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Argumentative Strategies Adopted by Parents and Children in Shopping Discussions

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ABSTRACT: In this article, the authors focused on argumentation that occurs between parents and children during shopping. Our findings showed that during shopping discussion, children are proactive in advocating and defending their standpoints. Children's argumentative strategies vary depending on their cognitive ability. The arguments utilized by children can be classified into three categories: breaking the record of zero, fairness doctrine, and principle of beneficence. While the frequently used strategies by parents are: causal explanation, consequentialism explanation and utilitarian explanation.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, parent-child argumentation, pragma-dialectics, shopping, strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the ways in which parents and children advocate their respective positions in discussions relating to purchases while shopping. What strategies do parents and children adopt during the context of shopping? What is the role of children in the discussion in cases of disagreement between child and parent?

Generally, children are considered to have inferior cognitive and argumentative skills compared with adults. Thus, studies about children's argumentation capabilities have tended to concentrate extensively on education and psychology rather than on the field of argumentation itself. Hence, previously, a fundamental research question about children's argumentation was "When do children begin to use argumentative discourse"; that is, the question sought to answer at what age children begin to argue. The basic assumption is that children's ages correlate with their argumentative skills, but scholars disagree on the question of when children begin to argue. Most scholars believe that children begin to understand and use arguments at young ages (Clark & Delia, 1976; Mercier & Sperber, 2011; Mercer & Sams, 2006; Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992; Stein & Miller, 1993; Silvestri 2001). Stein & Miller (1993) showed that 7-year-old children can recognise, identify, and use the basic components of an argument to provide evidence for and make judgements about their favoured position. Recent studies (Bernard, Mercier & Clément, 2012) have shown that children from the age of 3 years are already sensitive to argumentation triggers.

Often, psychological research tends to neglect the role of the institutional context in which argumentation takes place. As van Eemeren et al. (2018, p. 3) stated, “Argumentation is a communicative and interactional act complex aimed at resolving a difference of opinion with the addressee by putting forward a constellation of propositions for which the arguer can be held accountable in order to make the standpoint at issue acceptable to a rational judge who judges reasonably.” Argumentation is a complex, multiple social interaction, and the institutional context plays a vital role in it.

Numerous studies show that parent-child argumentation plays an important role in children’s cognitive development and socialization (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Moshman, 1994; Baumrind, 1971; According to Muller Mirza, Perret-Clermont, Tartas, & Iannaccone (2009) emphasized that the argumentative attitudes acquired within the family are fundamental and serve as the foundation for all other types of argumentation. Among these, playtime and mealtime are the most studied institutional contexts. The institutional context influences participants’ motivation and performance. Mealtime is seen as a privileged moment (Arcidiacono & Bova, 2011; Bova & Arcidiacono, 2015; Fiese et al., 2006; Laurier & Wiggins, 2011), and it is considered uniquely suited for the investigation of spontaneous family discourse (Blum-Kulka, 1997). Scholars highlight that, on one hand, mealtime typically constitutes a tightly scheduled occasion during which a lot must occur in roughly twenty minutes “Food must be served and consumed, roles assigned, past events reviewed, and plans made” (Fiese et al., 2006, p. 77). On the other hand, mealtime is often characterized by much freedom, which facilitates argumentative discussions. Moreover, such discussions during mealtimes have a crucial educational function (Bova, 2020).

Playtime also serves as a good choice to study young children’s argumentation abilities (Migdalek, Rosemberg et al., 2014; Heller & Krah, 2015; Perret-Clermont, Arcidiacono & Bova, 2015; Schär & Greco, 2018). Children first learn argumentative strategies in family and school environments. Games provide young children a vital way to gain social experience (Leontiev, 1981; Tomasello, 2008). During games, children use language for creating and sustaining the rules of the game, and to construct rules with others (Seidman, Nelson & Gruendel, 1986; Nelson, 1996; Zadunaisky Ehrlich & Blum-Kulka, 2010).

Our interview of 52 parents of 3- to 6-year-old children revealed that parents and children tend to have different opinions when it comes to mealtime, shopping, bedtime, and playtime, with shopping being the most likely scene for disagreement between parents and children. Of these parents, 49 (94.23%) indicated that disputes occur while shopping. One study in the 1970s analysed the shopping setting but not as it relates to argumentation. Atkin (1978) conducted an observation of parent-child interaction in supermarket decision-making, which mainly focused on the influence of advertising on purchasing choices, while simultaneously investigating the occurrence of unpleasant consequences such as arguments or unhappiness.

