



Transparent Discursive Effects in Argument Talk Construction: A Multiple Categorisation Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In this article, argument talk is considered from a discursive perspective, utilising Lacanian and Gadamerian theory. Argument talk between a mother and daughter in 3 familial contexts was analysed to explore how talk is locally constructed by participants mobilising socially constructed discourses through micro discursive practices. Data from everyday arguments was collected from the Santa Barbara Corpus for Spoken American English and analysed using Multiple Categorisation Analysis, a form of analysis that highlights how talk participants perform discursive “work” by establishing categories that infer governing social and moral knowledge. Argument talk was seen to be constructed gradually and motivated over the course of sequential discursive work. Because of this, discursive work is argued to motivate argument talk through the construction of narratives that undermine participant’s conceptions of self and world. Talk is thus conceptualised as a constructive process of a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2004) which is guided, in a Lacanian sense, by the governing social contexts that are mobilised therein (Zizek, 2006).

Argument talk was found to construct, and to be constructed, through narratives that obscure a discursive conception of talk, being constructed instead through an essentialist epistemology in which “argument claims” are understood to be embodied within talk participants. Further, as argument talk became more volatile, this epistemology becomes more prevalent, leading to further escalation and perpetuation of argument talk. To this end, a case is made for argument talk to be understood in discursive contexts, the use of Gadamerian and Lacanian theory in discursive research, and the place of discursive therapy in countenance of governing discourses in everyday talk.

KEY WORDS:	MULTIPLE CATEGORISATION ANALYSIS	ARGUMENT TALK	SYMBOLIC ORDER	FUSION OF HORIZONS	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM
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“Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says” – (Gadamer, 2004; pp 387)

Introduction

The Psychologisation of Argument Talk

Despite Freud’s turn to language as the “talking cure” in the early 20th century, talk, in psychology, has been overlooked (Parker, 2005; Forrester, 1980). As a discipline, psychology has been forged within the social context and history in which it has developed, and in return, it has shaped how it is that talk is “made thinkable” (Burr, 2015; pp 31; Rose, 1998). However, despite discourse having a key role in constructing what is made thinkable, talk in psychology has been scarcely researched in itself. Instead, talk has been taken-for-granted as a vehicle for the transference of ideas from one brain to another, and a certain idea of the self has been constructed as a result (Rose, 1998; pp 169).

Within argument talk, these governing assumptions are integral in forming a landscape through which societal “members” (Sacks, 1995) understand and interpret the discursive practices that are mobilised to position, and do moral work upon other members’ conduct and conceptions of socially constructed reality and self (Burr, 2015; Rose, 1998). Despite often having profound effects on how relationships are navigated and understood (Britt & Hudson, 2012; Fincher et al, 2007), argument talk is consistently misunderstood as the result of individual failings. Argument talk is, in this view, an everyday feature of experience which is orientated not by what is said, and by what is subsequently made thinkable, but by psychologised concepts of the self (Rose, 1998).

In opposition to this view, argument talk is argued to take place, not as a clash between opposing views or claims, but as a construction of reality between two participants through discourse; what Gadamer (2004; pp 304) terms a “fusion of horizons”. The case for studying argument talk then, lies not in the psychologised individual (Hacking, 1986; Foucault, 1982; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), but in how arguments are constructed as discursive “spaces”, in how argument talk makes justifiable those governing discursive practices mobilised within it, and through those governing discourses that grant authority to a structure of talk that we call argument.

Traditionally, arguments in psychology have been analysed with an essentialist view of the self. With much research ignoring the rich discursive content of argument, many studies focus instead on conflict resolution styles (Kurdek, 1994; 1995; Xie et al, 1998; Thomas et al, 2008; Holt and DeVore, 2005), confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998; Munro et al, 2009) and cognitive behavioural mechanisms such as asymmetric insight and generalisable categorising structures which are said to “underpin”

“conflict talk”¹ (Pronin et al, 2001; 2004; Goldberg et al, 2004). According to Leung (2002); implicit in many of the approaches thus far is a conception of argument talk as being the result of a lack of social skills (e.g. being caused by deficient or unhelpful cognitive mechanisms) or through a deficiency to properly understand what is being communicated (such as in intercultural communication (Hua, 2008)).

Much of the research that does focus on argument itself has been focussed on children (Maynard, 1985; Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1997), micro linguistic structures such as turn construction units (Selting, 1996; 2000), or undermines a discursive epistemology of argument through quantitative approaches (e.g. Beattie & Shovelton, 1999; 2002). As opposed to these approaches, discursive psychology focuses on an epistemology of self that is constructed through discourse, frequently referred to as the “discursive self” (Sacks, 1995; Foucault, 1982; Burr, 2015; pp 18).

What is proposed in this epistemology is that argument talk is, in part, a locally (and colloquially) understood category of talk in which individuals are governed through the use of discursive classifications that are invoked to do “moral work” (Stokoe, 2003; 2010). Argument is proposed to be constituted by (and constitutive of) discourses which construct, regulate, restrict and govern reality (Burr, 2015; pp 115).

Argument Talk in Micro and Macro Discursive Contexts

Typically, these features of discourse have been argued to exist in an incompatible macro/micro discursive dichotomy (Harre, 1989; Harre & Gillet, 1994). A dichotomy between micro discursive epistemologies that conceive reality as weaved by individual “performers” of discursive categories to do moral work (Sacks, 1995; Harre, 1989; Harre & Dedać, 2012); and macro discursive epistemological positions that argue that discourses construct social reality through wide scale institutional and social interactions (Fairclough, 1993; Rose, 1998; Burr, 2015; pp 121; Althusser, 2011; Gramsci et al, 1978).

Contrary to this position, it is argued here that argument talk is socially constructed as an “appropriate space” in which argumentative discursive performances are during a construction of reality between participants, what Gadamer (2004; pp 304) terms a “fusion of horizons”. Argument talk then, is at once both orientated and constructed through “performative” (Burr, 2015; pp 146; Goffman, 1978; Harre & Moghaddam, 1999) discursive work done by micro discursive selves using locally and colloquially understood categories (Stokoe, 2003; 2012; Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007a; 2007b). These categories construct and give normative power through interdiscursive interaction on a macro scale (Fairclough, 1993; 2001; Rose, 1992; 1998).

