

## BEHAVIOUR REGULATION IN THE FAMILY CONTEXT IN ESTONIA AND SWEDEN<sup>1</sup>

Boel De Geer, Tiia Tulviste

### Abstract

The aim of the study is to compare the regulatory speech used by parents and children in three different groups: Swedes in Sweden, and Estonians in Estonia and Sweden. 54 families with children of 9-13 were videotaped during mealtime. All regulatory speech aimed at controlling behaviour was identified and coded according to sentence form used for regulation as well as outcome (response). Estonians in Estonia used behaviour directives most frequently, and favoured the direct imperative form of regulatory language over declaratives and questions used by Estonians and Swedes in Sweden. Although the outcomes of regulation were mainly compliance in all groups, Estonian children living in Sweden complied significantly less than Swedish children. The results also show that Estonian children in Sweden have been influenced by the Swedish preference for regulating by declaratives and questions, using more questions and fewer imperatives than their mothers.

**Key words:** Pragmatic socialization, Family discourse, Regulation, Behavioural directives, Cross-cultural comparison.

### Introduction

Language use has several functions or purposes. In communication between parents and children one of the functions of language is that of socialization of children. Previous studies have shown that both the extent to which adults use language as an instrument of socialization, and the ways in which they use it, can vary between different cultures (e.g. Heath 1983; Schieffelin & Ochs 1986; Ochs 1988; Kulick 1990), as well as within cultures, depending on context and participants (Andersen 1990).

The term, pragmatic socialization, is often used to describe parents' focus on children's language and its use in different situations (Becker 1988, 1990; Blum-Kulka 1997). Ochs (1996) prefers the term language socialization to describe both the processes of language acquisition and socialization. According to Ochs, children acquire language and social and cultural competence in an integrated process, starting already during infancy. Children are socialized linguistically by adult input language, which guides the children towards an understanding of the socially appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour of

---

<sup>1</sup> Research for this article was supported by grants from the Baltic Foundation in Sweden (Nos. 3101 and 31103). We would like to thank Luule Mizera for her help in data gathering.

their culture (Andersen 1990). *Rauno, ole nüüd inimene!* 'Rauno, behave like a human being now!', uttered by an Estonian father towards his two-year-old son, serves as one example of what language socialization can be about - trying to give children cultural competence.

#### *Amount of regulatory speech*

The focus of the present study is on how language is used as a tool of socialization by parents in order to regulate 9-13 year old children's behaviour at meals. Goodwin (1990: 65) uses the term directive, "an utterance designed to get someone else to do something". She catches this nicely in saying that "directives are positioned right at the interface between language and social action; although built through speech, they are designed to make things happen in the larger world of social action within which talk is embedded" (1990: 65).

The main purpose of the present study is to investigate 1) the amount of regulatory speech and its distribution across family members, 2) the syntactic form of behavioural directives, and 3) the outcome following the behaviour regulation. The study involves three family groups in two countries: Swedish families in Sweden, Estonian families in Estonia and Estonian immigrant families in Sweden.

Earlier studies on maternal regulatory speech have shown cultural, social and individual differences in mothers' regulations, i.e. in how frequently they regulate children's behaviour, and in what kind of behaviour they expect from their children. The reasons for the differences in parental regulation are of course also related to the child's age, sex, personality etc., as well as to the context - inside or outside the home, whether or not there are strangers present, or depending on activity, i.e. mealtime, book reading, or solving a task etc. (Halle & Schatz 1994; Pan et al. 1996).

Assuming that behaviour regulation is one important way of socializing children that highlights what kind of behaviour is desirable or undesirable in the family, possible differences found in the data would imply that, not only what is considered "proper" behaviour differs between cultures, but also that the general importance of adhering to this norm and the need to control this adherence may vary.

Comparisons of Estonian and Swedish maternal regulation of 2-year-old children during mealtime have revealed cultural differences between these groups. Estonian mothers were found to use more behaviour directives than Swedish mothers, and to regulate attention and physical activity more than verbal behaviour (Junefelt & Tulviste 1997). Comparisons of Estonian mothers of 2- and 4-year-old children show that the preference of regulating physical behaviour rather than speech still holds when the children are 4 years of age (Tulviste and Raudsepp 1997). In both these studies mothers' regulation varies with context, both with regard to what is regulated and also to the frequency of regulation, e.g. in puzzle solving tasks the number of utterances regulating physical activity is higher than during mealtime situations.

