It was no big deal. It was a relief to get  
38               it over with. I cried afterwards. Then I  
39               laughed. I expect it's better with someone  
40               you're in love with.

Previous to this segment, Jackie has told her mother that she has had sex for the first time. Margaret reacts with disapproval to her daughter's revelation, calling it a "serious step" (line 35) and claiming that Jackie has "no idea" about the potential consequences

of her actions. But Jackie interrupts her in mid-utterance to produce a counter-claim. In asserting that "It was no big deal" and "a relief to get it over with" (lines 37-38), she implicitly disputes her mother's prior claims. While her turn implies opposition rather than openly express it, the interruptive placement emphasises dissent and thus acts as a negative counterbalance.

In the fragment from *'night Mother* below, Jessie challenges her mother's prior announcement using a counter-claim, which is in turn challenged by Mama with another counter-claim:

**example (5): 'night Mother**

262 MAMA Well, I'm calling Dawson right now. We'll see  
263 what he has to say about this little stunt.  
> 264 JESSIE Dawson doesn't have any more to do with this.  
> 265 MAMA He's your brother.  
266 JESSIE And that's all.

As noted earlier, prior to this extract, Jessie has revealed to Mama that she intends to kill herself. After various unsuccessful attempts at dissuading her daughter from her plan to commit suicide, Mama takes a new approach and decides to call on her son, Dawson, to help her bring Jessie to terms. In lines 262-263, Mama announces that she is going to call Jessie's brother to inform him about his sister's suicidal intentions. In the following turn, Jessie issues a counter-claim. By arguing that her brother has nothing to do with her decision (line 264), she implicitly opposes her mother's plan to involve him. In line 265, Mama counter-opposes her with another counter-claim, arguing that Dawson is her brother. By referring to their blood relationship, Mama implies that Jessie's intention to commit suicide obviously also concerns her brother, and thereby counters her daughter's prior objection. However, Jessie dismisses her argument simply by saying: "And that's all" (line 266). While she does not deny her mother's claim that Dawson is her brother, she disputes the assumption expressed in Mama's utterance that their relationship necessarily implies that her decision to kill herself concerns him.

In the extracts above, counter-claims are employed to oppose a preceding request or assertion. By contrast, in each of the

following two examples, the daughter uses this argumentative device to reject her mother's prior offer of compromise.

**example (6): Alto I,2**

26 FLORENE I can't help it. Your daddy's trying to get  
27 established in his career. Once he gets where  
28 he needs to be, then everything will be  
29 different.  
> 30 WANDA It might be too late then. He'll find a way  
31 if I ask him.  
32 FLORENE No, he won't!

As described above, prior to this fragment, Florene and Wanda have been arguing about whether Wanda might take singing lessons. When Florene tries to put her off until her father has "established his career" (lines 26-29), Wanda rejects her compromise offer with a counter-claim, arguing that by then, "it might be too late" (line 30). Subsequently, she adds a supportive assertion, claiming that her father will "find a way" to fulfil her wish if she asks him. In line 32, Florene challenges her with a contradiction, negating the content of her turn-final utterance: "No, he won't!" Her raised voice signals high emotional involvement and adds force to her counter.

**example (7): My mother I,6**

25 MARGARET When she's grown up, you can tell her; when  
26 she's sixteen.  
> 27 JACKIE It'll be too late!  
28 (Silence.)  
29 Give me back the bags.

In the interaction preceding this extract, Jackie has agreed to entrust her baby to her parents' care. When they actually come to pick up the baby, she has misgivings about her parents raising her daughter as if she was their child. When she claims that she wants the girl to know that she is her real mother, Margaret objects that it will be better for all if the girl does not know. But Jackie insists on their claim and an argument ensues. At the beginning of this fragment, Margaret concedes that she can tell her "when she's

sixteen" (lines 25-26). Like Wanda in the preceding extract, Jackie rejects her mother's suggestion with a counter-claim; and like Wanda, she claims that by the time her daughter is grown up, "It'll be too late" to tell her the truth (line 27). The volume increase signals emotional agitation and reinforces her counter. Moreover, following a short silence, she demands that her mother give her back the bags (line 29), thereby expressing her refusal to give the baby away.

In the following extract from *'night Mother*, Jessie employs counter-claims to reject her mother's suggestions, thereby foiling Mama's efforts to cheer her up and dissuade her from committing suicide.

**example (8): 'night Mother**

718 MAMA I'll teach you to crochet.  
> 719 JESSIE I can't do any of that nice work, Mama.  
720 MAMA Good time don't come looking for you, Jessie.  
721 You could work some puzzles or put in a garden  
722 or go to the store. Let's call a taxi and go to  
723 the A&P!  
> 724 JESSIE I shopped you up for about two weeks already.  
725 You're not going to need toilet paper till  
726 Thanksgiving.  
727 MAMA (*Interrupting.*) You're acting like some little  
728 brat, Jessie. ((...))

As discussed above, prior to this sequence, Jessie has tried to explain to her mother why she is unhappy with her life and wants to end it. When Mama tries to cheer her up by offering to teach her to crochet (line 718), Jessie rejects her offer with a counter-assertion. By claiming that she "can't do any of that nice work" (line 719), she not only declines Mama's offer but also frustrates her attempt to perk her up. Similarly, when Mama suggests several things she could do to occupy herself (lines 721-722), and proposes that they go shopping (lines 722-723), Jessie opposes her with a counter-claim: She tells Mama that she has already done the shopping and has even built up an ample supply of toilet paper (lines 724-726). In so doing, she rejects Mama's suggestion and thwarts her

desperate attempts at distracting her from her plan to put an end to her life. Mama responds by claiming that Jessie is "acting like some little brat" (lines 727-728). Her reaction reveals that she is frustrated and angry that Jessie rejects her offers of help and refuses to talk about her decision with her. The interruptive placement of the counter signals her indignation and further aggravates opposition.

As the following extract from *Avenue* illustrates, counter-claims can also be employed to challenge a prior personal attack:

**example (9): Avenue**

179 OLGA      What if- it's some sort of plot between him  
180              and father.  
181 MOTHER    Your father's dead, Olga, the no-good  
182              sonavabitch is dead and buried.  
183 OLGA      *(Olga gives her a defiant look.)*  
184 MOTHER    Whatsa matter with you? You know it's true.  
185              We got proof of it. Sometimes you're stupid  
186              about things. *(Stands, goes U. C.)*  
> 187 OLGA      I can think better than anyone.  
188 MOTHER    Thinking ain't enough. Do something if you're  
189              so smart. *((...))*

As described earlier, prior to this segment, Mother has told Olga that she expects her boyfriend to propose to her that night. However, Olga has reacted with scepticism. At the beginning of this fragment, she claims that her mother's boyfriend might be conspiring with her father (lines 179-180). In the following turn, Mother discards her objection with a counter-claim, arguing that Olga's father is dead (lines 181-182), thus implying that he cannot possibly be plotting against her. When Olga displays her disapproval of Mother calling her father a "no-good sonavabitch" by giving her "a *defiant look*" (line 183), Mother challenges her again in the next turn. The turn-initial rhetorical question: "Whatsa matter with you?" (line 184) implies that there must be something wrong with Olga and construes her reaction as inappropriate. The following supportive assertion states that Olga knows that the death of Olga's father is an established fact (lines 184-185). Mother concludes her

turn with a personal attack, characterising Olga as stupid on the grounds of her prior reaction: "Sometimes you're stupid about things." (lines 185-186). In the following turn, Olga answers back with a counter-claim: By asserting that she "can think better than anyone" (line 187), she disputes the truth of Mother's preceding attribution. The ECF serves to emphasise her claim and aggravates disagreement. However, Mother does not give in. In the next turn, she refutes Olga's counter by asserting: "Thinking ain't enough." (line 188) and dares her to prove her cleverness, while implying that she cannot do so: "Do something if you're so smart." (lines 188-189).

To sum up so far, counter-claims are oppositional moves in the form of declarative statements, which express disagreement not by means of direct negative linguistic constructions but via indirect devices such as presupposition and implication. They can be used to oppose a range of actions on the part of the opponent, such as directives, assertions, offers, suggestions and personal attacks.

As counter-claims do not contain an overt negation of the opposed utterance, there is often no explicit reference, and thus no or only a weak cohesive link to the prior utterance. However, counter-claims may be preceded by other argumentative devices, which indicate the adversative character of the utterance and establish coherence. In fact, the counter-claims in my data are frequently prefaced by some linguistic token that announces right at the beginning of the turn that opposition is being done. These disagreement prefaces are meta-pragmatic markers that signal that the following utterance is an expression of discord with the previous one. That is, they function as contextualisation cues (Gumperz 1982), framing the ensuing talk as disagreement.<sup>142</sup> For example, as discussed above, dissent may be signalled through an expression of negative polarity at the beginning of a turn containing the counter-claim. By initiating their utterances in this way, speakers signal that they are starting a turn that somehow opposes the interlocutor, or something she has said or done. Consider, for instance, the following two fragments:

**example (10): Alto II, 3**

60 WANDA We'll sing so good we'll bring that time back,

61                   Mama.  
 > 62 FLORENE No. I think it's over. Over for good, Wanda.  
 > 63 WANDA No. I won't let it be. I'll bring it back.  
 64                   I know all about it.

**example (11): 'night Mother**

2201 MAMA I'm ready for my manicure, I guess. Want me  
 2202                   to wash my hands again?  
 2203 JESSIE (*Standing up.*) It's time for me to go, Mama.  
 > 2204 MAMA (*Starting for her*) No, Jessie, you've got all  
 2205                   night!  
 2206 JESSIE (*As Mama grabs her.*) No, Mama.

In each of these extracts, the disagreement token “no” is placed in front of a counter-claim, indicating right at the beginning that opposition is being produced. Moreover, dissent is further emphasised by means of various linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic devices. For instance, in example (10), disagreement is intensified by way of self-repetition (“it's over. Over for good” line 62); in example (11), volume increase signals high emotional involvement and highlights opposition (lines 2204-2205). In addition, Mama’s non-verbal behaviour (line 2206) reinforces her challenge of Jessie’s repeated attempts at leave-taking.<sup>143</sup>

In the following passage, Madame Danzard’s counter-claim is prefaced with the extreme adverb “never” (line 33). Like the polarity expression “no” in the preceding extract, “never” indicates directly at the beginning of the turn that opposition is about to be produced.

**example (12): My sister, 9**

29 ISABELLE                   One ... two ... three ... start.  
 30 MADAME DANZARD (*Inspecting her cards.*) I don't have  
 31                   anything to start with.  
 32 ISABELLE                   You always do that. Start first.  
 > 33 MADAME DANZARD Never. That's your imagination.  
 34 ISABELLE                   (*Shrieking.*) I saw you.  
 35 MADAME DANZARD Quiet, Isabelle. (*Looking at her cards.*)  
 36                   This is absurd. I can't move a thing.

In addition to expressions of polarity and extreme adverbs, in my data, counter-claims are frequently prefaced by the discourse marker "But." As discussed above, "But" typically functions as a disagreement preface, signalling upcoming opposition. It can be used to initiate disagreements which challenge, defend, or both. As a result, by prefacing their turns with "But," disputants signal that the following utterance is a disagreement with something the opponent has said or done, as illustrated in the following two extracts:

**example (13): 'night Mother**

755 MAMA            You could keep books. You kept your dad's  
756                    books.  
> 757 JESSIE        But nobody ever checked them.  
758 MAMA            When he died, they checked them.

**example (14): Home**

339 OLIVIA        I meant what I said on the phone. That  
340                    you should start again. I meant that.  
341 MARY JANE    I thought this time you were gonna help me.  
342 OLIVIA        I can't help you.  
> 343 MARY JANE   But Ma. I can't go back to California. I  
344                    don't have any money to go anywhere. As  
345                    soon as you called me and ASKED me to come  
346                    here I started thinking about all kinds of  
347                    things and it started looking up again.  
348                    Coming back kind of washed away all my  
349                    mistakes. I can't explain it but it did.  
350                    It did.  
351 OLIVIA        Don't be silly.  
352 MARY JANE    I'm not being silly.  
353 OLIVIA        Well you're not making any sense. I hope  
354                    you don't go around talking to people like  
355                    this.

In each of these fragments, one of the disputants initiates a counter-claim with the dissent marker "But," thereby emphasising rather than delaying or disguising opposition. In extract (13), "But" is used to preface a counter-claim that challenges the

opponent's prior assertion, whereas in extract (14) "But" is used to initiate a counter-claim that defends or reasserts the speaker's own prior claim, following a challenge on the part of the opponent.

Extract (14) also illustrates another discourse marker that is recurrently used in my data to preface counter-claims, namely "Well." As noted above, similar to "But," "Well" signals that opposition is about to be produced, thus framing or contextualising the following utterance as a disagreement.

Following the counter-claim in line 343, Mary Jane elaborates on her position, describing what she felt when her mother asked her to return home after her failed marriage and what her home coming means to her (lines 344-350). However, in the next turn, Olivia refutes her explanation, implying that Mary Jane is being "silly" (line 351). When Mary Jane rejects her mother's criticism (line 352), Olivia produces a counter-claim, insisting that Mary Jane is "not making any sense" (line 353). As discussed above, by initiating her counter with "Well," Olivia acknowledges her daughter's prior refutation, while maintaining her disapproval of Mary Jane's behaviour, by signalling that she has not changed her stance as a result of her denial. In addition, her turn-final appeal to Mary Jane not to talk to people "like this" (lines 354-355), reinforces her prior claim and underlines opposition.<sup>144</sup>

The use of "Well" in dispute sequences as a disagreement preface to indicate continuing opposition is also exemplified in the following segment from *Tell me*:

**example (15): Tell me**

292 DAUGHTER Everybody else can.  
> 293 MOTHER Well, you're not everyone else.  
294 DAUGHTER Nancy can. Nancy's mother said she could.  
> 295 MOTHER Well, I'm not Nancy's mother. If Nancy's  
296 mother thinks Nancy's old enough, that's her  
297 business. But I'm your mother, and I say  
298 "no."

As described above, in the interaction prior to this extract, the daughter has repeatedly but unsuccessfully asked her mother for permission to join her friends in some activity. After an extended

exchange of requests and rejections, in line 292, the girl changes tack and issues a counter-claim, asserting that all her friends have their parents' permission to go: "Everybody else can." By means of the ECF with the universal pronoun "everybody," she is able to both challenge her mother's refusal and legitimise her original request. But Mother counters by saying: "Well, you're not everyone else." (line 293). As noted earlier, the preface "Well" signals that what is coming next will be a disagreement and that, regardless of her daughter's objection, Mother is firm in her rejection of the girl's request. Moreover, contrastive mirroring creates a strong link between the opposing utterances at the level of wording, while emphasising disagreement at the level of content. After her mother has refuted her ECF, the daughter tries a different approach and names one of the children who got permission to go to support her claim: "Nancy can. Nancy's mother said she could." (line 294). Once more, Mother opposes her with a counter-claim. By pointing out that she is "not Nancy's mother" nor does she share her liberal views (lines 295-298), she invalidates the girl's argument. Again, her counter-claim is prefaced with "Well," which indicates that opposition is going to continue despite her daughter's argument. Disagreement is further emphasised by the turn-final "no," presumably produced with emphatic intonation.

In addition, in my corpus, counter-claims are recurrently prefaced with a partial repeat, as in the following two extracts:

**example (16): Raisin III**

27	BENEATHA	Wasn't it you who taught me to despise
28		any man who would do that. Do what he's
29		going to do.
30	MAMA	Yes- I taught you that. Me and your
31		daddy. But I thought I taught you
32		something else too... I thought I
33		taught you to love him.
> 34	BENEATHA	Love him? There is nothing left to love.

**example (17): My sister 3**

41	MADAME DANZARD	<i>(She eats with a certain relish.)</i> Wait
42		till the Blanchards come to dinner. I'll

43                                    have her make her rabbit paté. Won't that  
44                                    surprise them! The best cook we've had  
45                                    in years.  
46 ISABELLE                        Oh I don't know- Marie wasn't so bad.  
> 47 MADAME DANZARD            Marie? Please. The way she cooked a pot  
48                                    au feu- ahhh- It still makes me shudder.  
49 ISABELLE                        You exaggerate, Maman.  
> 50 MADAME DANZARD            Exaggerate? I'm being kind. Marie would  
51                                    have murdered a veal like this.

As discussed in detail above, in initiating their turns with a partial repeat, disputants not only signal that disagreement is going to follow but also actively challenge what the prior speaker has just said. That is to say, these prefaces not only contextualise the forthcoming turn as a disagreement but also reinforce the oppositional character of the utterance.