In contrast to what has been proposed by Harre (1989) as an incompatible dichotomy of a “performative self” and a “socially constructed self” (Harre & Moghaddam, 1999), this paper argues that an analysis of argument using Sack’s (1995) Multiple Categorisation Analysis (MCA), which allows for a “micro-macro synthesis”. In this view, argument participants *invoke* and *perform normative* and

¹ With this in mind, this paper will refer to everyday argument as understood from a discursive perspective as “argument talk”, as opposed to the popular quantitatively based “conflict talk” to avoid confusion between the separate methodologies employed therein.

governing macro discourses that are, in themselves, socially constructed and upheld through micro discursive conduct. However, it is argued that everyday talk (and in particular, argument talk) is not conceptualised in this manner, either amongst mainstream researchers, or in everyday conduct. Rather, everyday talk is governed by a psychologised conception (Rose, 1998) of an essentialist self, in which talk can be said to “originate” from within a speaker, with ideas being transposed seamlessly from one speaker’s brain to another (Rose, 1998; pp 101; Burr, 2015; pp 76). Within this conception, argument talk arises as a result of individual failings in this transposition.

MCA, Micro/Macro Synthesis and Symbolic Order

In contrast to this analysis of talk through an essentialist self, MCA allows for an analysis of conversation in which discourses such as educational, military, psychological or neoliberal discourses are mobilised in local contexts. These discourses are typically analysed from a macro-constructivist epistemological framework that are more akin to the work of Foucault (1977; 1980) (Burr, 2015; pp 76). However, a marriage between micro and macro-constructivist frameworks may provide an insight into how narratives of the world and the self become accepted social truths, how arguments are understood colloquially (Stokoe, 2003), and further, how talk might be understood ontologically (Shotter, 2012).

Through the mobilisation discourses in talk, a variety of epistemological and ontological selves are “made thinkable” (Rose, 1998; pp 11). In this view, how argument talk is perceived and performed is critically orientated by participants’ implicit epistemological and ontological assumptions about the self (and social reality). Here, Lacan may serve as a helpful figure, precisely due to his “antithetical” epistemological positioning against these conceptions in North American Psychology (Parker, 2005; pp 164). In particular, Lacan’s conception of “symbolic order” (our unwritten and discursive social constitution Žižek, 2006; pp 9) may be employed as a helpful, rhetorical tool to understand how underlying governing assumptions structure argument discourses (See Appendix: Lacanian Terminology) (Parker, 2005).

Through discursive positioning and localised construction of discourses in argument talk, argument talk can be said to be motivated by “impeachments” of locally and colloquially constructed symbolic order (See Appendix: Lacanian Terminology). Further, in this conception, disruptions to social order done through discursive work open up “spaces” of argument talk in which performative acts that engage or escalate argument talk are justified through impeachments of localised symbolic order (Žižek, 2006), similar to what Fairclough (1993) describes as “orders of discourse”.

Transparent Discursive Effects in Argument Talk

Parallels may be drawn here between Sacks’ (1995) rhetorical Multiple Categorisation Devices (MCDs) and Lacan’s conception of the “Big Other” (Žižek, 2006). For Sacks, it is precisely because MCDs are “inference rich”² (Schegloff,

² Inference richness refers to how categories may reference “commonly knowledge” in order to do moral work. For a full description of inference richness, see Schegloff’s (2007) tutorial of Sack’s MCA or Stokoe’s (2012) guide to MCA

2007; pp 469) that categorisation does normative moral work. Through the use of MCDs, Category Bound Activities are inferred (Schegloff, 2007), and in this process, moral work is done through the inference to categories and activities in a locally and colloquially established “symbolic order” (Žižek, 2006); what Schegloff (2007) calls “common sense knowledge”. Importantly, Category Bound Activities (and the moral implications attached to them) are assumed to be commonly shared social knowledge between conversation participants (Schegloff, 2007): because these Category Bound Activities are inferred, rather than explicated through conversation, the moral work that is achieved through categories adheres to an “transparent”³ social order (Fairclough, 1993; Žižek, 2006).

Similarly for Lacan, it is in reference to assumed common knowledge in the form of the “Big Other” that a symbolic set of rules and governing structures orientate social interactions (Žižek, 2006). This governing, discursive structure is typically undisclosed and enigmatic, and can be understood as society’s “unwritten constitution”. For Lacan, this symbolic order is at once both pervasive and transparent:

“It is here, directing and controlling my acts; it is the sea I swim in, yet it remains ultimately impenetrable” - (Žižek, 2006; pp 8).

This transparency adds an extra layer of complexity to the analysis of discourses being invoked: as discourses in talk typically involve both interpretation and hermeneutic loss, the *perception* and *performance* of argument talk becomes an important factor in the construction of symbolic order (Gadamer, 2004; pp 387; Burr, 2015; pp 161; Goffman, 1978). Typically, in everyday interaction, argument talk is interpreted as being “conducted” by an essentialist subject. In contrast, argument talk is argued here to be “conducted” by a *perceived* essentialist subject, which defends an essentialist self without taking into account the “transparent” and governing discursive structure that motivates argument talk to be conducted (Burr, 2015; pp 161). It is precisely because these underlying features of discursive conduct are not explicated that argument talk may be conducted as a familiar, ossified and escalating pattern of conflict.

Argument Talk as a Reified Entangling of Locally Mobilised Transparent Governing Discourses

This conception of talk in one that fundamentally disagrees with a conception of behaviour as emanating from “internal psychic structures” (Burr, 2015; pp 161; Parker, 2005) such as personality factors. Or, in argument talk’s case, conflict resolution styles (Thomas et al, 2008; Kurdek, 1994; 1995; Garbrielidis, 1997) and cognitive mechanisms such as “confirmation bias” (Nickerson, 1998; Jonas et al, 2001) and “asymmetric insight” (Pronin, 2001; 2004; Vasire, 2010).