Numerous studies of parent-child argumentation exist in the literature, focusing mainly on the areas of mealtime and playtime. We focused on discussions that occur between parents and children during shopping trips because this is a common time for disagreements: children attempt to obtain what they desire; however, parents may not always be able to satisfy these desires due to economic difficulties, too many similar toys, limited storage space, and so on. Therefore, the shopping scenario presents an excellent

opportunity to investigate how parents and children interact and argue when children want to buy something that parents disagree with.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework of this research, while Section 3 focuses on the data analysis. Section 4 mainly about arguments categories utilized by children and parents respectively. The results of the analysis are discussed in Section 5, which summarizes the main findings and contribution of this study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS

This study examined how argumentation develops during interactions between parents and children while shopping. We addressed two main objectives. First, we treated argumentation as a pragmatic discussion by both parent and child. From this perspective, context is of vital importance to the research. Second, we sought to discover what happens in the process of argumentation by better understanding the argumentative strategies and structure that occur during discussions.

In order to analyse the mergence of context and process of argumentation, we introduced tools for the analysis of an argumentative discussion as theoretical starting points. We used the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984, 2004) for the general reconstruction of the argumentative discussion. According to van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004, p. 95), “The aim of a pragma-dialectical analysis is to reconstruct the process of resolving a difference of opinion occurring in an argumentative discourse or text”. This means that the context should be analysed taking into account the reconstructed resolution.” The pragma-dialectical model has two features: “pragmatic character” and “dialectical character” (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 95). The pragmatic character indicates that “the discourse or text is viewed as a coherent whole of speech acts”; the dialectical character lies in the premise that these speech acts are part of a systematic attempt to resolve a difference of opinion by means of a critical discussion (ibid.). The two characters fit neatly within the research object.

The pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion consists of four stages: the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage, and the concluding stage. In the confrontation stage, a difference of opinion manifests itself in the opposition between a standpoint and non-acceptance of this standpoint. In the opening stage, the procedural and the content-related material commitments that are to be in force during the discussion are identified, including the division of the discussion roles of protagonist and antagonist between the participants. In the argumentation stage, the protagonist defends the standpoint at issue systematically utilizing argumentation against the doubts and other critical responses of the antagonist. In the concluding stage, whether the difference of opinion is resolved is determined in the concluding stage (van Eemeren, 2010, pp. 36-37).

In accordance with the pragma-dialectical model, we have analysed our data by means of an analytic overview of argumentation in terms of standpoints and arguments in support of the given standpoints. As van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 118) stated, the analytic overview helps bring to light “which points are at dispute, which parties are involved in the difference of opinion, what their procedural and material premises are, which argumentation is put forward by each of the parties, how their discourses are

organized, and how each individual argument is connected with the standpoint that it is supposed to justify or refute”.

Based on its characteristics, the pragma-dialectical model was the best for the scope of this research. Moreover, in previous research using a family context, researchers adopted the theory of pragma-dialectical, which proved to be feasible to analyse argumentative discourse (Greco et al., 2018; Greco et al., 2017). Therefore, we opted for the pragma- dialectical theory as the theoretical tool for the analysis of parent-child argumentation.

3. CORPUS

We collected 45 separate video recordings of parents and children shopping together (constituting about 16 hours of video data), constructed from two different sets of data— data corpus 1 and data corpus 2, which are based on the number of children in a family. All participants were Chinese speaking, with some speaking local dialects. The length of the recordings varied from 10 to 30 minutes.

Data corpus 1 consisted of 10 video-recorded shopping events involving four families. The criteria adopted in the selection of the families were the following: the presence of at least one parent and two children, of whom the younger one was of preschool age, that is, from 3 to 6 years old. Most parents at the time of data collection were in their thirties ($M = 34.33$ years; $SD = 0.577$). Fathers were slightly older than mothers (fathers $M = 37.50$; $SD = 3.535$; mothers $M = 34.33$; $SD = 0.577$). All families in data corpus 1 had two children.

Data corpus 2 consisted of 35 video-recorded shopping events involving 10 families. The criteria adopted in the selection of the families were the following: the presence of at least one parent and one child of preschool age, that is, from 3 to 6 years old. Most parents at the time of data collection were in their thirties ($M = 33.80$; $SD = 2.529$). Fathers were slightly older than mothers (fathers $M = 36.50$; $SD = 3.109$; mothers $M = 33.80$; $SD = 2.529$). All families in data corpus 2 had only one child.