To conclude, counter-claims are a class of oppositional moves that do not directly challenge or contradict an opponent's prior activity but accomplish opposition indirectly by way of presupposition or implication. Counter-claims commonly have the syntactic form of a declarative sentence. They can stand on their own in a turn or be accompanied by other argumentative devices, indicating their argumentative character, and thus contextualising them as oppositional moves. In my data, counter-claims are often preceded by disagreement prefaces such as expression of polarity like "No," dissent markers like "But" and "Well," partial repeats or by other oppositional moves such as contradictions to indicate the adversative character of the utterance and establish coherence. In addition, their argumentative character is signalled and reinforced by structural, paralinguistic and/or non-verbal features such as, for instance, sequentially interruptive placement, repetition, tone of voice, and volume increase. Counter-claims provide a discursive resource that can be employed to challenge various kinds of activities on the part of an opponent such as directives, assertions, offers, suggestions and personal attacks. They tend to be produced immediately following or in overlap with the opponent's prior turn. Counter-claims present a potential threat to the addressee's positive face, as they indicate that the speaker thinks

that the hearer is wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some issue, and thereby express disapproval.

However, some researchers have argued that counter-claims present a less severe face threat than other, more direct oppositional moves, which involve the direct expression of negation or challenge. For instance, according to Vuchinich (1984), what he calls "indirect negation" is a "fully mitigated" variant of performing an oppositional move, which avoids direct hostility. Similarly, in their ranking of disagreement types from most to least face-aggravating, Muntigl & Turnbull (1998) classify counterclaims as the least face-aggravating type of disagreement, as it mitigates damage to the other's face. In their data, however, counter-claims tended to be preceded by mitigating devices such as pauses, agreement tokens and accounts, delaying and softening the disagreement. By contrast, as we have seen, in my data, counter-claims are often prefaced by dissent markers, which emphasise rather than downplay their argumentative character, and thus aggravate rather than mitigate their face-threatening potential. As in the previous sections then, the disputants in my data display an orientation towards dissent and confrontation rather than consent and harmony. Instead of mitigating disagreement and work towards the resolution of conflict, they can be seen to actively work to emphasise opposition and sustain disagreement. This is further evidence that in the context of mother-daughter disputes the interactional process of conflict is more important than its outcome.

### 7.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined what types of speech actions are chiefly used by the disputants in my data and how these actions and the ways in which they are packaged contribute to the adversarial character of the interaction.

As the previous sections have shown, in my corpus, opposition is accomplished by means of various different illocutionary acts. These include accusations, directives, demands for explanation, threats, relevance challenges, competence challenges, disqualifications, unfavourable comments, contradictions, corrections and counter-assertions.

While these argumentative actions can in principle be performed in a mitigated or aggravated manner using direct or indirect constructions, the preceding discussion has demonstrated that in my data such actions are routinely produced in ways that reinforce rather than minimise their face-threatening potential. Instead of being preceded by mitigating devices such as pauses, agreement tokens and accounts, which delay and soften the disagreement, the oppositional moves in my data are often prefaced by dissent markers, which stress rather than downplay their argumentative character, and intensify rather than lessen the potential face-threat they carry. Moreover, paralinguistic, prosodic, and nonverbal cues such as, for example, increased volume, contrastive stress and exaggerated intonation contours, facial expression and gestures further emphasise the argumentative character of turns. The resulting face-threatening and sometimes even offensive nature of the speech actions contributes to the sense of hostility in the conflict sequences under analysis and their antagonistic nature.

Both the kinds of speech actions employed and the ways in which these actions are packaged show, once more, that the disputants in my data display an orientation towards dissent and confrontation rather than consent and harmony. Instead of mitigating disagreement and working towards the resolution of conflict, the participants design their turns so as to emphasise opposition and sustain conflict. This is further evidence that in the mother-daughter conflicts under analysis the interactional goal is not conflict resolution. The choice and design of argumentative actions as well as the ensuing affective and confrontational key of the exchanges

contextualises the mother-daughter interaction in my data as emotionally charged disputes or quarrels and distinguishes them from other forms of conflict talk such as negotiation, discussion and argumentation.<sup>145</sup>

The previous discussion has also revealed that such aspects as the relevance, truth, informativeness and clarity of conversational contributions apparently play an important part in the accomplishment of arguments just as in friendly conversation and can therefore become the focal point of oppositional moves.

As noted above, the participants in my data can be seen to orient to the expectation to act in accordance with Grice's (1975, 1989) *Cooperative Principle* and the *Conversational Maxims* it encompasses; even though they are unmistakably engaged in oppositional talk, they cooperate in constructing the (inter)activity of disputing. The Gricean maxims require that participants try to make their contributions be true, efficient, relevant and clear, and thus prohibit utterances that are insincere, inefficient, irrelevant and incomprehensible. As we have seen, speakers display an orientation towards the expectation of sincerity, informativeness, relevance and clarity in verbal conflict. Contributions to disputes must be true, pertinent, properly informative and comprehensible; otherwise their validity may be challenged, for example, by means of contradictions, relevance challenges, and demands for explanation.<sup>146,147</sup>

In addition, the preceding analyses evidence (once more) that power is not a fixed social entity but a dynamic relationship that is continuously negotiated in and through talk-in-interaction and that this dynamics is most evident in the manifest collision of control manoeuvres and resistance in verbal conflict sequences. Hence, (conflict) talk constitutes a valuable site for the analysis of the ways in which participants jointly (re)produce and transform social order and their position vis-à-vis one another through the formatting and sequencing of actions and their responses.

To conclude, conflict, opposition and involvement are emergent social phenomena, which are mutually accomplished and displayed by participants in the ways they interact with each other. Structural aspects of conversation such as preference and turn-taking organisation and formal cohesion are among the discursive resources

which conversationalists can employ to establish and make known the kind of (inter) activity they are engaged in, their alignment towards each other and the current topic of talk, and their degree of involvement in the interaction. Sequential phenomena contextualise conflict talk, opposition and high emotional involvement and thus distinguish the mother-daughter interaction in my data as aggravated forms of conflict talk. However, structural properties are not the only conversational features that play a role in framing the interaction in my data as antagonistic. In addition to the sequential organisation of talk, both the kinds of speech actions employed and the ways in which they are designed so as to emphasise opposition and sustain disagreement reveal that the disputants orient towards dissent rather than consent and thus contextualise the mother-daughter interaction in my data as emotionally charged disputes and mark them from other - less confrontational, resolution oriented - forms of conflict talk.

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## Notes for chapter 7:

<sup>1</sup> To quote Maynard (1985: 3): "any utterance or action may contain objectionable features and may become part of a dispute."

<sup>2</sup> However, as noted above, while initial opposition is a prerequisite for argument, it is not a sufficient condition, because it can be responded to in various ways. Only if the opposed person responds with a counter-opposition, a conflict is fully under way.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Sacks' (1992) observations, cf. Hutchby (1996a, Ch. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Apeltauer (1978: 144); Frankenberg (1976, 1979: 51-52); Goffman (1971: 124f); Gruber (1996a: 196f); Günthner (2000: 78); Laforest (2002: 1596); Newell & Stutman (1989/90: 144); Sacks (1992, vol. 1: 636).

<sup>5</sup> This is reflected by Günthner's (2000: 56) findings that in German everyday speech, expressions of criticism of another person's behaviour such as, for instance, "Vorwurf," "Vorhaltungen," "Be/Klagen," "Beschwerden," "Lästern," and "Beschuldigungen" overlap to a considerable extent.

<sup>6</sup> A similar view is adopted by Benoit (1995); in his study of image restoration strategies, he uses the terms "accuse," "attack," "berate," "blame," "censure," "complain," "condemn," "criticise," "rail against," "rebuke," "reproach" and "object" synonymously to refer to communicative reactions, expressing disfavour with another's actual or perceived wrong-doing.

<sup>7</sup> Apeltauer (1978: 145), Hundsnurscher (1993: 144) and Laforest (2002: 1596) consider the identicalness of addressee and defendant as a distinctive feature of accusations (i.e. "Vorwürfe" and "reproaches" respectively).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also Drew & Holt's (1988: 399), Emerson & Messinger's (1977: 127), and Laforest's (2002: 1596) descriptions of complaint as well as Gruber's (1996a: 197) and Günthner's (2000: 76) definitions of "Vorwurf."

<sup>9</sup> In her study on accusatory activities in naturally occurring German conversation, Günthner (2000: 56) distinguishes expressions of disapproval that are produced in the presence of the accused person, which she calls "Vorwürfe", from expressions of disapproval which are issued in the defendant's absence.

<sup>10</sup> Extending Pomerantz's observations, Edwards (2000) shows that, in addition to the uses in complaint sequences identified by Pomerantz, ECFs can work as devices for displaying the speaker's stance towards some state of affairs, rather than the literal accuracy of a description. Moreover, he demonstrates that by virtue of their extremity, ECFs are used and oriented to by speakers as "nonliteral" (i.e. not accountably accurate), metaphorical descriptions in hearably performing irony, exaggerating, teasing, joking, etc. For further discussion of ECFs and their relation to hyperbole cf. Norrick (2004).

<sup>11</sup> Return-complaints as responses to complaints will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>12</sup> Messmer (2003, Ch. 6) also notes the routine use of ECFs in accusations in aggravated conflict sequences.

<sup>13</sup> This corresponds to the findings of Boxer (2002), Laforest (2002) and Tannen (2002).

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<sup>14</sup> Similar aspects of accusations have been discussed by Apeltauer (1978: 144), Burton (1980: 145), Frankenberg (1976: 51, 1979: 51), Gruber (1996a: 196), Günthner (2000: 78), Hundsnurscher (1993: 144), Messmer (2003, Ch. 6), Pomerantz (1978), and Rehbein (1972: 294).

<sup>15</sup> Gruber (1996a: 201) calls such accusation formats, in which the evaluative component is implicit, "structurally deficient."

<sup>16</sup> As this sequence illustrates, "it's not guaranteed that if you make a complaint your complaint will be the topic. It is perfectly well possible, systematically, that if you make a complaint, your complaining will be the topic." (Sacks 1992, vol. 1: 638)

<sup>17</sup> The formulation of accusations as interrogatives has also been observed in naturally occurring disputes by Apeltauer (1978: 154-157), courtroom cross examinations (Atkinson & Drew 1979: 105), TV discussions (Gruber 1996a: 202-204), everyday conversation (Günthner 2000: 85-95); Laforest (2000: 1600-1604), news interviews (Clayman & Heritage 2002) and police interviews (Thornborrow 2002: 46-48).

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of the use of interrogatives with "Why" as requests for accounts in ordinary conversation cf. Apeltauer (1978: 156), Günthner (2002: 90), Koshik (2003), Laforest (2000), and Sacks (1992, vol. 1: 14).

<sup>19</sup> This argumentative device will be discussed in detail in Ch. 7.4.

<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the stage directions preceding Mother's contribution: "*Angry, scared, she has gone too far.*" (line 308) suggest that her utterance be produced in a way which signals that she is well aware that she has committed an offence and understands Olga's interrogative as an accusation.

<sup>21</sup> A similar view is expressed by Apeltauer (1978: 160) in his study of verbal conflicts. He maintains that in German, question formats such as "Wie kannst du ...?" are typically used to realise accusations.

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the functions of self-repetition in naturally occurring conflicts cf. Gruber (1998: 491).

<sup>23</sup> A detailed discussion of various types of responses to accusations will follow below.

<sup>24</sup> In particular, Sacks (1992) has described the use of "Well" in argument sequences as an appositional tying technique, which signals that what is coming next will be a disagreement. The use of "Well" as a turn preface to indicate continuing opposition has also been observed in naturally occurring disagreement sequences. For instance, as M. H. Goodwin (1982: 85) has observed, turn prefaces such as "Well" occur frequently in children's disputes and function to signal both that the validity of the immediately prior talk will not be challenged, and that opposition will be continued. Similarly, Thornborrow (2000: 55) discusses the use of "Well" as a turn preface to indicate continuing opposition in police interviews.

<sup>25</sup> According to Bernardy (1996), the exclamation of address terms indicates the speaker's emotional state and usually reveals shock. Correspondingly, Leech (1999) notes that while vocatives characteristically serve the pragmatic functions of summoning attention, identifying the addressee of a speaker's remark and/or establishing/maintaining social bonds between speaker and addressee, they may also

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have "a more directly emotive function, as when a parent addresses a child loudly *Egon!*, in protest at the music being turned up too loud" (108-109).

<sup>26</sup> Address forms are grammatically optional, and their occurrence is thus always potentially significant. Research on terms of address has shown that, like all linguistic forms, they can serve a variety of functions (cf. Bing 1995; Braun 1988; Dickey 1997; Dunkling 1990; Hartung forthcoming; Kramer 1975; Leech 1999; Lerner 2003; McConnell-Ginet 1978, 2003; Wardaugh 1986; Wolfson & Manes 1980; Wootton 1981b, and others). Hence, the function of an address word cannot be determined without taking into consideration the linguistic and extra-linguistic context in which it is used. Several factors have been shown to be relevant for the assessment of the communicative function of a given form of address. These include, for instance, the overall relationship between speaker and hearer, the history of patterns of usage within and across a particular dyad or community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999), the interactional context in which the address term is uttered, and the position of the address term within an turn (i.e. turn-initial, mid-turn or turn-final). Leech (1999) suggests that turn-final vocatives usually combine an addressee-identifying function with a relationship-maintenance function. Similarly, Lerner (2003) finds that post-positioned terms of address tend to be used as a device to demonstrate a particular stance toward the relationship with a recipient. He suggests that adding an address form to the end of a turn may serve to underscore a personal concern for a problem. Likewise, Bernardy (1996: 75ff) maintains that the use of address terms at the close of exclamatory sentences may serve to underline the speaker's emotions. This corresponds to Kramer's (1975: 206ff) observation that in literary texts, address words usually emphasise activities such as, for instance, requests or promises. These findings suggest that the exclamation of "Jessie" at the end of Mama's turn signals a negative affective reaction (e.g. shock and/or exasperation) to Jessie's prior utterance.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondingly, in his study of family discussions, Knoblauch (1991: 174) states that the strongly stressed exclamation "What?" expresses disagreement by way of calling into question and requiring justification of the preceding utterance. In black children's disputes, too, "What" has been found to frequently function as a disagreement preface, initiating oppositional turns (M. H. Goodwin 1982, 1983, 1990; M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987).

<sup>28</sup> For example, Frankenberg (1979: 51) claims that with an accusation the speaker requests the addressee to account for an action which she has caused, permitted or performed. In order to remedy the failure, the accused is supposed to produce an excuse or justification. The same view is expressed by Apeltauer (1978: 144), Burton (1980: 157), Hundsnurscher (1993: 144) and Rehbein (1972: 294).

<sup>29</sup> There are, of course, numerous theories of defensive communicative acts or image restoration strategies and typologies of accounts apart from that of Scott & Lyman (1968), e.g. Austin (1961); Burke (1973); Goffman (1971); Schlenker (1980); Schonbach (1980, 1990); Semin & Manstead (1983); Sykes & Matza (1957); Tedeschi & Reiss (1981). For an overview and detailed discussion of these various approaches cf. Benoit (1995, Ch. 3: 31-61).

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. also Dersley & Wootoon (2000), Frankenberg (1976, 1979), Fritz & Hundsnurscher (1975), Günthner (2000), Holly (1979), and Rehbein (1972), whose studies draw on Scott & Lyman's work.

<sup>31</sup> In Dersley & Wootoon's (2000) terminology, justifications represent a form of "not at fault" denials.

<sup>32</sup> In Dersley & Wootoon's (2000) terms, like justifications excuses are a type of "not at fault" denials.

<sup>33</sup> Adopting Labov & Fanshel's (1977:100) terms, we might assume a *Rule of Accounts*, which holds that if a speaker A makes a statement about "AB-events" it is heard as a request for an account of some sort.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the use of noticing to do complaining in naturally occurring conversation cf. Schegloff (1988: 128f).

<sup>35</sup> As Goffman (1971: 143f) puts it: "An apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule."

<sup>36</sup> Likewise, research on discourse markers has described the communicative function of "Oh" as information or news receipt, marking the receipt of new information, or recognition display, marking the recognition of familiar information (Aijmer 2002; Fraser 1988, 1990; Schifffrin 1987). Aijmer points out that "Oh" may also express an affective stance to a preceding utterance or to the hearer. As Person (1999, Ch. 3) has shown, the communicative functions of "Oh" in literary discourse parallel those in naturally occurring conversation.

<sup>37</sup> Aijmer (2002) notes that "Oh" may introduce conventionalised phrases for apologising (e.g. "Oh I'm (so) sorry," "Oh sorry"). She argues that "Oh" is intensifying and is therefore appropriate together with an apology which requires some 'gushing' (Edmondson & House 1981: 153)" (149).

<sup>38</sup> This type of response is labelled "didn't do it" denial by Dersley & Wootoon's (2000).