Instead, argument talk is argued to take place in a process of a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2004; pp 304): a structure of “joint action” where dialogue is seen as a “fundamentally” interlinked combined effort (Shotter, 1990; 1995). In this conception

³ Transparent is used here to denote how many discursive practices, despite constructing social reality between talk participants, are often concealed: i.e. misunderstood, opaque and subversive.

of talk, talk participants are not “isolable” to essentialist psychic states, but constructed within a “vast network of social relationships” in which reality is made thinkable through discursive practices and the mobilisation of authoritative discourses in dialogue (Gergen & Gergen, 1997; Gergen, 2009; Rose, 1998).

What is further proposed here, is that argument talk is made ossified through participants’ implicit and explicit embodiment of an essentialist self: a self that is increasingly dominant and hegemonic in western, globalised societies and one that is favoured within the neoliberal project in particular⁴ (Fairclough, 1993; 2001; Rose, 1992; 1998; pp 101; Gergen, 2009)⁵. In contrast, argument talk is conceptualised as a discursive structure that is guided by implicit and “transparent” underlying discursive practices that do “moral work” (Stokoe, 2012; pp 278) through inference to symbolic or social order (Žižek, 2006).

As Burr outlines, as talk is constructed, participants are constructed in different subject positions, which entail different rights, obligations and rules of moral conduct:

“Such positioning is not necessarily intentional, though it sometimes is. People may therefore become enmeshed in the subject positions implicit in their talk without necessarily having intended to position each other in particular ways.” – (Burr, 2015; pp 115).

Argument talk then, is an appropriate place to understand how “knowledges, technologies and know-hows” of the self (Rose, 1998; pp 169) form boundaries, over which argument claims can be constructed and argued over. In this sense, the construction of the self (through categorisation) in argument talk is critical to how argument “sequences” (Watson, 1997) unfold. As conflict talk is learned through direct experience rather than being formally taught (Hester & Hester, 2010), presumptions of the essentialist self help to guide and orientate how narratives proceed throughout argument talk. To this end, understanding argument talk through a discursive epistemological framework may help participants in argument talk avoid escalating arguments, and better understand some of the perlocutionary effects (Searle, 1980) that are communicated in the mobilisation of macro discourses in micro discursive practices (Harre & Dedaić, 2012; Lock & Strong, 2012; Shotter, 2012).

During the analysis of argument talk that follows, argument talk will be shown to “build up” before argument explicitly erupts, similar to thi Nguyen’s (2011) conversation analysis. However, in contrast to thi Nguyen’s (2011), MCA’s methodology allows for a focus on the discursive categories which do moral work that implicitly or explicitly undermine participants’ conception of symbolic order and self (Žižek, 2006; pp 15). Using MCA, several orientating categories which construct argument talk as an “appropriate” or “justified space” for conflict will be drawn out, such categories which frame discourse in asymmetric positional hierarchies (such as categories around familial conduct, relations and punishments).

⁴ (See Appendix: Governance)

⁵ It perhaps unsurprising, that conflict resolution styles has a theoretical history rooted in management psychology (see: Blake et al, 1964; Blake and Mouton, 1981; Holt & DeVore, 2005)

In particular, this MCA will focus on how these invoked categories “impeach” on participants perceptions of locally (and colloquially) constructed symbolic order. In this process, discursive work in argument talk may be seen (or more appropriately, not seen) as a transparent “by-product” of talk as constructed through an essentialist epistemology. Further, similar to (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002), it is argued that participants construct increasingly ossified and governing (perceived) identities over the course of argument talk, due to the orientating nature of this innocuous discursive conduct.

Research questions:

Does moral work, through inference to discursive categories, motivate argument in a “build up” towards an explicit eruption of argument talk, similar to that outlined by thi Nguyen (2011)?

Is argument talk motivated by an essentialist conception of talk as opposed to a discursive conception (Gadamer, 2004), and further, does this essentialist conception of talk encourage escalations in argument talk, thereby perpetuating conflict?

Do underlying assumptions of self and talk (Parker, 2005) mobilised in discursive categories (Sacks, 1995) motivate argument talk through impeachments of “symbolic order” (Žižek, 2006)?

Method

Analytic Approach

MCA (Sacks, 1995; Schegloff 2007) was chosen to take a narrative perspective on argument talk as opposed to focussing on Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1995) and its structural approach, which has been argued to “sideline” many wider social dimensions to moral work that takes place within talk (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002). Drawing on work such as Stokoe (2003; 2006; 2010; 2012), Smith & Beckermen (2011) and thi Nguyen (2011): MCA was used to draw out positional elements of argument talk, and understand how categories were enabled to do moral work through the authority of wider socially constructed conceptualisations of the categories invoked in each argument sequence.

Because of this, MCA provides a helpful framework for understanding how discursive “subjects” (Harre, 1989) position themselves, and are positioned, through “constraints of rules, rights, obligations, duties and local patterns of tacit norms” (Harre & Dedaić, 2012, in Burr, 2015). MCA provides a less structural approach than its sister methodology Conversation Analysis (CA) (Stokoe, 2012; Schegloff, 2007), allowing for an emic approach to argument talk that focuses more on the topics and narratives used, rather than orientating structure of the language used in itself. Because of this, MCA allows for a joint analysis of micro discursive practices and macro constructivist discourses.

MCA is a helpful tool to draw out some of the boundaries that everyday argument talk imposes on participants conceptualisations of self and world, and how these categories are deployed in a colloquially and locally understood structure of talk known as an argument. Further, MCA was chosen as it is an appropriate place to bridge micro and macro constructivist epistemologies. However, as Schegloff (2007)

is keen to point out, MCA is also limited in this respect. As Schegloff argues, Multiple Categorisation Devices (MCDs), Category Bound Activities and “rules of application” (see Schegloff, 2007; pp 469) do not always “fit” into argument talk as cleanly as written text. As argument talk is often “incomplete” in its utterances, Schegloff (2007) argues that MCA may allow too much room for the analyst to impose their interpretation. However, this paper argues that MCA and its methodological approach is an apt tool for examining the vast varieties and everyday contexts in which talk can establish local social organisation in a way that CA cannot; a point further outlined by Housley and Fitzgerald (2002) and Stokoe (2003; 2012).