Detailed information about family constellation in data corpus 1 and data corpus 2 is presented in table 1:

Table 1. Length of recordings, participants, average age of participants

Family group with only one child with two children
Length of recording in minutes 15-28 16-32 Mean length of recordings in minutes 23.71 25.33
Participants
Mother 10 3
Father 4 2
Adults, total 14 5
Son 6 5
Daughter 4 3
Children, total 10 8
Total participants 24 13

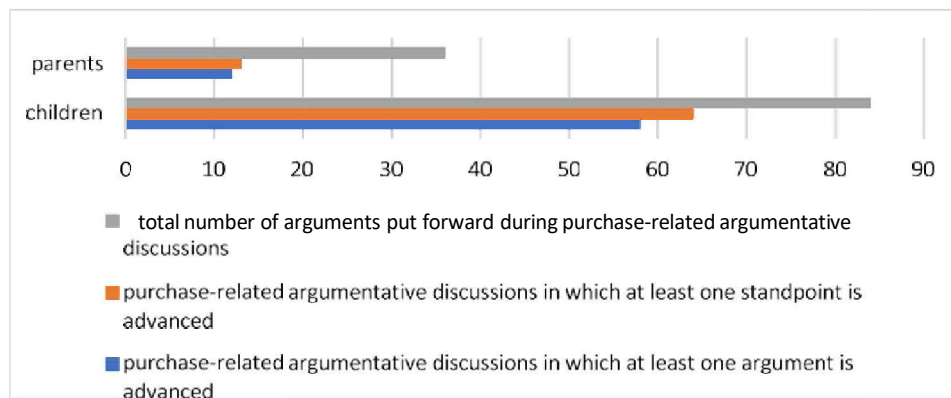
Average age of participants (years)	Mother	
	33.80 (<i>SD</i> 2.529)	34.33 (<i>SD</i> 0.577)
Father	36.50 (<i>SD</i> 3.109)	37.50 (<i>SD</i> 3.535)
Son	4.66 (<i>SD</i> 0.816)	4.80 (<i>SD</i> 1.643)
Daughter	4.50 (<i>SD</i> 1.290)	4.66 (<i>SD</i> 2.081)

4. ARGUMENTATION IN SHOPPING CONTEXT

4.1 Analysis

Within the corpus of 76 analyzed argumentative discussions, parents advanced at least one standpoint in 13 instances, while children did so in 64 instances. In 10 of these instances, both parents and children expressed their standpoints simultaneously. Notably, in the context of shopping-related arguments, children predominantly took on the role of protagonists, with parents frequently adopting antagonistic positions. Among the 13 cases where parents presented their standpoint, they also provided at least one argument (in some instances, more than one argument) to support their position, totaling 36 arguments. In the 64 cases where children expressed their standpoint, they likewise presented at least one argument (and often more than one) to justify their viewpoint, resulting in a total of 84 arguments (see Figure 1).

Fig.1 Purchase-related argumentative discussions between parents and children



The data showed that in shopping discussions, children were mainly acting as protagonists, as well as the proposers of standpoints. Meanwhile, children put forward at least one argument in 90.6% of the standpoints. The phenomenon might resort to the roles they play in shopping argumentations. Children tried to persuade the parents to buy what they want for themselves, hence they were more proactive in advocating and defending their standpoints. During this process, the standpoints which put forward by parents were 1/5 of the standpoints which put forward by children. Both children and parents had standpoints in 10 shopping time discussions, which indicated that parents were more inclined to respond to standpoints raised by children, but less to put forward their own standpoints.

4.2 Children's frequently-used arguments

The examination of the frequent arguments utilized by children including those 58 contentious discussions grown out of a shopping issue for which they set ahead no less than one contention to back their standpoint, for a total number of 84 contentions. The findings indicated that the arguments utilized by children could be classified into three categories: *breaking the record of zero* (36.90%), *fairness doctrine* (28.57%), and *principle of beneficence* (26.19%), others (8.34%). Qualitative studies on the argumentative strategies of the participants were made, of which excerpts of each category are given as follows.