<sup>39</sup> This corresponds to the findings of several studies of conflict interaction: For instance, Laforest (2002) claims that although complaints do not automatically set off an argument, they nonetheless frequently initiate dispute, are an essential element of arguments and cluster in episodes of aggravated conflict. Similarly, Newell and Sutmann (1989/90) argue that while complaints do not always function to initiate conflict episodes, "confrontations always begin with complaints" (148). Likewise, Gruber (1996a) maintains that accusations instigate either a whole dissent turn sequence or a topic shift within a dissent turn sequence by contributing a new topical aspect.

<sup>40</sup> M. H. Goodwin (1982, 1990: 152) observes a similar opposition strategy in children's disputes. She describes return and exchange sequences (Pomerantz 1975: 26), in which a move equivalent to the one being opposed is returned.

<sup>41</sup> Extract (26) illustrates the termination of conflict by means of withdrawal. As discussed above, this type of conflict termination occurs when an opponent becomes too distraught to continue the conflict and withdraws from the conversational activity or physically leaves the area, thus leaving the conflict in a stand-off

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with no terminal exchange. The aggravated directive and the use of self- and other repetition signal Mary Jane's high emotional involvement.

<sup>42</sup> To quote Sacks (1992, vol. 2: 433), "there's a way in which the production of a complaint can free the talk from what the talk has priorly been. ... It's a characteristically known thing that talk on any topic can "end up in an argument," and one of the ways that that's a formal possibility for conversation has to do with there being places in it where some kinds of interactional events can be freed from whatever they were about and themselves multiply. So a complaint can be met by a counter-complaint, an the counter-complaint can be met by another complaint, and one can kind of rapidly get into an argument that - intendedly or not - loses the course of talk out of which it seemed to come." As discussed above, the process operating in such exchanges of mutual (counter-) is that of "symmetrical schismogenesis" (Bateson 1935, 1958, 1972, 1979), whereby the disagreement between the interactants progressively increases as they respond to each other in identical, mutually alienating ways.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. also Messmer (2003, Ch. 6) on the crucial role of what he calls "Anschuldigungskommunikation" in aggravated conflict sequences.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the function of directives cf. also Apeltauer (1978), Burton (1980), Ervin-Tripp (1977), Fraser (1975), Jacobs & Jackson (1983), Labov & Fanshel (1977), Searle (1969, 1977, 1979), Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) and Tsui (1994).

<sup>45</sup> Burton (1980: 132) points out that, although directives are generally seen as eliciting a non-linguistic response (i.e. a "react"), they might also solicit a verbal response. For instance, the utterance "Tell me your name" is a command that requests a verbal response. She suggests that "a directive implies an instruction to perform something, and that performance might well include a verbal performance."

<sup>46</sup> In their study on the structure of conversational argument, Jackson & Jacobs (1980) describe similar sequences introduced by an oppositional turn as "insertion sequences," which are designed to get a back down from a disagreeable first-pair part of the main adjacency pair (e.g. a directive) without supplying the dispreferred second-pair part (e.g. a refusal). In example (3), while the insertion sequence initiated by Isabelle's contradiction does not result in a back down by Madame Danzard on her initial directive, it leads to shift of the focus of the talk from the adequacy of Isabelle's table manners to the appropriateness of the term "toy." The dispute sequence ends in a stand-off and no second-pair part to Madame Danzard's initial directive is ever supplied.

<sup>47</sup> The multiple control aspects of such utterances have also been noted in studies on interactional dominance and control. Both in the initiative-response coding scheme by Linell et al. (1988) as well as in Rogers & Farace's (1975: 229) relational-control coding system, meta-communicative imperatives like the above are categorised as termination or inhibiting moves, by which topics, phases, or complete interactions are closed. In both frameworks, such moves are classed as control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts at exercising interactional dominance.

<sup>48</sup> For discussion of similar oppositional moves, cf. Gruber's (2001) study of the strategic use of what he calls "opposing questions" in controversial TV discussions.

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<sup>49</sup> Burton (1980: 80) also notes that directives in conflict sequences can be produced in mitigated or aggravated fashion to soften or highlight their oppositional character. Other researchers have used a variety of different terms to refer to these phenomena. Apeltauer (1978: 86-122) differentiates between "requests," "directives," "suggestions," and "offers." Gruber (1996a: 212-226) distinguishes four types of what he calls "directing speech actions," namely "imperatives," "appeals," "requests," and "offers." Rogers & Farace (1975: 229) distinguish between "orders" and "instructions" as two types of regulative responses of different intensities. Tsui (1994: 91-95) discriminates between "requestives" (prospecting either compliance or non-compliance) and "directives" (prospecting only compliance) as two subclasses of "initiatives," in order to capture the dimension of mitigation and aggravation.

<sup>50</sup> M. H. Goodwin (1988: 57-58) states: "The ways in which speakers format their directives and sequence turns to them provide for a range of possible types of social arrangements between participants. Some directive/response sequences display an orientation towards a differentiation between participants and result in asymmetrical forms of relationships. Others, by way of contrast display an orientation towards seeking to minimize distinctions between participants and result in more egalitarian or symmetrical arrangements of social relationships."

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Rogers & Farace (1975: 229) on the mitigating function of accounts following directives.

<sup>52</sup> According to Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (19884: 203), such a "point of view" provides a more mitigated form of directive. Likewise, M. H. Goodwin (1988: 69) argues that the use of "let's" "mitigates the appearance of control."

<sup>53</sup> Thornborrow (2002) expresses the same view in her analysis of the interplay of discursive power and participant frameworks in institutional talk (e.g. police interviews).

<sup>54</sup> By contrast, in their study of disagreements in naturally occurring arguments, Muntigl & Turnbull (1998) found that corresponding argumentative moves, which they call "challenges," are often preceded by reluctance markers such as "Well," which display disagreement with the prior turn.

<sup>55</sup> However, in response to stories, recipients frequently summarise the gist of the prior speaker's narrative, for instance, with formulations such as "you were young, okay," "you were being an educator," etc. to display their interpretation of what they have been told (Norrick, personal communication 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Rogers & Farace (1975: 229) on the mitigating function of accounts following directives.

<sup>57</sup> In Rogers & Farace's (1975: 229) terms, Wanda's reaction represents a "disconfirmation," and is categorised as a strong one-up move/control manoeuvre in their relational control coding system. A similar view is put forward by Bilmes (1997: 520): "Ignoring someone is perhaps the sincerest form of insult - and, in the realm of manners, the deepest cut of all- but it can be used to express disapprobation as well as contempt ... interactional ignoring occurs only when the ignoree has some possible claim on our attention. ... Ignoring is a positive act of non-doing: it is an act produced through absence, and so related to conversational silence."

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<sup>58</sup> By designing her directive as an imperative, Florene displays that she strongly expects her daughter to carry out the requested action, leaving her no option but to comply (cf. Tsui 1994:93; Linell 1990: 159). Hence, her order constrains Wanda's freedom of action and thus presents a control manoeuvre. As discussed above, on the interpersonal plane, Florene's imperative assumes a power differential between herself and her daughter with her in a superior position, which authorises her to control her daughter's behaviour.

<sup>59</sup> Demands for explanation may also initiate proper insertion sequences (e.g. A: "Close the door." - B: "Why?" - A: "It's cold." - B: "Okay."). In such cases, they may simply interrupt an ongoing sequence of talk rather than foment an argument.

<sup>60</sup> A similar idea is expressed by Apeltauer (1978: 90), who argues that one of the preconditions for requests (as opposed to commands) is an asymmetrical relationship between the participants with the addressee in the dominant position, which allows him or her to refuse to perform the requested action.

<sup>61</sup> The formulaicity of such exchanges is corroborated by the following sequence, which was given in the issue of the *a-word-a-day* mailing list from September 10, 2003 (ed. by Arnu Garg) to exemplify the meaning of the term *ipse dixit*: "Child: Why do I have to go to bed at eight every day? Parent: "Because I said it."

<sup>62</sup> Wanda's use of the term of address "Mama" suddenly brings Florene's role as a mother (who can give or withhold permission) into play, and signals that Wanda is backing down.

<sup>63</sup> The close affinity between directives and threats has been pointed out by several researchers. For instance, Tsui (1994) defines threats as a subclass of "mandatives" (i.e. directives by which the speaker attempts to get the addressee to perform (or refrain from performing) an action for the benefit of the speaker himself), which have "the additional feature of explicitly stating that the speaker himself [sic] will bring about the undesirable consequence should the addressee refuse to comply" (129). M. H. Goodwin (1988: 60) observes that turns containing an imperative arguing for the speaker's relative control vis-à-vis the recipient may be accompanied by "semantic aggravators" (Becker 1982: 8) such as, for example, threats and phrases demanding immediate action, which display the speaker's view of the recipient's subordinate status.

<sup>64</sup> Similar definitions have been put forward by Apeltauer (1978: 98), Searle & Vanderveken (1985: 193), Sprey (1071), Tedeschi (1970), Tedeschi & Bonoma (1977: 215), Tsui (1994: 128-129), and others.

<sup>65</sup> By contrast, in conversational narrative, the "x and y" construction is conventionally heard as expressing a temporal sequence (Norrick, personal communication).

<sup>66</sup> It must be noted that the future activity Jessie is threatening to perform in example (1), i.e. shooting herself, is first and foremost an action to her own detriment. However, in view of the fact that losing their child is generally considered the worst thing that can happen to a parent, Jessie's suicide would clearly constitute the most severe punishment for Mama.

<sup>67</sup> A corresponding expression in German is "Pass (bloß) auf was du sagst!"

<sup>68</sup> Corresponding expressions in German are "Sei bloß vorsichtig!" and "Pass bloß auf!" (cf. Franke 1983: 244). It must be noted, however, that such formulations may

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also be used to package warnings. The close resemblance of warnings and threats has been noted by several authors. Fraser (1975a: 173), for instance, suggests that a threat is a special type of warning in which the speaker takes on the responsibility for bringing about the disadvantageous action. Similarly, Sadock (1974: 143) maintains that warnings for which we assume the warner has control over the consequences of not heeding the warning are described as threats (cf. also Apeltauer 1978: 112; Broadie 1972: 187-190). Tsui (1994: 133) and Green (1975: 124) maintain that warnings are performed in the interest of the addressee, whereas threats are performed in the interest of the speaker, and point out that the giver of a warning assumes that some ill will befall the addressee if she does not listen to it. By contrast, some researchers do not differentiate between the two activities. For example, Brenneis & Lein (1977: 51) list the following utterances as instances of threats, which they define as promises of personal harm to the opponent, those attached to him, or in general: "I'll kill you," "I'm going to tell the teacher on you," "The building will fall down if you do that." In the terminology adopted here, the last example constitutes a warning.

<sup>69</sup> The sequence-terminating potential of such utterances has also been noted in studies on interactional dominance and control. Both in the initiative-response coding scheme by Linell et al. (1988) as well as in Rogers & Farace's (1975: 229) relational-control coding system, meta-comments like the above are categorised as termination or inhibiting moves, i.e. framing moves or boundary markers, by which topics, phases, or complete interactions are closed. Accordingly, such moves represent control manoeuvres, i.e. attempts to exercise interactional dominance.

<sup>70</sup> For detailed discussion of the dialogic functions of discourse particles as boundary markers, cf. below.

<sup>71</sup> Apeltauer (1978: 101-102) has observed similar expressions in German dispute sequences (e.g. "Also jetzt hab ich genug"; "Jetzt ist aber wirklich genug"), which typically occur towards the end of dispute phases and are used to mark the limit between verbal and nonverbal sanctions.

<sup>72</sup> As mentioned above, this definition of insisting differs from that by Gruber (1998: 490) and Eisenberg & Garvey (1981: 159), who argue that in insisting a speaker may either repeat her own prior utterance verbatim (or nearly verbatim) without increasing or decreasing directness or reinforce it with a simple "Yes" or "No."

<sup>73</sup> As discussed above, in terms of Rogers & Farace's (1975) relational-control coding system, Wanda's reaction qualifies as a "disconfirmation." This move suggests an ignoring of other, that is, not just a disagreement with what was said, but rather a denial or negation of the other's right even to attempt to define the relationship (cf. also Bilmes 1997 on the potential functions of ignoring). That is to say, in ignoring her mother's demand, Wanda not only rejects Florene's attempt at exercising control over her, but also challenges the assumption of superiority underlying her aggravated directive.

<sup>74</sup> For a detailed discussion of counter-claims, cf. Ch. 7.12.

<sup>75</sup> Apeltauer (1978: 104) also argues that this type of threat-cum-ban (i.e. "Droh-Verbot") is used to invoke (or establish) a power differential with the speaker in superior position.

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<sup>76</sup> Polanyi & Scha (1983) list "Alright" as a PUSH/POP marker, i.e. a discourse structure signaling device "used to mark movement from one discourse unit to another" (64). Bangerter et al. (2004) find that the primary function of "Alright" in telephone calls is to coordinate entry into or exit from joint projects (e.g. side sequences and phone calls). They observe that "Alright" is typically used to transit from the entry phase to the body and from the body to the exit phase, or even to the end of a (telephone) conversation.

<sup>77</sup> Apeltauer (1978: 101-102) has observed similar expressions in German dispute sequences (e.g. "Also jetzt hab ich genug"; "Jetzt ist aber wirklich genug"), which typically occur towards the end of dispute phases and function as boundary markers, i.e. they are used to mark the limit between verbal and nonverbal sanctions.

<sup>78</sup> However, in high society, members of the aristocracy may still be addressed by such titles.

<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, boys receive "young man" not "gentleman."

<sup>80</sup> As Wolfson & Manes (1980: 79) have pointed out, "the choice of a form of address is one of the ways in which speakers ... may express and indeed influence their own status in relation to that of others." Thus, the mock-polite address term "young lady" at the end of Mother's turn, indicates a perceived asymmetry in authority.

<sup>81</sup> Correspondingly, Bernardy (1996) states that address terms may be used as warnings, for instance, to sever the interlocutor's line of argument.

<sup>82</sup> In this fragment, Ruth and Mama can be seen to align against Beneatha through both opposing her (cf. Maynard 1986 on collaboration in multi-party disputes).

<sup>83</sup> Research on discourse markers has yielded that in addition to signalling the recognition of familiar information or the receipt of new information "Oh" may have an intensifying function and displays the speaker's emotional alignment towards the addressee or something she has said or done. For instance, Fraser states that "Oh" is an interjection that "encodes an entire basic message typically involving the speaker's emotional state" (1990: 391). Schiffrin (1987) notes that "Oh" might function as speaker intensification conveying, for instance, that the interlocutor has pursued her position "beyond reasonable expectations of intensity" (98). Aijmer (2002: 98-99) also finds that "Oh" can be associated with affect and has a reinforcing or intensifying function. In her analysis of discourse particles in the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English, she finds that "Oh" typically combines with exclamations, expletives and vocatives, to express and emphasise the speaker's affective stance towards the hearer or what is said (e.g. surprise indignation, sympathy, disappointment, etc.): "When *oh* occurs in the lexicalised combination *oh God*, the effect is stronger than that of the speaker used the simple *God*" (99).

<sup>84</sup> Research on the dialogic functions of "Now" as a discourse particle has yielded that "Now" may have a framing function, marking a boundary or break between two parts in a conversation. For instance, Schiffrin (1987: 242-244) notes that in interpersonal arguments, "Now focuses attention on pivotal moves such as, for example, the speaker's next move as a contrast with what preceded." Similarly, according to Aijmer (2002: 95), "Now is a boundary signal between discourse units," marking, for instance, a change to a new stage in a conversation. For discussion of the functions of "Now" in fictional dialogue see Person (1999: 86-88).

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<sup>85</sup> Franke (1983: 237-238) describes similar expressions such as „Klar?“; „Ist das klar?“; „Verstanden?“ and „Haben wir uns verstanden?“ He maintains that in combination with a repeated command, such appended questions function as a means of intensifying the force of the speaker's claim. If the addressee responds with a yes token, she signals her willingness to comply with the command.

<sup>86</sup> Correspondingly, in his study of controversial TV-discussions, Gruber (1996a, 1998) has observed that topic changes during conflict episodes can cause what he calls "time outs": as soon as a topic change occurred during a conflict, the "dissent organisation" of talk (i.e. preference for disagreement, high frequency of interruptions and overlapping talk, increased number of cohesive devices between subsequent turns) was replaced by "consent organisation" (i.e. preference for agreement, few interruptions and overlap sequences, no hostile repetitions of previous turns by others). But as soon as the topic was introduced again, the organisational features of talk changed back to the dissent organisation.

<sup>87</sup> Competence challenges will be discussed in detail in Ch. 7.7.

<sup>88</sup> While in another context, Beneatha's utterance may be heard as an ironic allusion to the stereotypical docile Afro-American servant, the stage directions, the characterisation of the participants throughout the play as well as the subsequent interactions between Beneatha and Mama all contribute to the contextualisation of Beneatha's response as genuine submission.