Data

3 Transcripts were chosen from the Santa Barbara Corpus for Spoken American English (SBCSAE) so as to find everyday examples of argument. Each of the transcripts analysed in this paper can be found in the appendix, alongside a written description, and the descriptions compiled by the SBCSAE. Quotes from transcripts are referenced by the unique server number where the quote begins (for example, 0.000 being the start of the transcript).

A full description of transcription conventions employed by the SBCSAE can be found in Haiman and Thompson (1988).

(See Appendix: Data)

Analysis

Recursive Concatenation In Argument Talk

Across these 3 transcripts, argument talk can be seen to be initiated not over discrete 3 turns (Pomerantz, 1984; Gruber, 1998; Maynard, 1985) but gradually framed, over several “concealed” or “transparent” impeachments of perceived symbolic order. As argument talk becomes more explicit, moral work becomes more conspicuous and discursive practices become more explicitly focussed on individual positioning between argument participants. In particular, moral work begins to increasingly frame argument participants in an essentialist epistemology, often through reference to the motivations and structure of the argument itself. Examples can be seen across each argument sequence, but is particularly prevalent in Transcript 1 (See Appendix), in which argument talk is most volatile.

Kendra: “[If] I was trying to lie, I would give up, (69.272)
Cause then I wouldn't ca=re.”

Kendra: “and I'm supposed to read your mind and know (127.869)
what you're joking about F>VOX>.”

Kendra: “I didn't spend the night, (155.058)
that's what makes me so m=ad, I'm grounded for nothi=ng.”

Interestingly, talk in Transcript 1 is much less orientated through an essentialist epistemology during breaks in argument talk, even with the same participants (for example, during an intermission for carwash talk from 136.728 to 152.444).

As argument talk escalates, this epistemological framework orientates argument talk in such a way as to encourage impeachments of “symbolic order” (Žižek, 2006), such as discursive work which undermines a participant’s “underlying character”; for example, through insult. Because this essentialist epistemological framework is largely unquestioned, discursive practices (such as moral and positional work) are granted power through a structure of talk that is “ossified” and “transparent”.

Examples can be seen in Jenn and Leanne’s discursive work revolving around “familial guilt” in Transcript 3:

Jenn: “like you’re feeling a responsibility towards people” (96.012)

Jenn: “You and I have had a talk about this before” (109.926)

Leanne: “she’s right to an extent” (122.966)

Leanne: “You don’t think this family uses guilt?” (132.449)

Here, a question about whether “familial guilt” is used or not is constructed as what is being contested. However, implicitly, many of the discursive features that position each participant are ignored, with the discursive practices employed framing participants using an essentialist epistemological framework. What is implicitly at play is the discursive practice of categorising argument participants into a locally established MCD of a [Person who does/does not believe in “familial guilt”].

In this discursive practice, the participant involved is implicitly governed (within the context of locally established talk (Sacks, 1995; Stokoe, 2003)) as a subject, who in their essence, *contains* an attachment to the statement, or does not (i.e. whether they are categorisable in this statement or not). What is subsequently established (Sacks, 1995) in escalated argument talk is a conception of talk participants within an essentialist epistemological framework (Rose, 1998; pp 169) which orientates argument talk as a justified “space” for conflict. Further, in this constructed framework, conflict is motivated by perceived “impeachments” of symbolic order through discursive practices (such as categorisation), motivating further argument talk.

Examples in transcript 1 can be seen immediately after 23.191, with Kendra doing explicit discursive work on Kitty’s “self” and the argument structure:

Sabrina: “You’re so stupid thinking I spent the night” (38.254)

Sabrina: “If I did spend the night and I was trying to lie I would give up... cause then I wouldn’t care” (68.399)

Kitty responds by doing explicit moral work on Kendra:

Kitty: “Right, Melanie will call me to confirm your lie”(101.523)

Importantly, this moral work becomes more prevalent once participants recognise a typical beginning of argument structure (such as in transcript 3 at 107.633 “that is the biggest crock of shit I have ever heard”).

According to Sacks (1995), these category related activities perform normative work on Kitty’s positioning in the argument talk as a localised “discursive self” (Harre, 1989; in Burr, 2015). This normative work can be interpreted as an “impeachment” of Kitty’s concept of self as it is constructed through macro constructed know-hows (Rose, 1998), through assigning Kitty to a *locally understood* category of a “mother who does not listen” or a “stupid person”.

Divergent examples can be seen in Transcript 2 as Stephanie attempts to explicate how *she* feels about her university choices despite her Mother’s advice:

Stephanie: “Mom, I know. Mom. I’m not saying that” (59.996)

In this transcript, participants construct one another not in an essentialist epistemological framework in which participants embody an “argument claim”, but construct a framework in which each participant may take a range of “non-subjectified” hermeneutic possibilities (Rose, 1998 ; pp 170). In this sense, participants resist becoming constructed as ossified subjects during argument talk, and subsequently, argument talk is less volatile.

Patty: “When you learn that you can’t compare, you’ll really be grown up. You are uniquely you.” (102.497)

In this sense, in transcript 2, the moral work being done does not undermine argument participants’, and cannot be said not constitute an impeachment of locally established symbolic order, despite taking place in a typical argument talk structure (Maynard, 1985). However, despite argument talk being less volatile, argument talk participants resist diverging towards categories that are not locally involved in the argument structure or directly related to participants:

Erika: “[Where's your bathroom at]?” (116.397)

Maureen: “[2Uh, I have a platter...]” (190.275)

Interestingly, Stephanie engages again only when outside participants become involved in the argument narrative in a humour based mediation sequence similar to that described by Francis (1994):

Maureen: “[{(TSK)}] She snowed the interviewer, but they still didn’t want her.” (268.272)

Argument talk in this case can be seen to established as a structure where two participants are engaged, excluding other participants in the environment. Further this structure of talk is one that is constructs participants as essentialist individuals, rather than participants engaging in a process of “joint action” (Shotter, 1995; 1990; Gadamer, 2004). Kitty makes an explicit example of this discursive feature of argument talk in a more volatile sequence in Transcript 1:

Kitty: “[8<YELL Hey, stay out of it8]. ... (482.362)
Stay out of it, you're not involved in this YELL>.”