4.2.1 Breaking the record of zero

Causal argumentation is a type of argumentation in which an argument scheme is used that is based on the principle of something being causal to something else (van Eemeren 2018, p.46). Breaking the record of zero is a kind of argument scheme seeing "not having owned" as a good reason for buying something, which belongs to the causal argumentation, and breaking the record of zero is a kind of cause for a standpoint.

In the majority of cases, the arguments used by children with their parents in shopping argumentative dialogues related to trying something new (e.g., find something for the first time). (N=31; about 36.90%). In the corpus, the examples like:

(1) "*dan shi, zhe shi wo di yi ci jian dao zhe zhong suan nai, wo xiang chang chang kan!*"

"But I have not seen this before, I want to have a try of this."

4.2.2 Fairness doctrine

Fairness Doctrine is a subtype of comparison argumentation in which an argument scheme is used based on the principle of "All children have the right to own the same things". In this scheme, analogy is frequently used by the children.

In the corpus of shopping argumentative discussions, another type of argument applied by children with their parents referred to the comparison with other children (N=24; about 28.57%). It's worth noting that, there was a distinction between corpus 1 and corpus 2 about the employment of fairness doctrine, children from two-child families were more likely to utilize this doctrine than those from two-child families, namely 33.3% (N=8) in the corpus 1, while 66.7% (N=16) in the corpus 2. This category of argument can be described through the question as follows: "I know somebody has one, why can't I have one?"

In the corpus, other examples of arguments that referred to this train of thought put forward by children are listed in the following:

(2) "*ni gei didi mai le, wo ye yao!*"

"you have bought one for younger brother, I want one, too!"

(3) "*qian ji tian, kaixin de mama gei ta mai le yi ge, mama, ni ye gei wo mai yi ge ba.*"

"kaixin's mom bought one for kaixin several days ago, mom, could you please buy one for me?"

In the strategy of fairness doctrine, children defended the standpoint by showing that something referred to in the standpoint is similar to something that is cited in the argumentation, and that on the grounds of this resemblance the standpoint should be accepted. In the strategy of fairness doctrine, a scheme of analogy is frequently used by the children.

4.2.3 Argument of principle of beneficence

A third type of argument put forward by children in shopping time argumentative discussions with their parents is the so-called argument of principle of beneficence (N = 22; about 26.19%), which is a type of argumentation in which an argument scheme is used based on the principle of “Good for you”. The following excerpt of a dialogue between a daughter, Wang Xiaoxiao and her mother, offers an obvious illustration of this type of argument.

Excerpt 1.

From Corpus 2

Participants: mother (MOM, 34 years 3 months), Wang Xiaoxiao (WXX, 3 years 9 months, F)

1. *WXX: *mama, wo yao mai tang tang@f. (zhi zhe tang guo jia)*
 Mom, I want to buy some candies. (she points to the candy shelf)
2. *MOM: *shenme? o, ni xiang mai tang? Bu ke yi.*
 pardon? oh, you want to buy some candies? no.
3. *WXX: *wo yao, wo yao, ni gei wo mai.*
 I want that, I want, you buy it for me.
4. *MOM: *bu xing, chi tang hui zhu ya.*
 no, candies can decay your teeth.
5. *WXX: *bu shi de, wo xi huan tangtang@f, tangtang@f ye xi huan wo, tangtang@f hui rang wo kai xin, wo yi jian ta jiu kai xin.*
 no, I like candies, candies like me, too. Candies make me happy, I feel happy the moment I see candies.
6. *MOM: *e, zhe shi yi ge li you?*
 er, is that a reason?
7. *WXX: *ma ma mai yi ge.*
 mom, buy one.
8. *MOM: *e, ni na yi ge ba. (mama zou le zou mei tou)*
 er, take one. (mom frowns)

The argumentation started with the daughter telling her mother that she wanted to buy some candies on the shelf (line 1), while the mother disagreed with her daughter: she did not agree to buy candies (line 2). It is the confrontation stage, and a single mixed difference of opinion has formed between the daughter and her mother. In the argumentation stage, In fact, in this phase of the discussion the daughter’s standpoint (to buy some candies) had been met by the mother’s refusal. The child, in line 3, did not provide a counter argument to defend her position, replying instead by reasserting her original stance. In line 4, the mother put forward one argument to further her perspective:

“candies can decay your teeth.” In line 5, the daughter’s argumentation can be reconstructed as follows:

- 1 I want to buy some candies.
- 1.1 a I like candies.
- 1.1a.1 Candies make me happy.
- 1.1a.1.1 I feel happy the moment I see candies.
- 1.1b Candies like me.