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed discussion of various types of opposing questions in conflict sequences cf. Gruber (2001).

<sup>90</sup> Buckman (1992: 49) expresses a similar view in his discussion of medical consultation: "Some sentences are phrased as questions but are not, in fact, questions at all. Biased questions are responses that we (occasionally) phrase in the form of a question, but which are statements about our assessment of the situation. They often reflect our own ambivalence - we know that we are under an obligation not to sit in judgement on the patient's situation but feel a strong desire to do so. In order to conform with what we see as a professional behaviour, we disguise the judgement as a question" (quoted in Heritage 2002a: 1432). For further discussion of yes/no questions, which convey reversed polarity assertions cf. also Koshik (2002).

<sup>91</sup> Research on role-playing among children's groups has yielded that requests for permission are most frequently used by children playing younger children to 'mothers' and constitute a way of displaying subordination (Corsaro 1985: 83; M. H. Goodwin 1988: 80f). Gordon & Ervin-Tripp (1984) maintain that "true permission requests imply that the addressee has control over the speaker and that the speaker's wishes are subject to the hearer's approval."

<sup>92</sup> Although Mother does not explicitly state that she will punish Olga, as mentioned above, meta-communicative imperatives like "Watch that tongue" are partly formulaic and are conventionally used and interpreted as threats.

<sup>93</sup> Apeltauer (1978) adopts a similar view, stating that this type of threat-cum-command, which he labels "Droh-Gebot," is employed to influence the addressee's behaviour and to attempt to invoke or establish a power structure (100, 104).

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<sup>94</sup> A similar view is put forward by Messmer (2003: 242ff), who argues that threats commonly make manifest a structurally latent power imbalance, and therefore frequently occur in parent-child communication.

<sup>95</sup> Muntigl & Turnbull (1998) put forward a similar view in their discussion of "irrelevancy claims" in naturally occurring disputes.

<sup>96</sup> On the importance of newsworthiness in conversation cf. Sacks (1973: 139), (1974: 341).

<sup>97</sup> Correspondingly, in a study of arguments on British talk radio shows, Hutchby (1996a, b) has found that hosts frequently use "So?" as a second position move both to challenge the validity of callers' prior contributions and to put them in a position of providing an account for the relevance of their remarks within the dispute's agenda.

<sup>98</sup> That is to say, while the mother-daughter arguments in my data are characterised by aggravated disagreement, they nevertheless require a minimum of cooperation on the part of the disputants. For a distinction and detailed discussion of various kinds of cooperativeness, cf. Gruber (1996a, 1998).

<sup>99</sup> For more detailed discussion of this matter from the perspective of argumentation theory, cf., for instance, O'Rourke (2001, esp. Ch. 7).

<sup>100</sup> A detailed discussion of this disputing practice will be offered in Ch. 7.9.

<sup>101</sup> Personal need or desire statements such as Mama's "I want to know why..." are a type of directives as described by Ervin-Tripp (1977: 166-167).

<sup>102</sup> This argumentative device will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 7.10.

<sup>103</sup> For a detailed discussion of the organisation of repair in conversation, cf. Schegloff et al. (1977).

<sup>104</sup> Researchers have observed a similar use of partial repeats as prefaces to aggravated opposition in children's disputes (M. H. Goodwin 1983, 1990) and as prefaces to disagreements with prior speaker's self-deprecations (Pomerantz 1984).

<sup>105</sup> In a discussion of disputes between parents and their teenage children, Tannen (2001: 196-198) calls this arguing strategy, by which the speaker intensifies rather than denies another's criticism, the "aikido approach."

<sup>106</sup> As Gruber (1998: 477) has pointed out, in the course of a conflict episode, there is a high probability for what he calls "nested" conflicts: new conflicts might emerge with the initial conflict "waiting" for further processing (cf. also Knoblauch 1991, 1995). Correspondingly, during Mother's and Olga's extensive conflict sequence in *Avenue*, the dispute alternately centres round several contentious issues, which are cyclically taken up again by the disputants in the course of the argument without being resolved.

<sup>107</sup> As Sacks (1992, vol. 1) has observed, claims not to have heard can be employed as a device in interaction, enabling speakers to avoid doing an action which might properly go in that slot, but without simply ignoring what they properly ought to do. Building on Sacks's remarks, Drew (1997) argues that it is important to distinguish the use of a repair form which implies a claim not to have heard or understood the prior repairable turn, from the actual probable or possible cognitive states of a speaker thus initiating repair. While both Sacks and Drew are referring to requests for clarification, the upshot of their remarks is that Mother's response, which displays a certain understanding of Olga's prior turn,

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might be used as a communicative device, allowing her to avoid answering a more unpleasant aspect of her daughter's question while still providing the conditionally relevant response to Olga's request for information.

<sup>108</sup> Argumentative moves by which the speaker disqualifies what the opponent has said in the prior turn will be discussed in detail in the following section.

<sup>109</sup> M. H. Goodwin (1990) expresses a similar view in her study of black children's disputes.

<sup>110</sup> Bußmann (1990) defines meta-communication as "communication about communication." Correspondingly, meta-communicative statements are utterances by which the speaker "durch unmittelbaren Bezug auf Äußerungen diese durch Korrektur, Präzisierung, Stellungnahme, Kommentar u.a. erläutert oder modifiziert" (483). Likewise, Tannen (2001: 8-9) describes meta-communicating as "talking about communication," i.e. "about ways of talking."

<sup>111</sup> Similarly, in his study of family discussions, Knoblauch (1991: 174) states that the strongly stressed exclamation "What?" expresses disagreement by way of calling into question and requiring justification of the preceding utterance. In black children's disputes, too, "What" has been found to frequently act as a disagreement preface, initiating oppositional turns (cf. M. H. Goodwin 1982, 1983, 1990; M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987).

<sup>112</sup> In contrast to the examples of disqualifications described above (e.g. "You're funny, you are and so stupid."), which are used to challenge the opponent's general competence, Olivia's comment only refers to Mary Jane's current behaviour, which is indicated by the use of the present progressive and the adverb "now."

<sup>113</sup> Leech (1999) suggests that turn-final vocatives usually combine an addressee-identifying function with a relationship-maintenance function. Similarly, Lerner (2003) finds that post-positioned terms of address tend to be used as a device to demonstrate a particular stance toward the relationship with a recipient. He suggests that adding an address form to the end of a turn may serve to underscore a personal concern for a problem. Likewise, Bernardy (1996) maintains that the use of address terms at the close of exclamatory sentences may serve to underline the speaker's emotions. This corresponds to Kramer's (1975: 206ff) observation that in literary texts, address words usually emphasise activities such as, for instance, requests or promises. These findings suggest that the exclamation of "Jessie" at the end of Mama's turn signals a negative affective reaction (i.e. shock and/or exasperation) to Jessie's prior threat.

<sup>114</sup> The practice of building oppositional responses to accusations by means of negation has been discussed in Ch. 7.2 under the heading of "denial."

<sup>115</sup> Gruber (1996a: 152-157) also describes contradictions ("inhaltliche Widersprüche") that either dispute the proposition or the presupposition of the opponent's prior utterance. Similarly, Apeltauer (1978:197) states that such moves "beziehen sich nicht nur auf das Geäußerte, sondern auch auf das Mitbehauptete, die Präsuppositionen." Accordingly, he distinguishes two types of contradictions ("Zurückweisungen"): "solche, die sich direkt auf Äußerungen beziehen (Typ 1), und solche, die sich auf das Mitbehauptete beziehen (Typ 2)."

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<sup>116</sup> Likewise, Labov & Fanshel (1977: 86-87) maintain that speakers may refuse a preceding request for action by addressing to the prior speaker a negative assertion about one of the four preconditions.

<sup>117</sup> It is noteworthy that at first glance, the contradictions in examples (12) and (13) seem to challenge a presupposition expressed in the prior speakers' utterances. Both Olivia's "Don't be silly" as well as Mama's "Don't make jokes" look very similar to utterances such as "Quit being silly" or "Stop making jokes." In issuing the latter statements, a speaker presupposes that the addressee is being silly or is making jokes respectively. The important point is that presuppositions of these statements will remain constant even when the statements are negated. By contrast, the propositions contained in Olivia's and Mama's utterances do not remain constant under negation; rather they are reversed to the opposite.

<sup>118</sup> By contrast, Apeltauer (1978) distinguishes "Zurückweisungen," which involve the simple negation of the opponent's prior claim, from "Widersprüche," in which a negation is followed by a counter-assertion in the same turn: „Während mit der ZURÜCKWEISUNG eine Festlegung meist vermieden wird, beinhaltet WIDERSPRECHEN die Festlegung auf eine Gegendarstellung" (200).

<sup>119</sup> As described earlier, there is an asymmetry between going first and going second with one's view on a potentially controversial issue. While going first means having to state one's position (and, subsequently, developing a defence), going second allows to argue merely by attacking the opponent's position, for instance, by disputing the truth of their utterance.

<sup>120</sup> Similar means of maintaining opposition have been found in naturally occurring conflict sequences. For instance, in black working-class childrens' disputes, one of the most common ways of sustaining contradiction is through "recycling"; each of two opposing parties repeats a prior position with the effect that an extended series of disagreements is produced (cf. M. H. Goodwin 1983: 672-675; M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987: 212). Correspondingly, in a study of controversial TV-discussions, Gruber (1996a: 163) observes that the use of explicit rejections which are not followed by further accounts or justifications may result in "Interaktionskreisläufe," which emphasise and aggravate disagreement while preventing thematic progression. Several researchers have noted that such types of disputes are less complex in structure than disputes with justifications or supporting arguments (cf. Corsaro & Rizzo 1990; Eisenberg & Garvey 1981; Genishi & di Paolo 1982; Piaget 1926).

<sup>121</sup> It must be noted, however, that in this type of conflict termination, too, the disagreement is merely settled, not resolved. Settling a dispute means that the difference of opinion is simply set aside or suspended, temporarily or forever (e.g. by way of compromising or fighting it out). By contrast, a dispute is resolved only if the doubt about the standpoint expressed by one party is retracted because the argument offered to support it is convincing or if the other party withdraws the standpoint by virtue of realising that it cannot stand up to the criticism levelled against it (cf. van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992: 34; van Eemeren et al. 1993: 34-35).

<sup>122</sup> A corresponding format has been observed in naturally occurring dispute sequences in German. For instance, Spranz-Fogasy (2002) describes a rhetorical

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device that frequently occurs in conflict talk both in institutional and everyday contexts, which involves a challenge to the interlocutor's integrity, for instance, by accusing him or her of lying. Likewise, Spiegel (1995) discusses a disputing strategy by which the speaker alleges that the interlocutor has lied, typically by means of a meta-communicative utterance.

<sup>123</sup> Spranz-Fogasy (1986: 37) expresses a similar view. He states that this formulation involves the disqualification of the interlocutor and that the accusatory character of this utterance overlays the contradictory character.

<sup>124</sup> The close affinity between the activities of contradicting and correcting the prior speaker's utterance has been noted before in the literature on conflict interaction. For instance, in a study of controversial TV-discussions, Gruber (1996a: 153) differentiates contradictions ("direkte inhaltliche Widersprüche") which dispute the truth of the prior speaker's claim from those which challenge the accuracy of what the prior speaker has just said. He notes that the latter may focus on the appropriateness of terms used by the opponent in that utterance. Similarly, in a study of Afro-American children's disputes, M. H. Goodwin (1983: 670) states that "correction and disagreement are related kinds of next moves to prior moves in that they challenge either an element in prior speaker's talk or the action put forward by prior speaker."

<sup>125</sup> According to Matthews (1997: 322), a rhetorical question is "a question which does not invite a reply: e.g. *How can I climb that?*, if implying 'I can't climb it'."

<sup>126</sup> However, as pointed out by Schegloff et al. (1977: 378-379), some other-corrections and repair initiations are playful teasing of the original speaker. Feigned misunderstandings starting with "Y'mean" and similar markers are often used to call attention to ambiguous meanings, and thus to initiate joking. (For a more detailed discussion of this matter, cf. Jefferson (1985) and Schegloff (1987b)). However, such non-serious corrections do not occur in my data and, therefore, are not taken into account in the present discussion.

<sup>127</sup> For similar views on this matter cf. M. H. Goodwin (1983: 660) and Jefferson (1978: 3), who, in her discussion of "exposed" correction, states that "the business of correcting can be a matter of not merely putting things to rights ... but of *specifically addressing lapses in competence and/or conduct*" (original emphasis). Similarly, Norrick (1991), argues that unmodulated other-correction in second position signals the speaker's conviction that the prior speaker lacks the ability to produce the correction him- or herself, and that this perceived asymmetry in responsibility for correctness and ability to achieve it overrides the usual organisation of corrective sequences as described by Schegloff et al. (1977).

<sup>128</sup> This assumption is corroborated by M. H. Goodwin (1983, 1990: 1950-151) in her study of opposition moves in black children's disputes. She observes that "The utterance correcting a prior one frequently maintains a shape similar to that of the prior utterance with the exception of the item being replaced, produced with emphatic stress, and thus marking it as alternative to a similar item in the preceding utterance" (1983: 663). Similarly, in a study of cohesive devices in naturally occurring arguments, Schwitalla (2002: 112-113) finds one means of

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aggravating disagreement is prosodic reinforcement through accentuation of particular elements in an utterance.

<sup>129</sup> Leech (1999) suggests that turn-final vocatives usually combine an addressee-identifying function with a relationship-maintenance function. Similarly, Lerner (2003) finds that post-positioned terms of address tend to be used as a device to demonstrate a particular stance toward the relationship with a recipient. He suggests that adding an address form to the end of a turn may serve to underscore a personal concern for a problem. Likewise, Bernardy (1996) maintains that the use of address terms at the close of exclamatory sentences may serve to underline the speaker's emotions. This corresponds to Kramer's (1975) observation that in literary texts, address words usually emphasise activities such as, for instance, requests or promises. These findings suggest that the exclamation of the kin term "Mama" at the end of Wanda's turn at line 101 signals a specific affective reaction (i.e. shock, disbelief or exasperation) to Florene's refusal to get on the bus and serves to reinforce her plea to get on the bus.

<sup>130</sup> As Norrick (1991) shows, these observations about adult-child interaction, particularly parent-child interaction, may be generalised to any situation where speakers interact with significantly different ability in the language used, such as, for instance, talk between teacher and student, regardless of any age difference, as well as interaction between native and non-native speakers. He demonstrates that "common to all the situations in which a second speaker repeatedly took unmarked corrective actions was a perceived imbalance in background information and/or language ability toward the second speaker. In each of the situations, the second speaker acted to facilitate further interaction toward what he or she judged to be the common goal, and followed a pedagogical motivation with the corrective actions" (78). In these environments, the potential face threat of unmodulated corrections appears to be minimised, as the recipient apparently views the corrective action as friendly help in the ongoing interaction, rather than as a control move. Based on these findings, he argues that the organisation of corrective sequences depends on the relationship of the participants, particularly their perception of (differences in) their respective abilities to accomplish the action, as well as their interactional goals.

<sup>131</sup> As noted earlier, "a change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (Goffman 1986: 128).

<sup>132</sup> Similarly, in a study of children's disputes, M. H. Goodwin (1990) observes that "contest terms" such as "honey" or "dear heart" are frequently placed at the end of argumentative turns, with the talk preceding them being occupied with the work of displaying opposition (150-151). For instance, she finds that terms of address such as "dear heart" may be added at the close of corrective utterances done through substitution, in order to emphasise opposition (87). While these terms may be neutral modes of address or even terms of endearment as regards their semantic content, they appear to obtain their affective valence from the way in which they are embedded within a larger field of action. The findings in my data as well as Goodwin's observations show that within the context of a dispute, the production and interpretation of address terms is governed by the participants' orientation

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towards mutual opposition. This corroborates the suggestion made earlier that the dispute frame involves a change in footing (Goffman 1986: 128), which is displayed by the way disputants deal with the production and reception of utterances (or parts of utterances).

<sup>133</sup> Similar views have been put forward by several authors. For instance, Stein (2003) uses a markedness-based approach to establish the social, pragmatic and emotional meanings of the occurrences of particular terms of address. He argues that the norm in any address term system can also be viewed as the unmarked usage pattern from which deviations have to be accounted for as marked usages that convey some special meaning. Stein suggests that terms of address are "subtle linguistic indicators of social relations and the management of emotional states at a time" (251-252). Likewise, Mazzon (2003) states that one of the major points of interest in the research of address terms is to account for situations in which characters "deviate" from the expected usage pattern. According to her, such deviations mirror the complex and changing social attitudes of the characters towards each other as well as the changing levels of distance versus intimacy and power versus solidarity. She argues that address switches with the same interlocutor are most frequent in literary data because they contribute "to portraying interaction between characters" (225).