When argument talk is less volatile, it is less likely to develop into a locally established normative discursive structure, during which, participants' conceptions of symbolic order becomes ossified, and impeachments of symbolic order become more prevalent and justifiable.

In this example it can be seen how, although the argument revolves around two simple claims (Kendra sleeping over at her friend's house or not), the argument structure is kept in motion through various categorisations which do both positional discursive work (Stokoe, 2003; 2012). These categorisations are argued to motivate further argument by invoking categories that do moral work on participant's conceptions of “discursive self” (Zizek, 2006). It is argued here that this function of discursive categorisation is enabled to do this moral work through a normative understanding of each category in a web of socially constructed relations (Schegloff, 2007; Shotter, 1995; Gadamer, 2004).

Initial Categorisations Frame Argument Sequences By Doing Innocuous Micro Discursive Work

In Transcript 1, Kendra opens up discussion with her sister about an argument that has already been invoked between Sabrina and her mother Gemini, relating their disagreement to her own. Talk is immediately framed using categories relating to argument sequences and, in agreement with thi Nguyen (2011), it is likely that this early categorisation work plays a role in the argument sequence, with argument talk emerging as “incipient and gradual”.

Although the motivations behind Kendra's opening enquiry may be innocuous, Kendra's terminology “What did you do...” already invokes a multiple category device (MCD) of a parent/daughter through reference to normative category bound activities associated with positioning within their immediate family structure as a form of “local social organisation” (Sacks, 1995). When Kendra asks “What'd you do” (at 0.000), what is inferred (by Sabrina at 2.278) is “What did you do [to justify (Kitty/Mom) (being angry at/punishing) you]”.

Because both sisters have a colloquial and localised understanding of what role their parent takes (as a person of authority in relation to their locally and colloquially constructed role as teenagers in an American society). Because of this, they can invoke inference rich (Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007) categories, even though there is no direct reference to their familial positioning. This is further indicated by Sabrina and Gemini's responses:

Sabrina: “...so I'm grounded from the phone” (5.927)

Gemini: “You guys are always in trouble...” (9.903)

A similar opening sequence can be seen in transcript 2.

In Transcript 2, a discussion begins about Stephanie's SAT score with her family, which she says must be improved if she is to get into her preferred university (Appendix: Transcript 2). Argument talk becomes more explicit from 25.257 onwards, where 3 oppositional turns take place, signalling a colloquially understood beginning of argument talk (Pomerantz, 1984; Maynard, 1985; Gruber, 1998; thi Nguyen, 2011). In contrast to Pomerantz popular theory on counter oppositional turns, however, categories related to argument talk are brought into conversation before these discrete oppositional turns, which can be seen to encroach on participant's perceived "symbolic order". Interestingly, these categorical "impeachments" take place during multiparty conversation, rather than through direct conversation between the participants who eventually engage in argument talk, suggesting that argument talk is constructed over time in a process of "joint action" (Shotter, 1990; 1995; Gadamer, 2004; pp 304).

Patty's opening utterance in this sequence "It's not that bad" (0.000) is likely a response to Stephanie that does moral work to affirm Stephanie feelings that her SAT scores are not as bad as she thinks. The utterance "it's not that bad" can be seen to be a Category Bound Activity that invokes a Multiple Categorisation Device (that of a good student/bad student] that is locally and colloquially established through inference (Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007). The moral work being done ascribes Stephanie to a category it. Interestingly, although seemingly innocuous, this discursive work is also performed in inference of Patty's locally and colloquially established authoritative position as a Mother, undermining Stephanie (Davies & Harre, 1990). Because Patty is understood to belong to the multiple category device of [Mother/Daughter], the discursive work that she performs may be performed in reference to her duties of care as Stephanie's mother (Stokoe, 2003). This discursive work establishes a weight and authority in this inference to her local and colloquially established positioning; i.e. what Lacan calls "symbolic order" (Žižek, 2006).

According to Maynard (1985), argument talk initiation can be seen to occur in a predictable sequence wherein, after Speaker B contests Speaker A, Speaker A reinforces their claim or disagrees with speaker B's rebuttal. In this theory, argument initiations are typically argued to take place after three discrete oppositional turns. However, Stephanie take several turns to invoke category related activities and category related pairs in relation to her SAT's, namely the category of a "good student":

Sabrina: "cause I think ten seventy's way too low" (9.950)

Sabrina: "So I have to take them again" (17.696)

Sabrina: "<<STOMPING<MRC I'd better get twelve hundred (25.780)

on these. Have to get twelve hundred MRC>STOMPING>>"

Divergently, argument initiations more often take place over a series of claims over time (thi Nguyen, 2011). However, argument talk becomes more volatile after Patty contests Stephanie's claim at 32.071 and Stephanie reinforces her original claim at 39.852, following a recognisable feature of argument talk as set out by (Maynard,

1985; Gruber, 1998; thi Nguyen, 2011; Norick & Spitz, 2008; Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004; pp 200).

As can be seen in this “pre-argument” sequence, Multiple Category Devices, Category Related Pairs and Category Bound Activities (Schegloff, 2007) orientate the on-going talk over the course of multiple “turn construction units” (Seltling, 2000) rather than argument talk suddenly being motivated over 3 distinct oppositional turns (Pomerantz, 1984; Maynard, 1985; Gruber, 1998). Despite this, these three turns may serve to signal the beginning of argument talk *for the participants*, as many of these discursive features that normatively structure arguments over time do so “opaquely” (Fairclough, 1993), and in a Lacanian sense, through a largely transparent and unwritten social constitution (Žižek, 2006).