The standpoint is “I want to buy some candies.” There are multiple argumentations combined to support the standpoint. 1.1a and 1.1b have been taken respectively in order to defend the standpoint. 1.1a.1 and 1.1a.a.a’ are subordinate argumentation to support 1.1 a “I like Candies.” This combined argument succeeded in convincing the mother to buy what she wanted, because the mother did not know how to refute it. Line 8 concludes the discussion.

The strategy adopted by children as an argument of principle of beneficence is followed by a causal relation. When the argumentation is based on a causal relation, the argument scheme for a causal relation is in the following van Eemeren et. al. (2002, p. 101):

Y is true of X,
Because: Z is true of X,
And: Z leads to Y.

Asto “Candies make me happy, I feel happy the moment I see candies”
Happiness is good for me
Because: Candies are good for me
And: Candies lead to happiness

To assess whether the argumentation is conclusive, the analysis must verify whether the reason always leads to the conclusion. As a result, we can use critical question to verify the soundness of reasoning, like: *Does Z always lead to Y?* Namely, do candies always lead to happiness? In the example just given, candies made the child happy is presented as the cause of the buying some candies. However, according to the critical question that reasons like “*Candies make me happy, I feel happy the moment I see candies*”, “*it makes me much smarter to play this*”, etc. are lacking validity, “Candies made him happy” does not lead to that he can eat candies. For example, too many candies may decay the teeth (the mother’s argument) or lead to flesh out.

In the corpus, other examples of arguments that refer to Argument of principle of beneficence put forward by children are listed as follows:

- (4) “*wo zai zhang shen ti, ta you li yu wo cheng zhang!*”
 “I am in the time of physical growth. It will do good to me.”
- (5) “*wan zhe ge ke yi rang wo geng jia cong ming.*”
 “It makes me much smarter to play this.”

4.3 Parents’ frequently-used arguments

The analysis of the generally used arguments applied by parents to the 12 argumentative discussions in shopping in which they put forward at least one argument to support their own standpoint, for a total number of 36 arguments. The findings showed that the arguments put forward by parents with their children in purchase-related argumentative

discussions could be ascribed to three main *strategies*: *causal explanation* (N = 12; about 33.33%), *consequentialism* explanation (N=10; about 27.78%), and *utilitarian explanation* (N=8; about 22.22%), others (N=6; about 16.67%) Since parents had a fewer standpoints in the corpus, parents' strategies were mainly to refute children's standpoints.

Arguments of causal explanation (N=12; about 33.33%) refers to the strategy protagonists applied to express his or her opinion usually lead by the conjunction word "*because...*" In the corpus, other examples of arguments that refer to the pattern of causal explanation put forward by parents are in the listed in the following:

- (6) "*wo gei ni mai zhe shi yin wei ta fu han wei liang yuan su.*"
 "I buy this for you because it is rich in trace elements."
- (7) "*bu shi ma ma bu she de gei ni mai, ni zhi dao, er shi yin wei xiao hai zi bu neng wan zhe ge.*"
 "because it is not suitable for children, I don't buy it for you, not because of money."
- (8) "*yin wei mama ai ni.*"
 "because I love you."

The second strategy for the parents to use is the strategy of *consequentialism* explanation (N=10; about 27.78%), that is, the parents often focused on the "aim" when putting forward their arguments. It became much clearer when we resorted to the sentence "if you eat candies too much, you will have a toothache." Generally speaking, this strategy of argumentative explanation can be recognized by sentence structure like "if you ... you will..." or "it's..., it will/may..."

Other examples of arguments refer to the pattern of consequentialism explanation put forward by parents are in the following:

- (9) "*wo men jin tian bi xu mai er tong ya gao, ru guo ni zai bu yong ya gao de hua, ni de ya chi yao lan guang le.*"
 "we have to buy toothpaste for children today, If you don't use toothpaste when you brush, all your teeth will be decayed."
- (10) "*zhe ge hen wei xian, ke neng hui gei ni zao cheng shang hai.*"
 "this is dangerous, it may cause harm to you."
- (11) "*kan dao mei? La de, ni hui bei la ku de.*"
 "see? It's spicy, it will burn you to cry."