The above findings concern infants (1-2 years) or small children (up to around 5 years). This is a period of time when much of a child's pragmatic and social knowledge is being established. As Tannen (1981: 236) puts it: "Conversational style [...] is learned through communicative experience and is therefore influenced by family communicative habits". Children learn how to behave in communication both by mere observation of their

parents and older siblings and by explicit prompts, instructions, corrections and discussions. Moreover, older children are influenced also by other adults and by peers; this holds particularly for school children. Not many studies have been made of older children who have already internalized most of their families' pragmatic and social rules and norms, and who are now being exposed also to other adults' socialization efforts, particularly at school. Tulviste (2000) has studied socialization at meals in Estonian and American mother-adolescent dyads (children's ages varying between 13 and 17) and found that Estonian mothers controlled the behaviour of the children more frequently than the American mothers. On the other hand, she found no differences in talk elicitation between Estonian and American mothers, although Estonians talked significantly less than the American participants. "Little verbalization on the part of children seems to be the goal of socialization in Estonia," says Tulviste (2000: 538) and this seems to be true for toddlers and younger school children, too. Several authors have made a distinction between maternal directing vs. conversation-eliciting styles - the mothers who tend to be more concerned with eliciting children's conversational participation, and those talking to their children mainly with the aim to control their behaviour (Halle & Shatz 1994; McDonald & Pien 1982). Previous studies have found Estonian mothers to belong to the latter group. Thus, it is reasonable to expect mothers in Estonia to be more directive than the other mothers observed in this study.

#### *Equality of family members*

The second hypothesis is concerned with how different family members regulate each other's behaviour. It has been noted before that the acceptable form and amount of children's participation in family conversations varies considerably between particular cultural settings (Blum-Kulka and Snow 1992). A previous study, based on the same data as the present one, showed that mothers made more metapragmatic comments than fathers and children (De Geer et al. in press). Furthermore, cultural differences appeared. Swedish families showed a higher degree of bidirectionality in their use of metapragmatic comments, in that Swedish children were more active in their commenting behaviour than children in the other groups. It has, indeed, been pointed out by Pontecorvo (1998) that language socialization is by no means a one-directional activity. Based on the findings in De Geer et al. (in press) and taken into account the long traditions of "equality ideology" in Sweden (cf. Welles-Nyström 1996) we could expect that more asymmetrical interaction will occur in families living in Estonia than in Sweden with respect to how much regulatory language is used by different family members.

#### *Syntactic form in regulation*

The syntactic form chosen in regulation is the third point of interest. Previous comparative studies on Estonian and Swedish child regulation have found that Estonian mothers of 2-year-olds are more likely to use imperatives, whereas Swedish mothers use declaratives (Junefelt & Tulviste 1998; Tulviste 2000). It is known that smaller children receive a bigger amount of imperatives from their mothers than older children whose mothers phrase directives in a more indirect manner (Bellinger 1979; Halle & Schatz 1994; Schneiderman 1983). Are the cultural differences in what syntactic form is used for directing behaviour still there while children are early teenagers? In trying to direct a person's behaviour, syntactic form is of course only one factor out of a larger complex, which consists of

functional categories, such as command, suggestion, question, etc. as well as non-verbal cues. An obvious reason for choosing the syntactic form in our analysis is to be able to compare with previous studies, which focus on syntactic form. Based on previous studies (Junefelt & Tulviste 1998) we expect Swedes to prefer declaratives and questions, and Estonian imperatives as regulative means towards others. These forms are not, however, part of a speaker's communicative style, but are rather characteristics of his language.

### *Outcome of behaviour regulation*

The final aim of the study is to investigate the outcome of regulation, i.e. what reaction follows. If previous research results are confirmed, i.e. that Estonian parents regulate more than Swedish parents, it would be tempting to assume that Estonian children would be more obedient than Swedish children, since they have been regulated more. And, assuming that there exists at least some degree of bi-directionality in parent-child socialization (Pontecorvo 1998), what will be the outcome of children's regulation of their parents?