Transcript 3 (Appendix: Transcript 3) can be seen to take on a similar pattern of gradual, innocuous encroachment of locally and colloquially established symbolic order. Argument talk becomes more explicit and volatile where Leanne disagrees with Jenn as a response to her description of how guilt works in the family, with Leanne speaking over Jenn saying:

Leanne: “That is the biggest crock of shit I have ever heard”. (107.633)

Argument talk then may be seen to begin over Jenn’s assessment of familial guilt, however, Jenn’s statements on familial guilt may also be seen as a defence in response to moral or discursive work that is done on her positioning that she defines as a breach of symbolic order at several points earlier in the conversation. The first instance of this can be seen early in the transcript where Jenn’s mother Lisbeth states:

Lisbeth: “you have to be nice to me” (10.127)

Provoking the response:

Jenn: “I am.. I am <HI no=t HI> mean to you all the time”. (15.448)

In response to the narratives constructed during this sequence, other family members begin to lightly tease Jenn from 18.097 onward:

Bill: “Look how mean you’re being” (18.097)

Richard: “Jenn you’re crue=l”. (21.170)

In response to the moral work that takes place during this sequence, Jenn introduces a topic of “Familial guilt”. This is immediately contested by Laura, and then reinforced by Jenn, signalling a locally and colloquially understood pattern of argument talk initiation (Sacks, 1995; Pomerantz, 1984).

Jenn: “You know this family w=orks on guilt. (29.346)
The engine of this family is a little guilt motor...”.

Interestingly, the abstract concept of “guilt” is brought into conversation Bill before this statement at 24.875 where Bill simply says “Guilt” after teasing Jenn. In this sense, Jenn’s defensive position can be seen to be motivated by what she perceives as an impeachment of a locally (and colloquially) established symbolic order which justifies (and thus motivates) her defence (or attack) on the role of guilt in the family.

Discussion

Through an analysis of 3 familial arguments, an investigation into how categories are used to position participants in argument talk using locally and colloquially understood epistemological structures which underpin multiple categorisation devices (Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007) allow for an investigation into a micro-macro synthesis of social constructivism which have been previously considered from a dualist perspective, as suggested by Harre and Gillet (1994) (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002; Burr, 2015; pp 18; pp 148). Argument talk was seen to be established as a locally organised structure of talk by discursive selves (Sacks, 1995). The categories mobilised were seen socially constructed categories which were granted authority through both local discursive practices, and wider socially constructed interactions.

During argument talk, the discursive practices and categories mobilised constructed argument talk as a structure of talk in which participants were governed as essentialist selves. This orientating *conception* of talk is contrasted to a discursive conception of talk, wherein participants construct a narrative together, in a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2004; Shotter, 1990; 1990). Importantly, it is within a process of “joint action” that this former deficient conception of discourse is constructed. Taking place precisely because participants construct argument talk as a structure in which each participant is “made thinkable” (Rose, 1998) as an essentialist subject who “holds” an “argument claim”.

This “impeachment” of symbolic order is argued to take place “concomitantly” during categorisation work. In this sense, argument talk can be said to be conducted through inference to macro-discourses that establish “symbolic” (Žižek, 2006) authority in discursive conduct that is locally mobilised in micro-discursive practices, such as in the use of multiple categorisation devices, activities and relational pairs (Sacks, 1995). Because category bound activities and the attached categories that frame unfolding narratives are inferred towards Each participant as “commonly understood” (Schegloff, 2007) through societally constructed knowledges, a micro discursive self as described by Harre (1989) can be said to be interactional with knowledges produced through various relations through institutional structures on a macro scale (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002).

In each transcript, as suggested by thi Nguyen (2011) argument talk was seen to be preceded by innocuous discursive work which can be seen to impeach on participants conceptions of self and symbolic order, rather than argument talk erupting over 3 discrete oppositional turns as outlined by Pomerantz, (1984). Within this process, participants construct a more rigid conception of symbolic order. Subsequently, impeachments of symbolic order become more prevalent, motivating further impeachments as argument talk is constructed as a space for “justifiable” conflict.

Through an a reorientation of everyday talk's epistemological structures, arguments may be better understood in practice, motivating more productive resolutions by bringing to light how latent authoritative "macro" discourses are enacted through innocuous positioning in micro discursive actions (Burr, 2015; pp 146). Here, "transparent" undermining discursive practices are subsequently granted less orientating power over proceeding talk, and a tendency for argument talk to be constructed "ossified" as an essentialist structure may be reduced.

In agreement with Harre and Dedaić (2012), it is proposed that understanding argument talk in relation to an alternative discursive structure (and its implicit conception of a discursive self) breaks down argument talk by allowing participants to understand what has motivated their discursive conduct, and how their discursive practices may implicitly (or explicitly) undermine other participants.

This view is not isolated (see Lock & Strong, 2012), residing in a new, and progressive body of research stating a case for discursive therapy: "How and why do people remain, or even welcome being trapped inside webs of rules onto which responsibility for action is loaded? An important rule for discursive therapy is to relieve people of the burden of rules which seems to enclose them in a web of necessities" – Harre and Dedaić (2012; pp 46). This view of discursive practice is one that has been embodied in the rationale of this paper; it is one that asks how can we better understand one another, how it is that we can become free of those transparent governing discourses which are interweaved in our everyday conduct, and one that refuses to engage in a reduction of the rich discursive language in which we construct our social reality.

In Conclusion

Within argument talk, Multiple Categorisation Devices used in the "build up" to argument talk implicitly "impeach" on a locally understood "symbolic order"; in other words, through inference to locally and colloquially constructed social context. Further, when argument talk becomes more explicit, conversation participation narrows, and talk becomes more orientated around impeachments of symbolic order in relation to a locally and colloquially constructed essentialist self (Žižek, 2007). Importantly, this is argued to take place as a process of a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 2004), wherein participants' locally establish socially organised structures (Sacks, 1995) through the mobilisation of wider socially constructed categories (Foucault, 1982). Finally, talk that is more constructive may be established through the explication and understanding of these discursive processes amongst talk participants.