Utilitarian explanation is a type of argumentation based on a philosophical view about how we should evaluate a wide range of things that involve choices that we face. In the context of this article, it means that the parents would maximize the total expected utility of the goods before buying it.

The third strategy for the parents to use is the pattern of utilitarian explanation (N=8; about 22.22%), that is, when putting forward their arguments, the parents often took the utility of the commodity into consideration. It will be much easier to understand when we refer to the following sentence "it will not be frequently used, we don't need it."

Of course, there are many examples of this pattern in our corpus. Some of them are listed as follows:

- (12) "*gen ben yong bu zhao, bu mai.*"
 "I won't be used at all, I won't buy it."
- (13) "*zhe ge tai gui le, wo men yao mai wu mei jia lian de dong xi.*"

“it’s too expensive, it’s rational to buy those both good and cheap things.”

(14) “*zhe zi xing che gei ni qi tai da le, deng ni zhang da dian zai mai gei ni.*”

“this bicycle is too big for you, we won’t buy it until you grow taller.”

We observed that the argumentative strategies the parents accustomed to using mainly refer to the causal scheme, but the sentence structures vary.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to study parent-child argumentation in China by addressing the strategies adopted by parents and children during shopping and determining the role of children in the discussion in cases of disagreement between child and parent. The present study might contribute to the research by presenting a new situation—shopping—and finding the strategies parents and children adopt during it. Additionally, it may shed light on the role of the Chinese cultural background in parent-child mentation and the similarities and differences between Chinese approaches and those of other countries.

The research findings of this paper are as follows. Firstly, the data showed that in shopping discussions, children mainly act as protagonists as well as the proposers of standpoints. Children put forward at least one argument in 90.6% of the standpoints. This phenomenon may result from the roles they play in argumentation during shopping. During the argumentation, children try to persuade parents to buy what they want for them; thus, they are proactive in advocating and defending their standpoints. During this process, the parents put forward one-fifth fewer standpoints compared with the children. Both children and parents expressed standpoints in 10 shopping discussions, which indicates that parents are more inclined to respond to standpoints raised by children but are less likely to put forward their own standpoints.

Secondly, children’s argumentative strategies vary depending on their cognitive ability. Those aged 3 to 4 years are likely to put forward their point of view directly, while children 4 to 6 years old tend to state an opinion in an indirect way that may involve a process of “introductory strategy-wanting-persuasion”; for instance, in the corpus, instead of saying what she wants directly, WXT (4 years 4 months) used introductory remarks: “Mom, I know you will buy me what I like because you love me, right?”. Similarly, a boy use the introductory sentence is “Dad, I am now older, I can try a beverage, right?”. The expression “Dad, buy this for me” reflects the “wanting” of a child (4 years 1 months) telling his father what he wants; he is making efforts to persuade his father to buy what he wants. Furthermore, the finding also confirms previous research by some scholars that children can perform sophisticated argumentation when the issues are meaningful to them (Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2010, Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2006; Light & Perret-Clermont, 1989; Schwarz, Perret-Clermont, Trognon & Marro Clément, 2008). This illustrates the facilitating role the child played in adopting certain argumentative strategies.

Thirdly, there were differences between children who grew up in one-child and two-child families in China. The former was more concerned with themselves, while the latter tended to adopt the principle of beneficence less. In the study groups, children adopted the principle of beneficent argumentative strategies more often in corpus 1 than in corpus 2 (33.3% vs. 66.7%, respectively).

Fourthly, among the three strategies commonly used, the consequentialism explanation was used more frequently than the causal explanation, and parents frequently

resorted to negative consequences as their strategies. The utilitarian explanation was least used, which may be related to the age of the children, as 3- to 6-year-old children do not fully understand the connotation of “practical”; therefore, parents tended to adopt an expression that the children could understand relatively easily. That is to say, the presentational devices, audience demands, and the topical potential are integral. In argumentative practice, arguers are constantly pursuing effectiveness and reasonableness. Parent-child argumentation is a special part of argumentation research, yet relatively unstudied.

Children’s argumentation strategy is one of the key points in parent- child argumentation research. The study of the shopping setting in this paper broadens the research scope to some extent and lays a foundation for the study of prototypical argumentative patterns in parent-child argumentation. In this study, we delineated strategies for children and parents, among which, two were not researched previously. Additionally, we discovered that argumentation occurs differently in families with one and two children, a pattern that we will likely see repeated in the near future.

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