<sup>134</sup> According to Stein (2003: 44), the common denominator for all marked forms of terms of address is "some sort of emotional value (positive or negative)." Likewise Salmon (1967: 59) states that switches generally signal "moments of strong emotion, pleasant or otherwise."

<sup>135</sup> For that reason, Sadie's "I know" functions as a relevance challenge as described above.

<sup>136</sup> As Schwitalla (1997: 128-130) has pointed out in a study of institutional talk, imitating an interlocutor's prior utterance often expresses a derogatory attitude and may serve as a power move, i.e. a means of establishing an asymmetric relationship.

<sup>137</sup> The argumentative character of corrections has also been noticed by Piazza (1999), who states that "other-repairs" which address a specific trouble item in an utterance "convey ... the hostility existing between interlocutors and reflect the conflict" (1006).

<sup>138</sup> Leech (1999) speculates that vocatives are not used among close associates where neither addressee-identifying role nor their relationship-maintenance role is felt to be necessary, presumably, because the participants are completely sure of their mutual relationships. In an analysis of the spoken part of the London Corpus of Spoken and Written English (LSWE) corpus, he found that while in some conversations vocatives are extremely frequent, in mother-daughter interactions, no vocatives occur. However, in my data of mother-daughter disputes, vocatives are used quite frequently. While the participants are clearly close associates, they find themselves in relationship-negotiating interactions. As we have seen, address terms repeatedly occur in turn initial, medial and final position. However, in the context of a dispute, rather than summon attention or identify the addressee, they function as indicators of the complex and shifting interpersonal alignments of the

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characters towards each other as well as the continuously changing levels of distance versus intimacy and power versus solidarity.

<sup>139</sup> It is noteworthy that she formulates her directive as an imperative. Research into children's use of directives has shown that children very frequently use directives and that a large proportion of the directives they address to mothers are imperatives rather than mitigated forms of directives (Ervin-Tripp 1977; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1984; 1990). According to Ervin-Tripp (1977), the high rate of directives from young children in part results from their dependency. Moreover, there are structural limits to the kinds of directives children are capable of producing and hence, young children cannot be expected to produce complex formulations. Apparently, contextual factors, such as speakers' dependency and their linguistic competence may repeal the preconditions for valid requests for action as described by Labov & Fanshel (1977). Another reason for the high number of imperatives to mothers is that their social role is typically one of providing for the child's needs. Since their role is one of care-giving, requests usually do not present a major intrusion or unusual demand. In addition, as Ervin-Tripp et al. (1984) indicate, some control acts such as the daughter's "Tell me a story." uttered at bedtime in this extract may have companionship as their goal rather than the assertion of power. While such directives generally require that the addressee be in a better position than the speaker to fulfil the act requested, their primary goal is social. Therefore, Ervin-Tripp et al. label such utterances "person-centered control acts" (116). Consequently, to use Tannen's (2002) terms, although it is an attempt to affect the mother's behaviour and hence presents a "control manoeuvre", at the same time the daughter's imperative in the example above is also a bid for closeness, i.e. a "connection manoeuvre". Thus, this episode illustrates the interplay of control and connection, of power and intimacy, which, as noted earlier, is inherent in any relationship, conversation, and utterance.

<sup>140</sup> As Tsui (1994: 177) states, a temporisation to a request is often a face-saving device, as it avoids refusing a request outright. This supports Muntigl & Turnbull's (1998) claim that counterclaims are relatively less face threatening than other oppositional moves as, for instance, contradictions or relevance challenges.

<sup>141</sup> Correspondingly, Labov & Fanshel (1977: 86-87) note that speakers may refuse a preceding request for action by addressing to the prior speaker a negative assertion about one of the four preconditions.

<sup>142</sup> Corresponding techniques have been observed in prior studies on conflict talk. For instance, in his study of controversial TV discussions, Gruber (1996, 1998) reports that "pragmatic disagreement" expresses opposition not (only) by means of negation but with (turn-initial) pragmatic markers. The most frequent "disagreement markers" in his data were "No" and "(Oh) yes," "But" and "Well?". Similarly, Spranz-Fogasy (1986) notes that in his corpus of mediation hearings, "Alternativbehauptungen" were often preceded by other techniques to indicate the opposing character of the utterance and establish coherence. These include the disagreement tokens "No" and "Yes," which, as noted earlier, he refers to as "Reklamation."

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<sup>143</sup> Extract (11) also demonstrates that expressions of opposite polarity may not only preface further oppositional moves but can also stand alone in a turn (or in combination with an address term) as minimal (disagreeing) responses. For similar observations cf. Gruber (1996a, 1998) and Spranz-Fogasy (1986).

<sup>144</sup> According to Pomerantz (1984), "Well" is a dispreference marker, and as such serves to mitigate disagreement. However, as the examples from my data suggest, in the context of an already established dispute, turn-initial "Well" merely seems to signal that opposition is going to continue without necessarily functioning as a mitigating device.

<sup>145</sup> For instance, according to van Eemeren et al. (1993: 12) argumentation is "a procedure whereby two or more individuals try to arrive at an 'agreement'." The main function of argumentation thus consists "in managing the resolution of disagreements" (13). They propose a normative model of argumentative discourse as "the systematic exchanges of resolution-oriented argumentative moves" (16), which they label "critical discussion." As an idealised activity type, critical discussions do not contain accusations, orders, prohibitions, threats, and similar sorts of communicative acts since they are unsuitable to the resolution of disagreement (28ff). Threats, for example, are unsuited to the resolution of disagreement, since a disagreement cannot be resolved through strategies that end a discussion without mutual consent. Similarly, a criticism is not an acceptable move in a critical discussion, because it "is an act, whose point can be to express disapproval of the addressee - which is exactly the kind of thing that can sidetrack a discussion" (35, fn5). Correspondingly, Kotthoff (1989: 188) states that "Argumentation" is based on a contentious issue, which is to be resolved. Following Jacobs & Jackson (1989, 1982), she defines argumentation as "disagreement-relevant" expansions of adjacency pairs. "Disagreement-relevant" speech acts are those, which may lead to consent. These include, explanations, clarification requests, justifications, examples, and the like, but exclude insults, prohibitions, ridiculing the opponent, etc.

Similarly, "negotiation," according to O'Rourke (2001, Ch. 4), is driven by a sustained desire for agreement in the context of a difference of interests; successful negotiation will typically involve argumentation adduced in favour of initial positions and then a series of compromises. By contrast, "quarrels" are conversations fed by emotion that can lead to name-calling, shouting, and violence.

According to Schwittala (1987: 108) "Streitgespräche" are characterised by the use of "Äußerungen, die als Vorwürfe, Anklagen, Kritik, vielleicht sogar Schmähung, Beleidigung und Beschimpfung verstanden werden," which constitute attacks on the interlocutor's image. Correspondingly, Hundsnurscher (1993) maintains that "Streit" - as opposed to "Konflikt" - is distinguished by the occurrence of specific, "aggressive" or "expressive" speech acts, which lend this form of conflict talk its characteristic affective character. These "quarrelling-specific speech acts" include accusations, insisting and insults. For similar views cf. Apeltauer (1978); Fill (1989); Gruber (1996a); Knoblauch (1991, 1995); Messmer (2003, esp. Ch. 6); Rehbock (1987); Schank (1987); Spiegel (1995); and Walton (1992).

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<sup>146</sup> The validity of the maxim of clarity is illustrated by the following example from *My sister*, in which Madame Danzard challenges the comprehensibility of her daughter's contribution and demands that Isabelle make herself clear:

**example: *My sister* 9**

220 MADAME DANZARD What is the world coming to? I couldn't  
221 believe my eyes.  
222 ISABELLE But Maman-  
223 MADAME DANZARD There are no buts involved here.  
224 ISABELLE Maybe she didn't know, Maman.  
225 MADAME DANZARD (*Gathering up the cards.*) Of course she  
226 knew. She deliberately put it on and wore  
227 it. That sweater must have cost-  
228 ISABELLE (*Interrupting.*) Maybe-  
229 MADAME DANZARD I wonder if I pay them too much.  
230 ISABELLE Maybe she didn't buy it, Maman.  
231 MADAME DANZARD What?  
232 ISABELLE (*Rising, and walking to the staircase.*)  
233 Maybe it wasn't her.  
234 MADAME DANZARD What are you talking about?  
> 235 Make yourself clear, Isabelle.  
236 ISABELLE Maybe it was her sister who gave her that  
237 sweater. Didn't you see? It was handmade.  
238 MADAME DANZARD (*Softly.*) Oh. Yes. Yes. Now I see. (*Softer*  
239 *yet.*) I believe you're right, Isabelle.  
240 ISABELLE I think so, Maman.

At the beginning of this fragment, Madame Danzard expresses her exasperation at the fact that Lea, one of the Danzard's maids, is wearing a pink sweater for work instead of proper work clothes (lines 220-221). During the following course of the conversation, Isabelle repeatedly tries to point out to her mother that there may be an acceptable explanation for Lea's attire, but Madame Danzard will not listen to her daughter's objections (lines 222-229). When Isabelle at last finds her voice and points out that Lea may not have bought the sweater herself (line 230), Madame Danzard issues a first request for clarification (line 231). And when Isabelle rephrases her prior utterance (line 233) Madame Danzard more openly challenges the intelligibility of her daughter's utterance, asking: "What are you talking about?" (line 234), presumably in an irritated tone of voice, and demanding: "Make yourself clear, Isabelle." (line 235). In so doing, she calls into question the comprehensibility of her daughter's contribution and demands that she make the required amendments in accordance with the maxim of clarity. Only after Isabelle has elaborated on her preceding utterance, explaining what she was trying to say

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and providing evidence in support of her suggestion, does Madame Danzard concede that her daughter may be right (lines 238-240).

<sup>147</sup> Cf. also van Eemeren et al. (1993, Ch. 1) and Spranz-Fogasy (2002) on the preconditions for appropriate contributions to argumentative discourse.

In every dispute between parent and child, both cannot be right, but they may be, and usually are, both wrong. It is this situation which gives family life its peculiar hysterical charm. (Isaac Rosenfeld)

## 8 Summary and conclusion

In this study I have examined women's discursive practices in constructing and negotiating mother-daughter disputes and underlying power relationships as portrayed in contemporary plays by women. In this discussion of conflict and power in (fictional) mother-daughter interaction, I have pursued various strands of analysis. I have attended to the turn-by-turn details of (conflict) talk as situated interaction, I have looked at aspects of the (para)linguistic choices speakers make in designing and delivering their utterances, and I have considered the role of wider contextual aspects such as the participants' social identities and relationship, gender, etc. for the production and interpretation of talk. In doing so, I have drawn on a range of methodological frameworks that fall under the umbrella of interactional sociolinguistics, drawing, *inter alia*, on the analytical tools of CA, Gumperz' concept of contextualisation, Goffman's and Brown & Levinson's notion of face (work) and politeness.

I have investigated how the structural organisation of the mother-daughter disputes in my data differs from other interactional contexts and thus contributes to the framing or contextualisation of this specific speech activity. In particular, I have examined the relationship between various aspects of the sequential organisation of conversation and the procedures by which the adversative character of oppositional moves in my data is highlighted (rather than downplayed). In addition, I have looked at the types of argumentative actions that occur in my data and the ways in which these actions and their responses are formatted and sequenced to uncover the dynamics of the delicate power play that can take place between mothers and daughters and that is enacted in conflict talk.

This study thus contributes to a number of research fields, including work on intergenerational communication, gender and discourse, research on conflict talk, research on power in interaction, and stylistics. In this section, I will briefly

summarise the findings of the present study and discuss their significance.

### **Dramatic dialogue as a data source for conflict analysis**

The working hypothesis of this study has been that the procedures for the analysis of naturally-occurring conversation are profitable for the study of play-talk and, conversely, that dramatic dialogue is a rewarding research object for the analysis of everyday conversation, and in particular for the study of conflict talk. I have shown that, despite obvious differences, dramatic dialogue - especially in the case of modern plays - closely resembles ordinary talk, and thus can be analysed by drawing on procedures for the study of natural conversation. Dramatic dialogues are created by individuals who live and participate in the society they portray in plays. Accordingly, the interaction rendered in plays reflects how dramatists envisage the mechanisms of interpersonal exchange in real life. This is also, or especially, true for plays by women. Many plays by women can be considered slice-of-life accounts of family life, and in particular of mother-daughter relationships, reflecting the authors' personal experience as conversationalists and their observations as lay sociologists, as it were. Thus, play texts allow us to see how women perceive and conceptualise crucial relationship issues, such as power and conflict in mother-daughter relationships, and the manifestation of these issues in (verbal) interaction. Consequently, dialogues in plays by women have particular merit as a source of data for the analysis of conflict talk between mothers and daughters - and it is as such that they have been exploited here.

### **Conceptualisations of (interpersonal) conflict: causes versus process**

I have briefly discussed some of the ways in which conflict and its discourse has been conceptualised in order to delineate the scope of the study. Numerous investigators focus on the *underlying sources* of conflict and define conflict as goal incompatibility occurring between two or more individuals or groups (cf. Coser 1956; Deutsch 1971, 1973a, b; Fincham & Bradbury 1991; Galtung 1973; Shantz 1987; Thomas 1976; and Waln 1982). Such motive-centred conceptions put the accent on the preconditions of conflict. However, the presence of underlying sources does not necessarily mean that conflict will

arise. Moreover, while such emphases provide an insight into possible causes of conflict, they do not clearly identify an occurrence of conflict in ongoing interaction. Finally, although such motive-centred approaches reveal possible sources of conflict, the conflict itself, i.e. the ways in which conflict emerges, progresses and ends remain concealed. Other researchers focus on the *expression* of underlying incompatibilities in interaction as a defining characteristic of conflict. From this perspective, conflict is conceptualised as mutual opposition, the *overt display of differences* between (at least) two individuals or groups. Conflict is considered as a social activity, created and conducted primarily by means of talking (cf. Bavelas et al. 1985; Foss 1980; Frost & Wilmot 1978; Garvey & Shantz 1992; Mack & Snyder 1973; Rehbock 1987). In keeping with this interactional view of language as the means for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and for performing socially organised interactions between individuals, I view interpersonal conflict as an emergent process, which is jointly and sequentially accomplished by the participants in and through talk-in-interaction. Therefore, rather than analyse *why* people conflict and with what outcomes, we should examine *how* people conflict, i.e. the interactional procedures participants employ to accomplish the activity. Consequently, the analysis of the participants' verbal exchanges becomes the principal means of investigating conflict. In the present study, the emphasis has thus been on the interactive processes through which actual conflicts emerge and develop in order to study conflict as a structured and functional (inter)activity in and through which participants construct social reality. The interactive work can be observed by looking at the structural organisation of the talk, the speech acts used, and the formatting of turns and sequences.

### **Power in (conflict) interaction**

Previous research has shown that (verbal) conflict provides an important arena for the constitution of social relations, and in particular for the negotiation of power relationships. Like conflict, power is a large 'can of worms': there is a multitude of different conceptualisations of power. What it is, where it is located, and how it can be analysed are all questions that continue

to be hotly debated in the broad field of social and discourse studies. Following a rough overview of some of the major differences in the theories on power, a working definition of power was provided: power was defined as the potential ability of one actor to get her way and to control (influence) another's actions and/or beliefs. This potential rests on participants' access to power resources (or bases of power), which are mobilised by the actors involved in the course of their interaction in order to exert control. However, this ability or capacity to control others and influence social outcomes can be made manifest only in interpersonal dynamics. Thus, power is not a property or an attribute of individuals but part and parcel of social interaction. Moreover, power is not a static social category that is imposed by some pre-existing social structure; rather it is a dynamic relationship that is constantly (re)produced or modified in and through social interaction. Nevertheless, it is also grounded in social structures that exist prior to interaction. The relationship between power and talk in (conflict) interaction cannot be accounted for simply in terms of pre-existing social relations of power which determine discursive structures, but neither can it be accounted for in isolation from those relations (cf. Giddens' 1976, 1981, 1984 notion of the "duality of structure"). A key element in the approach I have taken in this study is that power relations in interaction are not fixed, predetermined states of affairs, but are constantly shifting and being redefined between participants on a very local level. From this very local moment-by-moment interactional perspective, power can be construed as one participant's ability to affect or influence what the interlocutor does in the next turn. These shifts can be observed by looking at the minute details of the talk. The social practice of language in interaction is a primary site where power relations can be seen to be constructed and resisted. Power relationships are joint interactional accomplishments; they are interactively and dynamically achieved, maintained, and transformed by the participants in and through interaction by drawing on various resources (both intrinsic and extrinsic to the interaction) to influence each other and affect social outcomes. A prime locus for the (re)construction and negotiation of power relationships is

conflict interaction, i.e. the open clash of control attempts and resistance.