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Appendix:

Lacanian Terminology:

The Symbolic and Impeachment

Lacan’s “symbolic” and “big other” are used to explicate some of the “transparent” qualities of self which guide and orientate everyday discursive practices. The symbolic is used here specifically because of how it discloses these transparent, underlying or subversive discursive effects that govern and construct reality (Gadamer, 2004; Shotter, 1995) in the process of argument talk.

The symbolic is perhaps best described as an unwritten social constitution: a system of power, boundaries and logic that is constructed in what we say (for example, in a discourse about familial relations) and how we say it (for example, what effect this discourse has on each talk participants’ positioning) (Žižek, 2006). It is in this sense that discourses are locally and colloquially constructed. It is because, for Lacan, the self is a discursive self (Žižek, 2006), that this constructive quality of the symbolic is particularly relevant to argument talk.

It is in this sense that talk participants’ can be said to be governed and orientated by “impeachments” of symbolic order. Argument talk, then, is argued to be motivated by the governing a socially constructed discursive self, in local contexts through the mobilisation of wider socially constructed discourses.

The Imaginary and The Real

Although not strictly arguing that the Lacan’s concepts of the “imaginary” and “real” are dissociated from the symbolic in this context, it is the symbolic that serves to draw out some of these opaque, or transparent, underlying structures of talk most

efficiently. The Imaginary, in contrast, may best help to illustrate how the words and language used in talk have little bearing on this constructive process, as is commonly believed. Here, Žižek (2006) uses the example of a chessboard: whereas the symbolic might be represented by the rules and moves that construct the game of chess into what it is, the imaginary may be represented by the names and language that we assign to the chess pieces. In other words, the language itself is not representative of an objective, or platonic, ideal.

An example of this quality in argument talk may be how argument claims or particular words are held up to be examples of a justifiable breach of symbolic order. What is claimed in this paper, is that what constructs and motivates this breach is not the language used, nor the argument claim as a platonic ideal, but the underlying discursive effects that construct social reality.

Finally, “the Real” may be used to explicate those contingent and uncontrollable features present in this constructive process. To return to the example of the Chessboard, an example of the Real maybe the chessboard being knocked over by a passing friend (Žižek, 2006). The Real then, best describes an infinitely vast amount of contingent factors that allow talk to be constructed at all, such as the presence of each talk participant, or the hermeneutic experiences and knowledge that each participant brings into conversation.

These three Lacanian structures delicately interwoven and cannot be fully explicated here. However, what is seen as particularly important to argument talk is the Symbolic, and the subversive governing nature that it discloses within it.

Gadamerian Terminology:

In combination with Lacan’s concept of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, Gadamer’s concept of a fusion of Horizons is used to disclose the constructive nature reality through talk. This concept is integral to understanding how symbolic order regulates and governs conduct. This concept of a fusion of horizons is one that is further explicated in discursive psychology by John Shotter (1990; 1995), in what he calls a process of “joint action”.

Importantly, the concept of a fusion of horizons is not only applicable in ideal circumstances. Argument talk is just as much of a fusion of horizons as is a conversation where talk participants attempt to fully understand one another. However, argument talk can be said to be a deficient mode of this fusion of horizons, as the governing structures which orientate talk are not addressed during conflict. To this end, discursive psychologists have rallied behind the role of discursive therapy (see Lock and Strong (2012) for a varied account of this position) as a tool to explicate how a discursive self is constructed, governed and orientated in talk.

In this sense, the discursive self is placed as a radically different conception of the self in talk, wherein agency is not the driving factor of discursive practice, as is typically espoused in both research and within everyday talk.

Governance:

Although only alluded to in this paper, governance, and in particular neoliberal governance is seen as a motivating factor in the construction of the discourses we use in argument talk. In agreement with Rose (1998), within the neoliberal project,

subjects are governed (through discourses both in text and in talk) to increasingly think of their self as an essentialist subject; one of intense intersubjectivity. Subsequently, argument talk is governed, partially, by the macro discourses that establish our late modern era. In relation to argument talk then, a link to the hegemonic nature of the neoliberal project should be explicated, though a fuller investigation lies outside of the scope of this paper.

Data:

3 transcripts were selected from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English as each scenario was related to “real world” conceptions (Schegloff et al, 2002; Wu, 2003), rather than being artificially constructed or institutional setting (e.g. chat shows, political broadcasts, news broadcast, etc.). Each argument consists of American family members, with the main participants in each argument centring on a mother and daughter. Other participants include friends and siblings, who interact to various degrees, aligning themselves or choosing not to participate with the argument at various points in the unfolding narrative. Participants’ specific ages and ethnographical backgrounds were not considered crucial for each sequence of argument talk unless an ethnographic category was invoked in relation to the participants’ positioning in the discursive sequence.

Each argument shifts their narrative focus over the course of the sequence, covering a range of topics that are deployed in the context of a colloquially and locally understood argument structure. Argument talk revolves around hierarchical positional elements in 3 unique, “locally” understood (Burr, 2015; pg 157)) family contexts, although categorisations also utilise more general colloquial knowledge of representative American family conduct to do discursive work. 3 Transcripts were chosen to engage in argument talk across a range of scenarios. Although a more detailed analysis could be carried out over one transcript, the purpose of this MCA was not to “unearth” the underlying motivations of one sequence of argument talk, but rather to draw out some of the organisational elements of argument talk in a small variety of contexts, similar to Sack’s (1995) own work on MCA.

Importantly, each of the analysed transcripts reference a past argument which has taken place over what is locally understood to be the “same” or similarly understood argument claim. A common sequence that has been argued to lead participants becoming more likely to be quickly frustrated or escalate the argument quicker than if it were the first time (Greatbatch & Dingwall, 1997).

Descriptions for each of the arguments can be found in the appendix along with extracts from each text. Each transcript was compiled for the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, which include short descriptions of social and environmental context, as well as MP3 recordings of each transcript. Each recording is given the title as it appears in the Santa Barbara Corpus for ease of use.