Of particular interest to our study are of course the children of the immigrant families, who are exposed to different socialization behaviour in the home and at school, given the above results that Estonian and Swedish regulation has been found to be different (Junefelt & Tulviste 1997). It is suggested by Tannen (1981) that conversational style is more resistant to change than a language itself. This would allow for a situation where the Estonian immigrant children could well talk Swedish but still adhere to the conversational patterns of their Estonian culture. Conversely, they may well speak Estonian in the home, but be influenced by a Swedish conversational style.

### **Data collection**

54 families were included in the study: 17 Estonian families in Estonia (Tallinn and Tartu), 18 Estonian immigrant families in Sweden (Stockholm) and 19 Swedish families in Sweden (Stockholm). Letters were distributed through schools, where those interested in participating were invited to contact the researchers. The Estonian families had lived in Sweden for an average period of 9.1 years (max. 23, min. 5<sup>2</sup>).

All 54 families had at least one child in the preadolescent age 9-13 (target child), with mean ages of 10.9 for the girls and 11.1 for the boys. Most of the families had further siblings, older or younger. No family had siblings younger than 3 years. This was a deliberate choice, since much regulative speech would inevitably be directed towards these children. All families had similar socio-economic backgrounds, defined by the mother's educational level and/or profession (middle to upper middle class). Although all family members were asked to join the meals, in 10 of the Estonian families in Estonia, and in 11 of the Estonian families in Sweden the fathers are missing during the recording. The Estonian fathers were thus seldom present, although in only three families in Estonia and two in Sweden the parents are divorced. Swedish fathers were seldom absent during the recordings - only two are missing - due to sickness or travel. In only one Swedish family the parents are divorced.

---

<sup>2</sup> There were also four mothers who had lived in Sweden all their lives. If they are included, the average period in Sweden will be 14.58 years with a max. period of 52 years.

Table 1  
Demographic data  
Number of people present at recordings

	SS	EE	ES	All
Mothers present	19	17	18	54
Target children present	19	17	18	54
Fathers present	16	4	5	25
Siblings present	24	9	19	52
All	78	47	60	185

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

## Procedure

Video recordings were made in the families' homes during mealtime, usually on a weekday. Lengths of recordings (= lengths of meals) vary both within and between groups. Both Swedish and Estonian families in Sweden generally sat longer (mean 20 minutes) at the table than families in Estonia (mean 15 minutes), although there existed some in-group variation (see Table 2).

Table 2  
Recordings

	SS	EE	ES
Length of recordings in minutes	13-30	8-32	10-37
Mean length in minutes	20.52	15.12	20.37

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

The recordings were performed by one researcher only, in order to disturb as little as possible. The families were instructed to "act normally" and take no notice of the camera, which was a very small digital video camera. There was no interaction between the researcher and the family members during recordings and the researcher holding the camera was positioned as far away from the family as possible.

The Estonian immigrant families in Sweden spoke mainly Estonian during meals, with few instances of code switching. The families claim that Estonian is the language spoken at home.

## Coding

All behavioural directives, i.e. utterances aimed to prompt or restrict a certain type of behaviour, produced by mother, father, target child or siblings, were identified. The original plan was to distinguish between regulation of behaviour vs. attention, based on McDonald & Pien (1982), who distinguishes between behaviour regulation, attention regulation and speech regulation. However, it appeared that attention was hardly regulated in the material, probably as a consequence of the age of the children. Thus, this category was left out.

The coding procedures were undertaken jointly, in order to obtain a high inter rater reliability.

All behavioural directives were coded according to the linguistic means (sentence form) used for regulation:

---

### 1. Form

**1a. Imperative:** "Finish your milk!"

**1b. Declarative:** "There are potatoes too." "You can have another piece of cucumber."

**1c. Ellipsis.** As ellipsis we have coded all one-word utterances and all incomplete utterances. Incomplete means that the utterance lacks one or more words in obligatory context, e.g. subject, verb or object etc. "The sweater!" = Don't bite at your sweater!

