

## Accounting for Sequentiality in Spoken Corpora: Methodological Reflections on Coding and Analyzing Actions in Schoolchildren's Argumentative Conversations

This talk reflects on the challenges encountered in a recently completed research project (<https://kompas.germa.unibas.ch/en>) on the development of schoolchildren's conversational argumentation skills and how these skills evolve with age. I will focus in particular on how children design and position argumentation-specific actions to co-construct argumentation and work toward joint decisions. The central aim of this talk is to explore how we can account for *sequentiality* – a core principle of talk-in-interaction – within large corpora of conversational data.

The project emerged from a need for basic research on conversational argumentation – on how it *actually* unfolds in interaction and what skills it demands – beyond the «monological-written habitus» (Mundwiler et al. 2017:91; my translation) that is still present in models and descriptions of argumentation in pedagogical practice. Conversation analysis (CA) provides the tools to describe, in fine detail, how conversational argumentation is shaped by fundamental principles of orality (see Deppermann 2004:18). Yet, to identify developmental trends across grades and to determine what pedagogical practitioners can expect and systematically foster at different stages, a quantitative perspective is also necessary (Luginbühl et al. 2021:182; see also Heritage 1995:405).

To this end, we recorded and transcribed 180 conversations involving four children each, producing a corpus large enough to generalize patterns, derive grade-specific argumentation profiles, and control for potential confounds (Luginbühl et al. 2021:186). We then developed a coding scheme for argumentation-related actions – but this raised a central methodological challenge: how can we reduce rich, sequential interaction to codes and numbers (see Stivers 2015:1) without erasing the very sequential structure that gives these actions their meaning?

Sequentiality goes beyond the mere temporal order of actions: it reveals how each turn builds on what came before and how participants display, interpret, and orient to one another's contributions (Heritage 1995:398). Ignoring this would mean coding in a vacuum, disconnected from the relevancies participants themselves establish in the course of interaction (Stivers 2015:2). Analyzing argumentation brings additional challenges, as elements such as conclusions or inferential rules are often left implicit (Deppermann 2006:14). However, I argue that the CA concept of conditional relevance – particularly the interactionally established *obligation to give reasons* (Heller 2012:77) – offers a valuable resource for assessing action ascriptions from an emic perspective.

Thus, I will demonstrate ways in which a CA-informed quantitative approach can respect sequentiality by grounding the research design in detailed sequential analysis, integrating sequentiality into the coding scheme, formulating the right research questions, and returning to qualitative analysis to make sense of and validate quantitative findings.

## References

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