### **Methodology**

The investigation of the interactive sequential procedures by means of which participants jointly accomplish conflict and thereby (re)construct and negotiate social (power) relationships calls for an analytic framework that takes into account both local (micro) aspects of talk-in-interaction and global (macro) aspects of social structure. The present study has therefore operated within an interactional sociolinguistic framework of discourse analysis. Interactional sociolinguistics integrates two aspects of context in the analysis of verbal interaction between mothers and daughters: the local, sequential context of talk and the global, socio-cultural context. In terms of methodology, it draws heavily on the analytical tools and findings of CA. That is, the study includes a micro-analysis of talk-in-interaction, examining the sequencing of actions (e.g. turn-taking organisation, preference organisation and tying techniques) and the design specifics of actions (e.g. syntactic structure, wording, prosody, as well as paralinguistic and nonverbal features). However, it also takes into account macro-level aspects of context such as background knowledge about socio-cultural, linguistic and interactional norms (e.g. norms of politeness) as well as such ethnographic particulars as participants' gender, age, social roles and relationships, and interactional history. By combining micro-level analysis of the form, content, and sequential placement of utterances with ethnographic and socio-cultural information, we are able to analyse how verbal conflict is jointly and sequentially accomplished by participants in interaction, how the activity type is contextualised or framed, and how participants (re)construct and negotiate their social identities and (power) relationships in the course of (conflict) interaction.

### **The sequential organisation of mother-daughter dispute**

Based on a concept of (interpersonal) conflict as a situated local interactional accomplishment which is jointly constituted by the participants through the mutual exchange of oppositional moves, I have analysed the particulars of talk-in-interaction to uncover how

the mother-daughter disputes in my data are mutually and interactionally created, conducted and terminated by the participants. I have shown that verbal conflict is sequentially and interactionally accomplished by the participants through the reciprocal exchange of oppositional moves in successive turns at talk. Verbal conflicts contain a minimum of three mutually opposing turns. They begin by means of an action that can be construed as arguable being opposed, with the initial opposition itself being treated as an arguable action in the subsequent turn. They proceed by way of each opposition being consecutively treated as an arguable action. They end when oppositional turns cease to be produced and other activities are taken up. Thus, the definition of verbal conflict that forms the basis of the present study is structural in nature; it specifies and locates an occurrence of conflict in successive turns at talk. Approaching verbal conflict in this way places the analytic focus directly on the sequential organisation of talk-in-interaction as the framework within which participants accomplish conflict talk.

I have also shown that, like conflict opening, conflict termination is jointly and sequentially accomplished by the participants. Verbal conflicts begin and proceed through mutually expressed opposition and end with mutual abstinence from opposing moves. Opposition ceases either because the conflict has been resolved or settled by the participants or because it has been dropped by one or both of them. Despite the stress on resolution as the principal way of terminating conflict in much of the literature on conflict, almost none of the mother-daughter disputes under analysis are resolved. Instead, conflict is terminated mostly through stand-offs. In fact, not only does resolution rarely occur in my data, it is apparently not a goal of the interaction. This finding suggests that the intergenerational arguments in my data serve other purposes than the reconciliation of opposing views. A crucial function of mother-daughter conflicts is the negotiation of power relationships (through the exchange of oppositional moves, i.e. control attempts and resistance), and this function is accomplished whether conflict is resolved or not. For instance, in closing an argument by means of submission, the participants jointly, sequentially establish a local hierarchy, thereby

reproducing or modifying global social structures - depending on the outcome of the dispute. Consequently, verbal conflict represents a crucial locus for examining the ways in which participants negotiate their status with respect to one another. The investigation of the process and outcomes of verbal conflicts between mothers and daughters reveals how the social order of the moment can be formulated, challenged, and reconstituted through talk-in-interaction. Although social structure is negotiated in every interaction, conflict talk constitutes a crucial activity through which participants (re)produce social organisation and negotiate social relationships. Thus, an understanding of how social structure is negotiated will benefit from an understanding of how arguing is accomplished. By examining closely the ways in which conflicts are mutually and interactionally constituted, sustained and terminated, we can obtain insights into the central role of conflict in the joint accomplishment and transformation of social order.

### **Aggravated versus mitigated disagreements**

Starting from a model of verbal conflict that views dispute as a joint sequential accomplishment, I have examined the relationship between various aspects of the sequential organisation of conversation and the procedures by which the adversative character of oppositional moves in my data is highlighted. Taken together, these sequential features allow a characterisation of the verbal conflicts in my data as aggravated conflicts on the structural plane of interaction: firstly, the mother-daughter disputes under analysis are characterised by suspending the preference for agreement order of ordinary conversation. The oppositional turns in my data are not structured so as to minimise opposition. Disagreements no longer show any features of dispreferred seconds as described in the CA-literature. They are not delayed sequentially by means of hesitation, nor are they pushed back in the construction of turns through the use of initial agreement tokens. On the contrary, instead of mitigating their disagreement through the use of reluctance markers, the women in my data emphasise the oppositional character of their turns by prefacing their utterances with various dissent markers. That is to say, in the construction of argumentative turns, participants display an orientation towards the

structural preference for disagreement. That means, rather than show a concern for the avoidance of open discord organising their talk so as to display deference to each other in accordance with the principles of face-saving or polite behaviour proposed by sociolinguistic research (Brown & Levinson 1987; Goffman 1967; Leech 1983), participants exhibit an orientation to the expectation of dissent and 'impoliteness.' This context-specific preference structure provides one conversational resource by means of which participants can frame or contextualise an ongoing (inter)activity as a heated dispute.

Secondly, in addition to the departure from the standard preference organisation, the mother-daughter disputes in my data are characterised by a change in the standard turn-taking mechanisms as described by Sacks et al. (1974). (Attempted) speaker changes do not occur at transition relevance places but at disagreement relevance points: opponents produce disagreements immediately when propositions, etc. in the current speakers turn occur which they do not agree with. By initiating their oppositional turns in the midst of, rather than at the possible completion of the opponent's turn, disputants can stress disagreement. This turn-incursive positioning reinforces disagreements in that it involves the deliberate interruption of a turn in progress. Interrupting is thus another structural means by which the speakers in my data accomplish aggravated opposition. Thus, apart from exchanging unmitigated disagreements, participants make the ongoing talk recognisable (both to each other and observers) as a heated dispute by packaging these disagreements in the sequential form of interruptions, placing them immediately at or shortly after a point in the opponent's turn at which an arguable action has been identified. This requires that the disputants monitor closely what the opponent is saying. Apparently, dispute talk is a highly structured activity progressing through the detailed sequencing of oppositional turns.

Interruptions are often thought to be involved in the establishment or maintenance of power in interaction. As the analyses in this study have shown, disputants can indeed exert a form of discursive control through the use of a particular interruption technique. Disputants may use post-response-initiation interruption as an arguing device to constrain the opponent's

participation options. The participants in my data can be seen to use this form of countering, or overriding a response-in-progress to deal with unfavourable responses. This device provides a conversational resource that can be used as a means of constraining the options open to the opponent in formulating a response - in particular a counter or a defence - to a preceding assertion or challenge. Countering or overriding a response-in-progress by means of an oppositional move packaged as an interruption provides a conversational resource that disputants can exploit to restrict the options available to the opponent for developing a response that is perceived as unfavourable to the interrupter's position. In this way, interruptions-cum-challenges can be employed to exercise control over both the structure and content of the ongoing interaction.

Thirdly, the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus display a noticeably high degree of formal cohesion between successive turns. In producing subsequent argumentative moves, disputants regularly tie not only to the type of action the prior utterance performs but also to various (structural and lexical) features it exhibits. Links to the opponent's as well as the current speaker's own prior turns are established and explicitly marked via recurrence of words, phrases, or whole utterances. The use of such cohesive ties between successive turns is a further structural device which the speakers in my data utilise in building aggravated oppositional moves and thereby making the ongoing talk recognisable as a heated dispute. On the one hand, by means of various types of contrastive mirroring, disputants exploit and manipulate the lexical and syntactic structure of the opponent's prior talk as a resource for shaping a counter to that very talk. In this way, a pronounced contrast is set up between the opponents' positions on the content level of interaction, while at the same time a close link is created on the structural and lexical level of interaction. The various types of contrastive mirroring are dialogical dispute devices in that they always relate locally to the opponent's preceding utterance, and therefore - despite the pronounced contrast they establish between participants' positions - display cooperativeness on the structural plane of interaction. Moreover, while argument has frequently been viewed negatively as a troublesome and disorderly type of talk, when

this activity is examined in detail, it turns out that it is in fact accomplished through a process of very intricate coordination between the disputants. In order to construct counters by means of contrastive mirroring, speakers must follow very closely what the opponent is saying. This shows that dispute talk is a highly orderly (inter)activity co-constructed by the participants through carefully orchestrated oppositional moves. On the other hand, disputants can proceed by means of skip-connecting, i.e. repeating (a part of) their own prior utterances, thus reinforcing their own positions. In heated phases of arguments, disputants frequently construct subsequent argumentative moves by simply repeating their own utterance more or less verbatim several times. While contrastive mirroring mainly serves to intensify the opposition between the disputants' positions, this practice of 'standing pat' is a monological arguing device, which primarily serves to reinforce the speaker's own point of view, and typically adds no new substantial information to the interaction.

The mother-daughter disputes in my corpus are thus distinguished by the following sequential features: (1) a change in preference organisation with disagreements being the structurally unmarked and hence preferred reactions to an opponent's turn; (2) a change in turn-taking organisation with an increased number of competitive overlaps and simultaneous stretches of talk; and (3) the frequent use of formal cohesive ties between turns of opponents or the same speaker. This structural organisation of conflict sequences provides a scale of emotional involvement in conflict episodes and thus allows us to differentiate between mitigated and aggravated forms of verbal conflict: if only one of the three discursive features occurs in a strip of talk, we are dealing with a mild controversy, whereas if all three occur, we are dealing with an emotionally charged dispute. On this view, the sequential organisation of the mother-daughter disputes in my data differs from other interactional contexts and thus contributes to the framing or contextualisation of these interactivities as fierce altercations. This impression is corroborated by the occurrence of paralinguistic and prosodic features such as volume increase, tone of voice, contrastive stress and noticeable emphatic intonation contours,

which also signal high emotional involvement and convey the oppositional character of turns and their level of intensity.

### **Argumentative speech act(ion)s in mother-daughter disputes**

Furthermore, I have looked at the speech act level of talk. I have examined what types of speech actions are chiefly used by the disputants in my data and how these actions and the ways in which they are packaged contribute to the adversarial character of the interaction. By looking at the form and sequencing of actions and their responses, I have investigated how, within the mother-daughter dyad, the social order of the moment is formulated, challenged, and reconstituted in the course of an ongoing dispute, thereby exploring the interplay of conflict and power in intergenerational interaction.

In my corpus, opposition is accomplished by means of various different illocutionary acts. Of these, the most prominent are: accusations, directives, demands for explanation, threats, relevance challenges, competence challenges, disqualifications, unfavourable comments, contradictions, corrections and counter-assertions. While these argumentative actions can in principle be performed in a mitigated or aggravated manner using direct or indirect constructions, in my data such actions are routinely produced in ways that reinforce rather than minimise their face-threatening potential. Instead of being preceded by mitigating devices such as pauses, agreement tokens and accounts, which delay and soften the disagreement, the oppositional moves in my corpus are often prefaced by dissent markers, which stress rather than downplay their argumentative character, and intensify rather than lessen the potential face-threat they carry. Moreover, paralinguistic, prosodic, and nonverbal cues such as, for example, increased volume, contrastive stress and exaggerated intonation contours, facial expression and gestures further emphasise the argumentative character of turns. The resulting face-threatening and sometimes even offensive nature of the speech actions contributes to the sense of hostility in the conflict sequences under analysis and their antagonistic nature. Both the kinds of speech actions employed and the ways in which these actions are packaged show that the disputants in my data display an orientation towards dissent and

confrontation rather than consent and harmony. Instead of mitigating disagreement and working towards the resolution of conflict, the participants design their turns so as to emphasise opposition and sustain conflict. This is further evidence that in the mother-daughter conflicts under analysis the interactional goal is not conflict resolution. The choice and design of argumentative actions as well as the ensuing affective and confrontational key of the exchanges contextualises the mother-daughter interaction in my data as emotionally charged disputes or quarrels and distinguishes them from other forms of conflict talk such as negotiation, discussion and argumentation. Moreover, the ways in which the argumentative actions and their responses are formatted and sequenced in my data uncover the dynamics of the delicate power play that can take place between mothers and daughters and that is enacted in conflict talk.

In conclusion, this study has shown that conflict, opposition and involvement are emergent social phenomena, which are mutually accomplished and displayed by participants through the ways in which they interact with each other. The co-construction of dissent and emotional involvement takes place on various communication levels: the sequential level, the speech-act level, the lexical level, and the level of paralinguistic and nonverbal communication. These levels mutually and reciprocally contextualise utterances as oppositional and the interaction as dispute. Structural aspects of conversation such as preference and turn-taking organisation and formal cohesion are among the discursive resources which conversationalists can employ to establish and make known the kind of (inter)activity they are engaged in, their alignment towards each other and the current topic of talk, and their degree of involvement in the interaction. Sequential phenomena such as unmitigated disagreements and corrections, confrontational interruptions, and preference for disagreement contextualise conflict talk, opposition and high emotional involvement and thus distinguish the mother-daughter interaction in my data as aggravated forms of conflict talk. However, structural properties are not the only conversational features that play a role in framing the interaction in my data as antagonistic. In addition to the sequential organisation of talk, both the kinds of speech actions employed and the ways in which they are designed so as to emphasise opposition and sustain disagreement

reveal that the disputants orient towards dissent rather than consent and thus contextualise the mother-daughter interaction in my data as emotionally charged disputes. Moreover, the mother-daughter conflicts are distinguished as quarrels by the display of negative affective reactions through a range of paralinguistic and prosodic and nonverbal features, which signal emotional agitation and further emphasise the argumentative character of turns. The resulting face-threatening and sometimes even offensive nature of the speech actions contributes to the sense of hostility in the conflict sequences under analysis, and their antagonistic nature marks them from other forms of conflict talk.

Although the present data were drawn from fictional mother-daughter disputes in plays, the practices of constructing conflict talk and building oppositional moves displayed therein are by no means restricted to fictitious argumentative exchanges. The structure of arguments between mothers and daughters as portrayed in contemporary drama very closely resembles that observed in naturally occurring disputes. In addition, research on real-life conflict talk in a range of interactional contexts has described a number of similar sequential phenomena in aggravated phases of conflict to those found in my data. Furthermore, corresponding argumentative speech act(ion)s and paralinguistic and nonverbal cues have been reported for natural and pseudo-natural conflict interaction. This confirms the assumption that playwrights rely on their (underlying) knowledge of how everyday conversation works in their creation of dialogue in drama. Dialogues in plays are a rewarding research object for the analysis of talk-in-interaction, and in particular of conflict interaction.

### **Implications of this study**

The findings of this study have several implications for the study of naturally occurring arguments. Firstly, they clearly show that, while conflict talk has often been evaluated negatively as a disruptive and disorderly type of discourse, on close examination, this activity turns out to be achieved via a process of very close coordination between the opposing parties. The sequential analysis of the mother-daughter interaction in my data has demonstrated that verbal dispute is highly orderly and progresses through the

meticulous sequencing of oppositional turns. For instance, placing argumentative interruptions immediately at or shortly after a point in the opponent's turn at which an arguable action has been identified requires that the disputants monitor closely what the opponent is saying. Likewise, building counters by means of contrastive mirroring requires that speakers pay exact attention to what the opponent is saying. In fact, the more aggravated opposition is at the content level, the more finely tuned the disagreeing moves are to those of the adversary both at the structural and the lexical level of interaction. This delicate adjustment requires that the participants closely follow what the other is saying at a range of linguistic levels. Thus, while at the content level of interaction, opposition is stressed and reinforced, at the structural and lexical level of talk, there is strong formal cooperation in these sequences of conflict talk. In other words, the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus are both highly confrontational and cooperative at the same time. These findings clearly show that describing argumentative discourse in terms of speech actions and restricting analysis to the sequencing of those actions overlooks a crucial aspect of the interaction, notably the vital importance of the surface structure of the talk for sequential organisation. Attention to aspects of the detailed sequencing of oppositional turns provides essential insight into how conversationalists in general, and mothers and daughters in particular, 'do disputing' in a sequentially organised way, proceeding turn by turn by producing talk that connects to prior talk.

The results of this study also show that such aspects as the relevance, truth, informativeness and clarity of conversational contributions apparently play an important part in the accomplishment of aggravated arguments just as in friendly conversation and can therefore become the focal point of oppositional moves. The participants in my data can be seen to orient to Grice's (1975, 1989) *Cooperative Principle* and the *Conversational Maxims* it encompasses. This evidences, once more, that, although they are unmistakably engaged in oppositional talk, disputants cooperate in constructing the (inter)activity of quarrelling.