**1d. Questions.** These include open questions, yes-no questions: "May I have beer?", wh-questions: "Why don't I get any gravy?" as well as interrogative declaratives "You have taken gravy?" and ellipses. "Potatoes?", "More?".

**1e. Non-verbal question.** Interrogative vocalizations, often in combination with interrogative face, i.e. pointing at milk pack.

---

Secondly, the outcome or reactions to the regulative were coded as:

---

### 2. Outcome

**2a. Compliance:** The addressee performs the action required (sits still, eats up, takes food etc.).

**2b. Resistance:** The addressee resists the action required, either verbally by protest or non-verbally by a gesture (covering glass when mothers wants to pour, shaking head, pushing away plate etc.).

**2c. Ignoring:** The addressee silently ignores, or does not recognize, the regulative, without explicitly refusing to do so (does not eat, does not pass milk etc.).

---

Form and outcome of behavioural directives were judged by two independent judges with more than 81 % cases of agreement for all protocols. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, scrutinizing the video recordings.

## Results

Gender differences were examined in a preliminary analysis. No significant differences were found; therefore, gender was not included in further analyses. As the composition of families (e.g. the father's presence) and the number of family members participating at meals varied considerably both within and across samples, the statistical analyses were performed only for the mothers' and adolescents' speech. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to ascertain whether the amount of speech variables varied as a function of Culture (EE x ES x SS). To estimate differences between the means of using different types of regulatory utterances in different cultural groups, *post hoc* comparisons with the Planned comparison or LSD Test were performed.

### *Distribution of behaviour regulation between family members*

In order to compare the overall amount of talk in the different groups, an *utterance ratio* - the mean numbers of utterances were divided by time - was calculated, in order to eliminate the differences in lengths of recordings as well as number of people present at the recordings:

Table 3  
Utterance ratio  
Mean numbers of utterances per minute

	SS	EE	ES
Mothers	9.86	7.49	6.67
Fathers	6.73	2.70	2.30
Children	6.14	4.60	4.22

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

A one-way ANOVA yielded significant effects of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS) on mothers' talkativeness,  $F(2, 51) = 6.98, p < .005$ , due to the fact that Swedish mothers, as a group, talk significantly more than Estonian mothers, regardless of place of residence. Estonian mothers talk more in Estonia than in Sweden, but the difference was not statistically significant. All mothers speak more than the rest of the family members. Estonian fathers speak much less than Swedish fathers and Swedish children speak more than Estonian children. For the families as groups Swedish families speak much more than Estonians. To eliminate the influence of the amount of talk on the results of maternal regulatory speech, the frequencies of behavioural directives per mothers' utterances were used in later analyses.

A *regulation ratio* - the mean numbers of behavioural directives divided by time - was calculated (Table 4a):

Table 4a

Regulation ratio

Mean numbers of behavioural directives per minute

	SS	EE	ES
Mothers to children	0.44	0.54	0.22
Fathers to children	0.17	0.18	0.00
Children to parents	0.19	0.03	0.03

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

Interestingly, while the Swedish mothers talk most (see Table 3), the Estonian mothers in Estonia regulate their children more than Swedish mothers and Estonian mothers in Sweden. Estonian fathers in Sweden do not regulate behaviour at all and they also speak little. Again, although the Swedish fathers are more talkative than the Estonian fathers in Estonia, they regulate as much. When it comes to children's regulation of parents, Swedish children produce far more behavioural directives per minute than Estonian children. They are also much more talkative. Compared to the Estonian children, the Swedish children are more active regulators than the other children.

In order to see the relative frequency of regulation in the different groups, the number of behavioural directives must be put in relation to the total number of all utterances. A regulation/utterance ratio gave the results of Table 4b:

Table 4b

Regulation/utterance ratio

Mean number of behavioural directives per utterances

	SS	EE	ES
Mothers to children	0.05	0.09	0.03
Fathers to children	0.03	0.07	0.00
Children to parents	0.03	0.01	0.01

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

A one-way ANOVA yielded significant effects of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS) on mothers' use of behavioural directives per utterance,  $F(2, 51) = 7.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , due to the fact that Estonian mothers living in Estonia used this type of utterances significantly more frequently than the others. ANOVA for behavioural directives used by children showed a main effects of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS),  $F(2, 51) = 9.83$ ,  $p < .0005$ , due to the fact that Swedish children regulated their mothers' behaviour significantly more frequently than their Estonian counterparts.