The transcripts compiled in the Santa Barbara Corpus for American Spoken English feature indications of intonation and pitch, laughter, pauses, overlapping speech, interruptions and environmental noises, amongst other codes (see appendix). Each of the transcripts feature American Spoken English, and thus some elements of culturally understood knowledge which contribute to micro discursive practices may not be given correct emphasis or may be misinterpreted. Each participant was given a pseudonym by the Santa Barbara Corpus to remain anonymous.

Full Transcripts and accompanying recordings can be found online on the Santa Barbara Corpus for Spoken American English

<http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/santa-barbara-corpus>

Transcript 1: “Stay out of it”

Description:

“Family argument and task-related talk, recorded in Pasco, Washington. The recording begins in a car and moves to the kitchen of a family home. Main participants are three teenage sisters (Sabrina, Kendra, and Marlena), their mother (Kitty), and step-father (Curt). A friend of Sabrina's (Gemini) is also present. The dispute centres around Kitty's belief that Kendra stayed the night at a friend's house without permission, something which Kendra denies having done. Argument and shouting is interspersed with Saturday-morning housekeeping chores such as doing dishes and laundry.” – Description taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of American Spoken English, Du Bois et al. (2000)

Transcription begins as Sabrina, Kendra and Marlena discuss why they are in trouble with their mother Kitty. Argument talk erupts immediately as Kitty re-enters the car, suggesting the argument is one that has been ongoing. Argument talk is volatile, and frequent insults are used and is focused around Kitty and Kendra in particular.

The argument claims being asserted are that Kitty has incorrectly judged that Kendra has lied to her, and disobeyed her by sneaking out to stay at her friend's house – with this claim, Kendra also asserts that her punishment of being grounded is unfair. Kitty's counterclaim argues that Kendra has disobeyed her rules, and that Kendra and her friends have lied to her before, resulting in a lack of trust from Kitty towards Kendra.

Although these can be said to be the argument claims being asserted, argument talk shifts focus continually and there cannot be said to be one distinct narrative, with multiple discrete discursive elements upholding and progressing conflict talk (Sermijn et al, 2008). Positional elements are made possible through reference to a locally established familial hierarchy, which is given authority through colloquially established interdiscursive macro discourses that construct how participants understand familial North American familial structures, and their “correct” conduct (summarised through the use of the rhetorical device of Lacan's “symbolic order” (Zizek, 2006)).

Participants: Sabrina, Kendra and Marlena – Three teenage sisters; Kitty –Mother; Curt – Step Father; Gemini – Sabrina's Friend.

Transcript 1 Extract:

0.000 2.278 KENDRA: ... What'd you do ~Sabrina?

Transcript 2: “Hold my breath”

“Lively family argument/discussion recorded in the kitchen of a family home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.” – Description taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of American Spoken English, Du Bois et al. (2000)

Transcription begins with Patty and Stephanie discussing whether or not her SAT score of 1070 is good enough, both in reference to her friends performance, her own performance and what is needed to get into a “good” college. (For reference, 1068 is the mean score across states). Argument talk revolves around Patty and Stephanie, with other family members and friends interjecting at various points. Argument talk is not volatile, with the Patty arguing that Stephanie is being too hard on herself.

The argument claims being asserted by Patty are that Sabrina’s score is a good score, and that Sabrina should not be too hard on herself as when she is older she will recognise that she cannot compare herself to other people through a test score. Sabrina argues with Patty that he score is not as high as her friends score, and that if she wants to go to her preferred “good” college she will have to retake the test to improve her score.

Although these can be said to be the argument claims, argument talk evolves and progresses through multiple discursive factors, with discursive positioning referencing a locally and colloquially established symbolic order of familial conduct and school performance. Argument talk similarly shifts focus throughout the transcript, and cannot be said to have a discrete logical narrative, but rather a flowing, or rhizomatic narrative, as described by Sermijn et al. (2008).

[Complete information on participants’ familial relations was not available from the Santa Barbara Corpus for American Spoken English – Stephanie being Patty’s mother is explicit from the transcript].

Participants: Patty – Stephanie’s Mother; Stephanie; Erika; Maureen; Genevieve; Dale; Gail

Transcript 3: “Guilt”

“A lively family argument/discussion recorded at a vacation home in Falmouth, Massachusetts. There are eight participants, all relatives or close friends. Discussion centres around a disagreement Jennifer (age 23) is having with her mother (Lisbeth).” – Description taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of American Spoken English, Du Bois et al. (2000)

Transcription begins as a family are cooking using some Woks and discussing how their food looks. The family and friends joke about several topics, with Bill and Don leading the jovialities. Argument talk is more complex than other transcriptions, with argument initiating first between Jenn and Leanne, with Bill and Dom interjecting but not guiding talk. Lisbeth becomes involved in argument talk after Bill asks her explicitly if she is going to join in this conversation at 153.607 (suggesting that he disagrees with what is being said).

Argument claims revolve around the use of guilt in the family, and how guilt has been used to various capacities towards participants within the family. Initially, Jenn claims that guilt is used to a large effect within the family, arguing that she has also been subject to being “guilted” by other family members. Counter arguments are complex, and shift focus quickly throughout the transcription, revolving around the abstract

nature of what guilt is and how it functions as a concept as against how guilt functions as a more “material” fashion within the family.

As with the other transcripts, talk shifts quickly and continually through the transcript, and one coherent narrative cannot be said to be held continually by any participant (rather, the argument claim being made serves as a guiding feature that orientates how talk is conducted). In contrast with the other transcripts, argument talk involves a greater degree of participation and mediation between participants, showing how talk works as a participatory structure (as Gadamer, 2004 describes: a fusion of horizons). Despite this feature of talk, argument talk is orientated around an essentialist conception of self, where one idea is transposed from one brain to another, or when one utterance is representative of a person’s “underlying” self.

[Complete information on participants’ familial relations was not available from the Santa Barbara Corpus for American Spoken English aside from Lisbeth and Laura, who are mother and daughter].

Participants: Laura - Daughter; Lisbeth - Mother; Don; Jenn; Leanne; Bill; Richard; Mary;

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