In addition, the outcomes of this study have implication for the study of power in interaction. It clearly demonstrates that the relationship between power and discourse can neither be explained simply in terms of pre-existing social structures which determine discursive structures, nor can it be accounted for in isolation from those social structures. Power relations are not fixed, predetermined states of affairs, but dynamic relationships, which are continuously negotiated between participants on a very local level in talk-in-interaction, by utilising various resources (both intrinsic and extrinsic to the interaction) to exert control over each other and influence social outcomes. The social practice of verbal interaction, and especially of conflict-talk-in-interaction, is a key site where power relations can be seen to be (re)constructed and counteracted in the overt clash of control manoeuvres and resistance.

The findings of this study also have implications for gender research. My analysis also shows that female dramatists apparently conceive of mother-daughter interaction as much more confrontational than the stereotype of consent-oriented, cooperative, face-saving, harmonious female communication that can frequently be found in the literature on gender and discourse would have it.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, in the mother-daughter disputes in my corpus, the women's disputing style differs considerably from the feminine conflict style that has been observed in other argumentative contexts. Studies on gender specific disputing styles (Kotthoff 1984, 1989, 1991, 1992a, b; 1993c; Sheldon 1992, 1993, 1996; Tannen 1990, 1994b; Trömel-Plötz 1992, 1996) have claimed that women tend to avoid offensive arguing, evade direct confrontation, defend their positions less vehemently and show a stronger concern for harmony in the interaction than men.

For instance, Sheldon's (1992, 1993, 1996) work on the way conflict is managed in the talk of three-year-olds in the setting of the pre-school playgroup shows that girls use more mitigated forms than boys, and thus are involved in less conflict and are able to resolve conflict more easily when it arises. Sheldon (1996: 58) describes "double-voice discourse," a feminine conflict management strategy, "which has an overlay of mitigation, effectively softening the force of dispute utterances rather than escalating discord." She

argues that double-voice discourse does not conform to the classical definition of conflict as a heavy-handed adversarial activity but is better described as "negotiation," with participants communicating with one another so as to arrive at the settlement of some matter: "to arrive through discussion at some kind of agreement or compromise about something" (Grove et al. 1967, quoted in Sheldon 1996: 58).

Similar observations have been reported for adults, especially in the context of institutional discourse. In her studies of TV discussions and discussions between university students and lecturers, Kotthoff (1984, 1989, 1991, 1992a,b, 1993c) finds that in argumentative sequences, women generally use a more cooperative speech style and orient towards consent, whereas men use a more confrontational speech style and orient towards dissent. She finds that men tend to confront their co-participants with unmitigated positions. They defend their positions more vehemently, do not show an orientation towards consent and emphasise opposition. By contrast, women formulate their positions more openly, frequently express their understanding of the other's position, show an orientation towards consent and emphasise consent. She concludes that men seem to be more interested in pushing through their position, while women appear to be more interested in finding a solution that is acceptable for both parties.<sup>2</sup>

Correspondingly, in a study of TV discussions and interviews among women, Trömel-Plötz (1992, 1996) finds a range of properties of women's talk "pointing toward collaboration, creative atmosphere, balance of speaking rights, cooperative style, symmetry, and mutual support when women talk with each other" (1992: 581). These include the following mechanisms, which Trömel-Plötz (1992: 582) ascribes to "a basic fairness in the conversational practice of women, and which, according to her, "contribute to women's conversations being free of competition":

- a) Women frequently protect the face of an opponent by packing criticism, by implicit correction, or by withholding reproach where these would be appropriate. ...
- c) ... women withhold power gestures, e.g. they do not use toppings to show their superiority over an opponent; they do not devalue the content of other speakers.

d) Women are willing to compromise. ...  
(Trömel-Plötz 1992: 582)

In contrast, the women in my data frequently attack the face of an opponent by openly expressing criticism and reproach, or by explicit correction. Rather than withholding power gestures, they often pull rank to get their ways. They also recurrently devalue the content of other speakers. Moreover, instead to working towards compromise, the women in my data work to maintain disagreement.

While Trömel-Plötz (1992: 582) finds that women's conversational style is characterised by "respectfulness" in that "women withhold personal attack and insults," the women in my data frequently personally attack and insult each other.

Trömel-Plötz (1992: 582) reports that women's talk is marked by "conversational generosity." "Women are seen to be generous in complimenting and commending others and in attributing expertise to them" and "are seen to generously use speech acts, such as praise, compliments, and commendation, which evaluate other speakers positively" (587). These serve to construct competence for the other speakers, and contribute to the collaborative achievement of equality. Trömel-Plötz' findings are in sharp contrast to the results of this study. As the preceding analyses have shown, the mother-daughter disputes under analysis display a frequent use of unmodified competence challenges, disqualifications and unfavourable comments. Rather than attributing expertise to the interlocutor and collaborating to achieve equality, the women in my data recurrently employ argumentative devices that allow them a reciprocal display of expertise: they question the opponent's competence and thereby demonstrate their own superiority.

Among the mechanisms by which the women in Trömel-Plötz' data achieve equality are "refraining from power gestures like correction, reproach, and criticism" (583). In addition, "if power gestures are necessary, women are seen to give a motivation for them and/or tone them down; e.g., they pack criticism, depersonalise an attack, or modify a correction or objection" (584). By toning down power gestures, women refrain from constructing a higher status for themselves at the expense of others: "Using weaker means than would be available according to one's status has as a consequence that

status differences are equalized" (584). According to Trömel-Plötz (1992: 588), these findings show that "women handle power differently: rather than confirming hierarchical differences, they undo hierarchies and rankings in favour of a more equal distribution of power and rights." She even goes so far as to claim that the orientation towards cooperation and equality displayed in women's communicative behaviour also holds in the context of dispute:

Der Wille, mit anderen zusammenzuarbeiten, anstatt Autorität einzusetzen, die Macht zu teilen, anstatt auf Macht zu bestehen, der Wille zur Verständigung ist vielleicht die hervorstechendste Eigenschaft von Frauengesprächen. Daraus ergeben sich andere Züge wie z.B., dass ohne zu konkurrieren und ohne abzuwerten geredet wird. *Das gilt selbst noch im Streitgespräch - die Beiträge der Gegnerinnen werden als gleichgewichtig betrachtet, seien sie inhaltlich noch so unerwünscht; die Gegnerinnen werden nicht als Personen angegriffen oder zerstört.*

(Trömel-Plötz 1996: 372, my emphasis)

However, as the portrayal of mother-daughter interaction in my data suggests, this does not seem to be true for mother-daughter disputes, where power gestures are used frequently and with gusto. The women in my data explicitly criticise, reproach each other, use disqualifications, i.e. activities that stress rather than mitigate opposition. The recurrent use of such devices contributes to the sense of hostility in these exchanges and lends these conflict episodes their specific adversative quality. Trömel-Plötz (1992, 1996) describes the collaborative achievement of equality, whereas my data are characterised by continuous struggles for control: pre-existing hierarchies (i.e. status differences) are reproduced by the mothers by means of control acts such as accusations, directives, correction, etc. At the same time, such structures are actively challenged by the daughters by means of counter-accusations, refusals to comply with directives, etc.

Thus, the representation of women's talk in the plays investigated runs counter to the stereotype of female conciliatoriness and cooperativeness. In contrast to the prevalent stereotype that female interaction is organised with reference to politeness and a dispreference for dispute (Gilligan 1982: 9-10; Lever 1976: 482; Piaget 1965: 77), the women in my data do not

exhibit an orientation towards the creation of support and the minimisation of disagreement. On the contrary, the mother-daughter interaction in my data is characterised by the frequent occurrence of aggravated disagreement. Moreover, instead of displaying an orientation towards conflict resolution, the women can be seen to actively work to sustain conflict, and termination is achieved mostly through submission and stand-off rather than compromise.

The way women playwrights dramatise mother-daughter disputes by drawing on their own communicative experiences calls into question the notion that women generally display an orientation towards cooperative, supportive, face-saving interaction. Rather, it suggests that women's communicative practices are closely related to a range of features as, for example, the local interactional context, the participants' social identities and relationships, and their (shared) interactional history. This corroborates Eckert & McConnell-Ginet's (1992: 464) claim that "to understand precisely how language interacts with gender ... requires that we look locally, closely observing linguistic and gender practices in the context of a particular community's social practices."

These findings have implications for the study of women's communicative practices in naturally occurring conversation in so far as they show that in examining women's talk-in-interaction, it is necessary to abandon generalisations about and stereotypes of female discourse in favour of a context-sensitive approach taking into account sociological and situational factors such as the speaker's social identities and relationships, their (shared) interactional history, and the local context of the interaction.<sup>3</sup> By looking at women's communicative strategies in the context of mother-daughter dispute as portrayed in contemporary plays by women, we can reconstruct the tacit knowledge by which women organise verbal conflict in a specific speech community or community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet's 1992), namely the family. Rather than avoiding offensive arguing, evading direct confrontation, toning down disagreement and showing a strong concern for harmony, the women in are shown to have extended arguments constructed through turns that highlight and escalate rather than mitigate disagreements. Rather than using strategies which are typically associated with a female speech style such as empathy, an

orientation towards consensus, personal closeness and harmony and camouflaging their power through polite ways of speaking (cf. Camras 1984: 263), the women in my data employ antagonistic discourse strategies, explicitly categorising the interlocutor in negative ways, etc. in asserting their positions and interactively (re)establishing status hierarchies. The way mother-daughter interaction is portrayed in my data suggests that in the context of mother-daughter dispute, gender seems to be less salient than the speakers' parent-child relationship. Apparently, family dispute, especially between mother and daughter, is a speech activity that is governed by different rules and expectations and allows different contributions than conflict episodes in institutional settings such as the TV interviews and discussions analysed by Trömel-Plötz and Kotthoff.

Finally, the findings of this exploratory study may have implications for family counselling and family therapy. Family arguments, including parent-child arguments, are of great importance in family therapy. Detailed interaction analyses might provide a basis for suggestions to improve family therapy and family counselling training and for the development of communication training programmes that could help family members (in particular mothers and daughters) to improve their conflict resolution techniques and interpersonal communication skills to ultimately improve their family relationships.

### **Generalisability of the findings**

My analysis has demonstrated some of the ways in which conflict and power relations can be accomplished and negotiated in mother-daughter interaction as portrayed in contemporary plays by women. It does not by any means encompass all of the ways in which conflict is achieved and in which power is negotiated in mother-daughter interaction. The participants' discursive practices reported here represent realisations of argumentative actions and of the activity type dispute. The list of realisation is not comprehensive, and considering how creative people are in the realisation of communicative actions in ongoing talk-in-interaction, a comprehensive list may not be possible.

This raises several questions, which regularly emerge in conjunction with an inquiry like the present one, regarding the generalisability of the findings of such a study. Since my analysis of conflict and power was limited to one specific interactive constellation: mother and daughter, readers may find themselves wondering whether conflict and power are negotiated in similar (or, indeed, different) ways in other constellations.

For example, if the disputants had been father and daughter, would there be other forms of interaction? Or would the interactions be similar, demonstrating that the parent-child relationship is the primary factor influencing the negotiation of conflict and power relations rather than the gender of the parent. In a similar vein, the question might be posed concerning the effect of the child's gender on the interaction. More generally, we could ask whether similar discursive practices might be found in all instances of parent-child interaction or even of intergenerational interaction in general.

Likewise, assuming that authors draw on their own communicative experience in constructing dialogue in play, we might ask what (if any) impact the gender of the playwright might have on the way parent-child interaction in general or mother-daughter interaction in particular is depicted in plays.

Finally, the question might be posed whether the fact that this study is based on a corpus of constructed dialogues affects the results, i.e. whether similar discursive practices might be found in instances of naturally-occurring mother-daughter interaction. This is but a small sample of some of the questions which might be raised on the basis of the present inquiry. While all these questions are interesting and worth further investigation, it was not the aim of the present study to pursue them.

Qualitative research does not provide answers to questions concerning generalisability in the usual sense of the word. As an instance of the research orientation, the present inquiry is similarly unable (and does not aim) to answer questions about how often the arguing practices outlined here will occur in which settings and between which (groups of) actors. What it can do, however, is provide a way of looking at - a window on - conflict and power. By looking through this (or a similar) window, interactional

ways of accomplishing conflict and power can be investigated in other similar, or even different, contexts.

Thus, the general relevance of the present inquiry lies in this methodological sense, i.e. in developing a way to observe and investigate conflict and power (and gender) in interaction, rather than in the empirical generalisability of its results.

Besides this general methodological consideration, the research topic itself warranted an exploratory, in depth investigation into how conflict and power is accomplished in the specific context of mother daughter-interaction in the fictional world of plays. By showing how conflict and power are achieved in a limited number of cases, I was able to discover and delineate recurrent patterns, which can, ultimately serve as a starting point for further research. The activity type 'dispute' is realised in specific ways in specific situations and by specific participants but, as this study suggests, it is realised in similar ways by mothers and daughters. Moreover, since mother-daughter relationships are basic, the same patterns may occur in other kinds of close relationships. Future research will determine whether the findings and conclusions of this study hold more generally.

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## Notes for chapter 8:

<sup>1</sup> Some models of female interaction have proposed that, while male speakers exhibit a competitive and more confrontational style of discourse, women use a more cooperative, supportive and harmonious style of speech (Coates 1989, 1991; 1994; 1998; Maltz & Borker 1991; Tannen 1990: 149 ff). Correspondingly, it has often been assumed that conflict, argument, and opposition are a male domain.

<sup>2</sup> However, Kotthoff emphasises that these are merely tendencies in men's and women's communicative behaviours: „Ich verwende die gefährliche Ausdrucksweise vom ‚männlichen und weiblichen Gesprächsstil‘ als idealtypisch verkürzte Kategorien. Es ist aber davon auszugehen, dass Frauen und Männer ein mehr oder weniger breites stilistisches Repertoire beherrschen, welches sie je nach Kontext unterschiedlich zur Anwendung bringen“ (Kotthoff 1993c: 92). „Es besteht kein Zweifel, dass die in den 70er Jahren aktuelle These, Frauen und Männer sprächen kontextübergreifend anders und dies sei einer unterschiedlichen Sozialisation anzulasten, heute in dieser Schlichtheit nicht mehr vertreten werden kann“ (Kotthoff 1996a: 9). „Heute sehen wir, dass es kaum Sprechverhalten gibt, die kontextübergreifend so oder so von Frauen und Männern unterschiedlich ausgeübt werden... Jedes Geschlecht beherrscht eine ganze Bandbreite von Stilen, die aber je nach Kontext unterschiedlich angewendet werden und den Kontext als solchen mitproduzieren ... Die bedeutende Frage lautet nicht, wie Frauen und Männer reden, sondern wie sie durch welche Arten von Rede welche Kontexte aufbauen und was dies für sie bedeutet“ (ibid: 12, my emphasis).

<sup>3</sup> Wodak (1997: 1-2) states that some of the research on gender “has isolated the variable of sex/gender from other sociological or situational factors and has made hasty generalizations about genderlects.” She proposes that “a context-sensitive approach which regards gender as a social construct would lead to more fruitful results” (ibid). Moreover, she suggests a look at gender “in connection with the socio-cultural and ethnic background of the interlocutors, and in connection with their age, their level of education, their socio-economic status, their emotions and the specific power-dynamic of the discourse investigated.” For similar views, cf. also Cameron 2003; M. H. Goodwin 2003; Günthner 1992; Kakavá 2001.

They seemed almost, with staring at one another, to tear  
the cases of their eyes. There was speech in their  
dumbness, language in their very gesture.

(William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*)

## **9 Appendix: drama-reading conventions**

As discussed in chapter 2, the empirical part of this study is based on a corpus of eleven contemporary plays by women. More precisely, I am looking at play scripts, rather than transcriptions of recordings of theatre performances or naturally-occurring talk. As a result, certain crucial aspects of conversation such as intonation patterns and volume of voice are already encoded in the written text, which have to be decoded by the reader/analyst; they are given an abstract visual representation in written form (e.g. punctuation). In this section, following a brief discussion of the role of paralinguistic and nonverbal cues in the production and interpretation of meaning in interaction, I will present a set of 'drama-reading conventions,' to illustrate how I have dealt with the information the play texts provide about features of the characters' speech.