Thus this procedure gives a somewhat different picture with respect to fathers and shows that it is important to also calculate the number of behavioural directives in relation



to the total number of utterances. The Estonian mothers in Estonia still regulate more than Swedish and Estonian mothers in Sweden. The Swedish children likewise dominate their Estonian counterparts. When it comes to fathers, however, because of the relatively low amount of speech produced by Estonian fathers in Estonia, their regulation/utterance ratio is much higher than that of the Swedish fathers. This difference has impact also on the groups' total scores. It is the Estonian families in Estonia who produces the highest regulation/utterance ratio.

Since behaviour regulation in this data is most often performed in a non-interrupting, parenthetical way, i.e. it is not interrupting the ongoing conversation but rather made as a brief instruction, order, suggestion etc. that allows for the ongoing conversation to continue, examples will be given without context. Example (1) and (2) are intended to show this non-interrupting regulation.

(1) The Swedish family is discussing a maths exam in the boy's (12 years old) class.

- 1 Father: *Hur gick det för Björn då?*  
'How did it [the exam] go for Björn then?'
- 2 Mother: *Ville du inte ha potatis?*  
'Did you not want potatoes?'
- 3 Child: *Jag vet inte.*  
'I don't know.'
- 4 Mother: *Va?*  
'What?'
- 5 Child: *Han sa inget.*  
'He didn't say anything.'
- 6 Father: *Han muttra ju mycket i början.*  
'He did mutter a lot in the beginning.'

(2) The discussion about the exam goes on.

- 1 Father: *Undrar var dom lägger ribban då?*  
*Om de lägger den vid fullt.*  
'Wonder where they draw the border then?' [= what will count as passed in the test]  
'If they draw it at full points.'
- 2 Mother: *Alla rätt?*  
'All correct?'
- 3 Sibling: *Pappa kan jag få potatisen?*  
'Dad can I have the potatoes?'
- 4 Child: *Men dom som gick dom hade fått hjälpstenciler.*  
'But those who went [earlier] had had extra exercises.'

In few instances, the regulation results in a longer stretch of conversation. Such instances are more typical of mealtime conversations in Estonian families living in Estonia (see 3).

(3) Mother is urging child to have dessert.

- 1 Mother: *Võta söö siis magustoitu!*  
'Have, eat desert then!'

- |   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| 2 | Child: | <i>Mul on kõht nii täis.</i><br>'My stomach is so full.'  |
| 3 | Mother | <i>Sa nii kiiresti sööd sellepärast sul saab kõht nii täis.</i><br>'You eat so fast, that's why the stomach is full.' |
| 4 | Child: | <i>Ma ei oska aeglaselt süüa.</i><br>'I can't eat slowly.'  |
| 5 | Mother | <i>Siis pead õppima.</i><br>'Then learn how to.'  |

### *Syntactic form in regulation*

It is in the choice of sentence form that we find the most interesting differences between the three groups. One-way ANOVAs revealed significant effects of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS) on mothers' use of imperatives per behavioural directives,  $F(2, 51) = 5.96$ ,  $p < .005$ , and on the use of questions per behavioural directives,  $F(2, 51) = 16.42$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Mothers from both Estonian samples used imperatives significantly more frequently, and questions significantly less frequently than Swedish mothers.

As shown in Table 5, imperative is the dominant form for Estonians, *Ära noaga vehi!* 'Don't play with the knife!' (EE), *Ära laua ääres kõõlu!* 'Don't be all over the table' (EE), *Ära lurista!* 'Don't slurp!' (EE), *Ei sokolaadi ära võta!* 'Don't touch the chocolate!' (ES), *No ole hea võta natukene!* 'Come on, do take some!' (ES).

Swedes prefer to regulate behaviour by declaratives and questions. Children's behaviour is regulated by tempting suggestions or yes-no questions. Utterances such as *Hur tar du?* 'How do you take?' [= in the wrong way] (SS), *Ska jag lägga upp till dig?* 'Shall I serve you?' (SS), *Den där lilla potatisen, var inte det lite för lite, hördu?* 'That little potato, wasn't that too little, hey?' (SS) and *Du kan ju börja ta grönsaker där.* 'You can start taking vegetables there.' (SS) are used to make children take (more) food. To make children finish, imperatives are sometimes used: *Ät upp allt på tallriken!* 'Finish everything on the plate!' (SS), but seldom as a first try. Even after many tries Swedish mothers use declaratives: *Nu ska du kaka dina köttbullar, asså.* 'Now you are going to eat your meatballs, really.' (SS). More often utterances like *Vill du inte ha mat?* 'Don't you want food?' (SS) are used to encourage finishing eating. In one family the mother has tried hard to encourage her daughter to eat and finally suggests, quite contrary to "good table manners": *Om du stoppar in en tugga samtidigt som du pratar...* 'If you put in one chunk at the same time as you are talking...' (SS). Imperatives in Sweden are mainly used to regulate undesirable behaviour, and not until parents' patience is running short: *Sluta tjafsa nu!* 'Stop fussing now!' (SS) and *Sitt snyggt!* 'Sit properly!', but just as often other forms are used: *Amen...!* 'But...!' (SS), *Du behöver inte skrika.* 'You don't have to shout.' (SS). In short, imperatives are used to stop improper and undesirable behaviour and other forms in order to prompt behaviour.

Table 5  
Behaviour regulation – form, proportions of each participant's contributions in %

	SS	EE	ES
<i>Mothers to children</i>			
Imperatives	14	68	60
Declaratives (except interrogatives)	34	19	24
Questions (incl. declaratives and ellipsis)	43	11	8
Ellipses (except interrogatives)	9	2	8
Non-verbal	0	0	0
<i>Fathers to children</i>			
Imperatives	13	76	0
Declaratives (except interrogatives)	38	8	0
Questions (incl. declaratives and ellipsis)	42	8	0
Ellipses (except interrogatives)	7	8	0
Non-verbal	0	0	0
<i>Children to parents</i>			
Imperatives	8	87	46
Declaratives (except interrogatives)	16	0	23
Questions (incl. declaratives and ellipsis)	36	13	31
Ellipses (except interrogatives)	35	0	0
Non-verbal	5	0	0

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

One-way ANOVAs yielded significant effects of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS) on children's use of imperatives per behavioural directives,  $F(2, 51) = 25.39$ ,  $p < .0001$ , due to the fact that Estonian children living in Estonian used the significantly more frequently than all the other, and Swedish adolescents significantly less frequently than the others. Estonian children used imperatives for regulating parents' behaviour significantly more than Swedish children but significantly less frequently than Estonian children in Estonia. Swedish children regulate their parents by yes-no questions *Kan du skala min?* 'Can you peel mine?' (SS), declaratives *Jag vill ha köttbullar!* 'I want meatballs!' (SS) or ellipses *Köttfärssåsen!* 'The Bolognese!' (SS). It is common that a Swedish child regulates his parents' behaviour when being served food: *Jag vill inte ha så här mycket!* 'I don't want this much!' (SS), *Jag vill ha köttbullar!* 'I want meatballs!' (SS) or otherwise: *Skynda dig pappa! Vi har börjat redan!* 'Hurry up dad! We've already started!' (SS).

It is interesting to note that Estonian children in Estonia use imperatives, whereas the Estonian children in Sweden behave more like Swedish children in that they also use declaratives and questions. This suggests that the immigrant children are more influenced by their Swedish environment - peers, teachers, etc. than by their mothers.

An interesting phenomenon is the non-verbal regulation, which sometimes occurs alone and sometimes in combination with verbal language. In (4), at the end of the meal, the

mother tries to make her son, 12 years, to eat some more cucumber by using the ellipsis “Gustav!” while reaching a piece of cucumber towards him. This family has the rule “One piece of vegetables is compulsory”. Therefore, mother’s question in 4 “Have you done it?”, suggesting that the compulsory piece is already taken, makes proper sense.