In everyday face-to-face conversation, both speakers and hearers use verbal (linguistic and paralinguistic) and nonverbal cues to communicate effectively. Speakers, for example, may mark the end of an utterance using non-linguistic cues such as intonation, eye contact, a nod, or some combination of these; hearers may provide speakers with various feedback tokens demonstrating understanding such as the verbal "uh-huh" and the nonverbal nod (cf. M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987). Body language and speech have a mutual and reciprocal relationship, each contextualising the interaction (Fornel 1992: 172-173; Kendon 1994: 193). Although both speech and body language may be understandable apart from each other, they usually work together, mutually providing for their interpretive context. Discourse analytic studies have demonstrated this "reciprocal contextualisation" (Fornel 1992: 1972) for a variety of head and body movements, including gaze, nods, body posture, facial expressions, hand gestures and physical distance or proxemics (C. Goodwin 1986; C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin 1990; M. H. Goodwin 1990; M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 1987; C. Heath 1984, 1986, 1992; Schegloff 1984; Streeck & Hartge 1992). These nonverbal cues are used by both speakers and

recipients in the co-construction of meaning. They can serve a range of different functions within various communicative environments. They may refer retroactively to previous speech, occur simultaneously with the related utterance, or proactively alert the recipient as to what type of speech (e.g. agreement vs. disagreement) is going to follow.

Literature is purely graphic and, therefore, emphasises the verbal aspect of communication. However, as the examples discussed in this study demonstrate, the representation of face-to-face conversation in drama clearly includes nonverbal aspects of communication. All of the play texts in my corpus contain descriptions of the fictional characters' head and body movements in the stage directions, thus displaying the dramatists' awareness of the interplay of speech and body language. Just as in naturally occurring conversation, body movement as represented in dramatic dialogue may occur simultaneously with or independently of speech. As Korte (1997) and Person (1999) have shown, body language in literary discourse contains much - if not all - of the functional variety that is found in natural communication and can be analysed with the same functional categories.

The co-construction of meaning in interaction is also influenced by the participants' competence in producing and recognising appropriate prosodic features of utterances. It is not only what is said but also how it is said (i.e. the pitch, tone and volume of the speaker's voice) that provides the context for the production and interpretation of meaning. In fact, a multitude of conversational features including lexis, syntax, prosody, body language, and the sequential context of utterances mutually and simultaneously contribute to meaningful interaction in everyday talk. Prosody by definition occurs simultaneously with verbal items. Prosodic research (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996) suggests a variety of functions for prosody such as conveying emotional and attitudinal information.

As a graphic medium, writing cannot reproduce prosody completely. This is evident in the fact that no standard transcription system for prosody has been adopted yet. For example, the studies in Couper-Kuhlen & Selting (1996) use various transcription systems. As Couper-Kuhlen & Selting (1996: 9) remark:

Until the basic categories relevant to a prosody-for-conversation are agreed upon, it seems futile to expect notational standardization.

Despite such difficulties, although dramatic dialogues may not represent the fullness of prosody used in naturally occurring conversation, they clearly include information about prosodic features of the characters' speech.<sup>1</sup>

To recapitulate so far, body language and prosody - two important aspects of everyday talk that remain difficult to represent in the graphic medium of writing even for current researchers in the respective fields - are also represented in dramatic discourse. Moreover, when writers do represent such conversational elements, the representations in their literary contexts function as the elements do in their conversational contexts.<sup>2</sup> In the following, I will look at the ways in which paralinguistic and nonverbal aspects of conversation are depicted in my data. Detailed analyses of the following examples are provided in chapters 6 and 7. I will first look at the ways in which prosody is represented in the dramatic dialogues under analysis.

In her diachronic study of punctuation, Bergien (1994: 243) found that in 16th and 17th century English, "punctuation was primarily guided by prosodic consideration" and is often still related to prosodic features. Therefore, punctuation is one means of compensating for the limitations of writing to depict prosody, as the following examples from my data illustrate.

#### A COMMA TYPICALLY INDICATES A LEVEL, CONTINUING INTONATION:

**example (1): Avenue**

365 MOTHER I think you'd better look for a job. You got a  
> 366 body, go out and work, earn your own keep.

A PERIOD DENOTES A FALLING TONE IN THE PRECEDING ELEMENT:

**example (2): 'night Mother**

1373 MAMA I married you off to the wrong man, I admit  
> 1374 that. So I took you in when he left.  
> 1375 I'm sorry.  
> 1376 JESSIE He wasn't the wrong man.

DOUBLE QUOTATION MARKS INDICATE SPEECH SET OFF BY A SHIFT IN THE SPEAKER'S VOICE:

**example (3): Home**

> 189 OLIVIA She said, "Mrs. Dunn. It's a dream come  
190 true for me to have your house. I wouldn't  
> 191 do a thing to it." I was so flattered.

A QUESTION MARK COMMONLY DENOTES RISING INTONATION IN THE PRECEDING ELEMENT, marking, for instance, requests for information:

**example (4): Perfect days I, 2**

> 25 SADIE Zat all you got?  
26 BARBS No, there's all these.

**example (5) Raisin I, 1**

> 27 MAMA What time you be home from school today?  
28 BENEATHA Kind of late. (*With enthusiasm.*) Madeline is  
29 going to start my guitar lessons today.

A QUESTION MARK FOLLOWING REPETITION TYPICALLY INDICATES A FALLING-RISING INTONATION PATTERN, denoting that the repeated lexical item is called into question:

**example (6): My sister 3**

45 MADAME DANZARD ((...)) The best cook we've had in years.  
46 ISABELLE Oh I don't know - Marie wasn't so bad.  
> 47 MADAME DANZARD Marie? Please. The way she cooked a pot au  
48 feu - ahhh - It still makes me shudder.  
50 ISABELLE You exaggerate, Maman.  
> 51 MADAME DANZARD Exaggerate? I'm being kind. Marie would  
52 have murdered a veal like this.

This extract clearly shows how prosodic features of the characters' speech (marked by punctuation) and the sequential context of utterances work together in providing the context for the production and interpretation of meaning.

**AN EXCLAMATION MARK COMMONLY INDICATES A RAISED VOICE OR SHOUTING.** It may be used to indicate emotions such as shock, astonishment, horror, or anger:<sup>3</sup>

**example (7): My mother I, 7**

130 DORIS He's reversing straight into my lily of the  
> 131 valley!

**example (8) Raisin I, 1**

127 BENEATHA Well - neither is God. I get sick of hearing  
128 about God.  
> 129 MAMA Beneatha!

**example (9): 'night Mother**

1953 MAMA I can't just sit here and say O.K., kill  
1954 yourself if you want to.  
1955 JESSIE Sure you can. You just did. Say it again.  
> 1956 MAMA (*Really startled.*) Jessie! (*Quiet horror.*)  
> 1957 How dare you! (*Furious.*) How dare you!

**CAPITALS AND ITALICS CONVENTIONALLY SHOW HEAVY STRESS OR INDICATE THAT THE ELEMENT IS LOUDER THAN THE SURROUNDING DISCOURSE:**

**example (10): Home**

344 MARY JANE But Ma. I can't go back to California. I  
345 don't have any money to go anywhere. As soon  
> 346 as you called me and **ASKED** me to come here I  
347 started thinking about all kinds of things  
348 and it started looking up again. Coming back  
349 kind of washed away all my mistakes. I can't  
350 explain it but it did. It did.

**example (11): Stuck 6b**

135 MOM Have a drink.  
136 LULA I don't want one.  
> 137 MOM BORING, don't want to have a drink with your  
138 mom.

**example (12): 'night Mother**

275 JESSIE Dawson will get here just in time to help  
276 you clean up. Go ahead, call him. Then call  
277 the police. Then call the funeral home. Then  
> 278 call Loretta and see if *she'll* do your nails.

Prosodic information can also be represented by explicit references to the tone or pitch of the speaker's voice in the stage directions (in parentheses and italicised). In these cases, the nonverbal is 'translated' into the verbal. Prosodic aspects of utterances can be designated by specific lexical items. For instance, THE LEXICAL MEANINGS OF CERTAIN VERBS (E.G. "CHALLENGE") AND ADVERBS (E.G. "SARCASTICALLY," "PETULANTLY," "KINDLY," ETC.) ARE ROUTINELY ASSOCIATED WITH INTONATION:

**example (13): Avenue**

188 MOTHER Thinking ain't enough. Do something if  
> 189 you're so smart. (*Challenging her.*) Just  
190 what can you do?  
191 OLGA Nothing!

**example (14): Avenue**

384 MOTHER You know I had champagne at his place.  
385 (*Crosses to bureau.*)  
> 386 OLGA (*Sarcastically.*) Really?

**example (15): Tell me**

172 MOTHER Big girls don't cry.  
> 173 DAUGHTER (*Petulantly.*) I'm not a big girl.

**example (16) Raisin I, 1**

120 BENEATHA I am going to be a doctor and everybody  
121 around here better understand that!  
> 122 MAMA (*Kindly.*) 'Course you going to be a doctor,  
123 honey, God willing.

Aspects of timing are also marked by punctuation. A SINGLE DASH OR ELLIPSIS WITHIN A SPEAKER'S TURN FOLLOWED BY A RE-START CUSTOMARILY INDICATES AN INSTANCE OF SELF-INTERRUPTION:

**example (17): Raisin I, 1**

> 61 BENEATHA I don't flit! I- I experiment with different  
62 forms of expression-

**example (18): Neaptide II, 3**

43 JOYCE Yes, normal custody. Not one who deals  
> 44 with... you know... special circumstances.

In both of these extracts, the speaker interrupts herself and then produces a re-start. In ordinary conversation, this is a routine way of stalling time. In example (17), the interjacent discourse marker "you know" following the minimal pause acts as a "filler." This hesitation phenomenon gives the speaker a second to think about what she wants to say.

PAUSES WITHIN A SPEAKER'S TURN CAN ALSO BE EXPLICITLY MARKED IN THE STAGE DIRECTIONS (IN PARENTHESES AND ITALICISED):

**example (19): My mother I, 7**

> 140 DORIS Margaret, that's enough! (*Pause.*) After all,  
141 he is going to marry an English girl.

Although dramatic discourse is limited by its linear, graphic mode of presentation, there are various ways by which sequential aspects of talk such as simultaneous speech and interruptions can be represented in the exchanges that occur between fictional characters. For instance, A SINGLE DASH OR ELLIPTICAL PERIODS AT THE END OF A SPEAKER'S UNCOMPLETED UTTERANCE COMMONLY MARKS THE ONSET OF OVERLAPPING TALK AND INDICATES INTERRUPTION:

**example (20): My sister 9**

220 MADAME DANZARD What is the world coming to? I couldn't  
221 believe my eyes.  
> 222 ISABELLE But Maman-  
223 MADAME DANZARD There are no buts involved here.

**example (21): Tell me**

308 MOTHER One more word and up to your room.  
> 309 DAUGHTER But...  
310 MOTHER Another word, and up you go.  
> 311 DAUGHTER But Mom...  
312 MOTHER Alright, that's it. That is it. I've  
313 heard enough. It might be a good idea,  
314 young lady, if you went up to your room.

**example (22): My mother I, 7**

136 MARGARET That's typical, you think all Americans  
137 are brash and wear loud check shirts and  
138 chew gum and want to marry English girls.  
> 139 You're just prej-...  
140 DORIS Margaret, that's enough! (*Pause.*) After  
141 all, he is going to marry an English girl.

In each of these extracts, one speaker ends her utterance at a non-completion point because of the other speaker's overlapping speech. Neither "But Maman-" nor "But (Mom)..." nor "You're just pre-..." constitutes a complete proposition.

INTERRUPTION CAN ALSO BE INDICATED BY RESPECTIVE LEXICAL ITEMS (E.G. "INTERRUPTING," "CUTTING OFF," "OVERLAPPING") IN THE STAGE DIRECTIONS (IN PARENTHESES AND ITALICISED):

**example (23): My sister 12**

17 ISABELLE But it won't be ready in-  
> 18 MADAME DANZARD (*Interrupting.*) It will be ready.  
19 She hardly has anything to do.

**example (24): Neaptide II, 3**

46 JOYCE (*Sighs.*) I just wish...  
> 47 CLAIRE (*Cutting her off.*) It's no good bloody  
48 wishing, is it? Please get on with it.

In both of these examples, the first speaker is clearly interrupted by the second as denoted by the first speaker's speech ending abruptly without syntactic closure and the lexemes "interrupting" and "cutting her off" in the stage directions.

In the extract below, interruption is indicated by the lexical item "overlapping" in the stage directions. While the cut-off of the first speaker's turn is not explicitly marked, the term "overlapping" suggests the onset of the second speaker's talk prior to the completion of first speaker's speech:

**example (25): Home**

265 MARY JANE That's such a lie! How could you say that?  
> 266 OLIVIA (*Overlapping.*) Oh, keep your voice down.  
> 268 MARY JANE (*Overlapping.*) He got laid off that time,  
269 Ma! Laid off!

Apart from signifying prosodic features, STAGE DIRECTIONS (IN PARENTHESES AND ITALICISED) INDICATE A VARIETY OF NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOURS, INCLUDING GAZE, BODY MOVEMENTS, BODY POSTURE, FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND HAND GESTURES. These may occur simultaneously with speech, e.g. reinforcing the illocutionary force of the utterance, or independently of speech, e.g. by way of answers, as in examples (26) and (28).

**example (26): Avenue**

181 MOTHER Your father's dead, Olga, the no-good  
182 sonavabitch is dead and buried.  
> 183 OLGA (*Gives her a defiant look.*)  
184 MOTHER Whatsa matter with you? You know it's true.

**example (27) Avenue**

149 OLGA Yes, I know. Didn't you ever get tired and  
150 sore from all that work?  
> 151 MOTHER (*Stops activity and looks angrily at her.*)  
152 I'm thinking of two ways to take what you  
153 just said. And if it's the bad way I'm  
154 thinking to be right, you're gonna get a bar  
155 of soap in your mouth.

**example (28): Avenue**

231 MOTHER Hey, one day I bought a piece of gum, the  
232 kind that has the fortune in it and what do  
233 you think it said?  
> 234 OLGA (*Shrugs and turns away.*)  
235 MOTHER Guess, go on, take a guess.  
> 236 OLGA (*Shrugs again.*)

**example (29): Home**

300 OLIVIA Just shut up. Shut up.  
301 MARY JANE You shut up. You just shut up forever. How  
> 302 about that? (*She rushes into the bedroom.*)  
303 I'm so sick of this.

**example (30): 'night Mother**

2216 MAMA You said you wanted to do my nails.  
> 2217 JESSIE (*Taking a small step backward*) I can't. It's  
2218 too late.

**example (31): 'night Mother**

> 178 MAMA (*Coming over now, taking over now.*) What  
179 are you doing?  
180 JESSIE The barrel has to be clean, Mama. Old  
181 powder, dust gets in it...  
182 MAMA What for?  
183 JESSIE I told you.  
> 184 MAMA (*Reaching for the gun.*) And I told you, we  
185 don't get criminals out here.  
> 186 JESSIE (*Quickly pulling it to her.*) And I told  
187 you... (*Then trying to be calm.*) The gun is  
for me.

**example (32): Alto I,1**

23 WANDA Let's ask it anyway. I bet it knows.  
> 24 FLORENE (*Tentatively placing her fingers on the  
25 planchette.*) I just couldn't face another  
26 move any time soon.

**example (33): Alto II, 1**

> 51 FLORENE (*Points to the envelope.*) What is that?

In addition to editorial comments by the authors, the examples discussed in the present study also entail **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY THE ANALYST**. These **ARE ENCLOSED IN DOUBLE PARENTHESES**:

**example (34): Alto II, 4**

33 FLORENE Wanda, you bridle your tongue right now, and

34 apologize to everybody for being rude.

35 WANDA No! I will not!

36 FLORENE Wanda, you heard me.

37 WANDA I won't say something just because you want

38 me to. It is gossip, because Miz Lockwood

39 wouldn't act that way. And I won't take back

40 what I said.

> ((The argument terminates with Althea Lockwood entering the stage.))

**ELLIPTICAL PERIODS IN DOUBLE PARENTHESES INDICATE THE OMISSION OF TEXT:**

**example (35): Alto II, 1**

123 FLORENE See how brave Miz Hattie is?

124 WANDA It's easy for her to be brave. She's old and

125 already had her life. I haven't even started

126 to live yet.

127 FLORENE I haven't either. Not really.

128 WANDA You have too. You've been to Galveston and

129 Wichita Falls and had cocktails at nightclubs.

> ((...))

138 WANDA And you've had a chance to sing.

139 FLORENE I never had a chance to sing!

140 WANDA Yes, you did! You just didn't do it!

141 FLORENE The only time I ever got to sing was at

142 that nightclub in Galveston.

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**Notes for chapter 9:**

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the representation of prosody in fictional narrative cf. Person (1999, Ch. 5).

<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly, Khader (2000: 81) notes that "drama texts are full of paralinguistic features which function to communicate intention and feelings." In addition, non-linguistic features of communication such as proxemics and kinesics "help to communicate interpersonal relations as well as to create the contextual atmosphere in dramas" (82).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Person (1999: 83) for a similar reading of exclamation points in fictional narratives.

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