(4)

- 1 Mother: *Gustav!* (reaches piece of cucumber on a fork)  
 2 Child: *Ja? Ska jag ta en grönsak?*  
 ‘Yes? Shall I take a vegetable?’  
 4 Mother: *Har du gjort det?*  
 ‘Have you [already] done it?’  
 5 Child: *Ja det har jag.*  
 ‘Yes I have.’

#### *Outcome of behaviour regulation*

A significant effect of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS) was revealed in the ANOVA for the compliance,  $F(2,51)=3.51$ ,  $p<.05$ , due to the fact that children in Swedish families complied to behavioural directives directed towards them significantly more frequently than Estonian children in families living in Sweden. The frequency of resistance and ignoring maternal behavioural directives revealed no significant effect of Culture (EE vs. ES vs. SS).

Compliance to the behavioural directive is the most common outcome category in all three groups. Resistance - in the form of rejection or negotiation - is the least common category in all groups. For both parents and children, there are more instances of compliance in the Swedish families than in the Estonian families and there are fewer cases of resistance and ignoring in the Swedish families. It is worth noticing that Estonian children do not regulate their fathers’ behaviour at all and that Estonian fathers in Sweden do not regulate their children’s behaviour at all.

Table 6  
Outcome of behaviour regulatives

	SS	EE	ES
<i>Mothers to children’s regulation</i>			
Compliance	76	53	46
Resistance	6	12	19
Ignoring	18	35	35
<i>Fathers to children’s regulation</i>			
Compliance	66	0	0
Resistance	9	0	0
Ignoring	25	0	0
<i>Children to mothers’ regulation</i>			
Compliance	78	63	62
Resistance	6	12	15
Ignoring	16	25	23
<i>Children to fathers’ regulation</i>			
Compliance	100	55	0

Resistance	0	9	0
Ignoring	0	36	0

SS=Swedish families, EE=Estonian families in Estonia, ES=Estonian families in Sweden.

## Discussion

The study indicated both similarities and differences in the regulatory language used during mealtime conversations in Swedish families in Sweden, and in Estonian families in Estonia and Sweden.

### *Amount of regulatory speech*

The study confirmed the prediction that Estonian mothers in Estonia use more behavioural directives than Swedish mothers. This finding confirms earlier results of Junefelt and Tulviste (1997), who found that mothers in Estonia were more controlling than Swedish mothers, in that they used more behavioural directives towards their two-year-olds; as well as the results of Tulviste (2000), who found Estonian mothers of children to be both regulating behaviour and commenting on behaviour more than American mothers. In addition, the study yielded that Estonian mothers living in Sweden directed significantly less regulatory speech towards their children than Estonian mothers in Estonia, being more similar to Swedes in this respect. It shows that the frequent use of behavioural directives typical of Estonian mothers in Estonia is not common even to mothers who share the same linguistic system (Estonian language) but live in another country - Sweden.

As could have been expected, the behaviour of preadolescent children (9-13 years) is much less regulated than that of the toddlers studied by Tulviste & Junefelt (1997), where the frequencies of regulation of physical activity were 7.71 per minute in the Estonian data and 4.59 per minute in the Swedish data. These figures may be compared to the results presented in Table 4a, where we found frequencies per family of 0.54 per minute for the Estonian mothers in Estonia, 0.22 for the Estonian mothers in Sweden and 0.44 for the Swedish mothers. The results of Tulviste (2000) further confirms that behaviour regulation is decreasing along with children's age - the Estonian mothers of teenagers made 0.52 behaviour regulating directives per minute (compared to the American mothers who made only 0.05). Thus, all groups of mothers in the current study were using more behavioural directives than did the Americans in the study by Tulviste (2000). At the same time, the Swedish mothers were as talkative as American mothers (Tulviste 2000).

An interesting fact is the relatively low degree of regulation in the Estonian families in Sweden. All family members regulate less than all their counterparts in Estonia and the Swedish families. In their amount of talk, measured in utterances, they behave in an "Estonian" way. In amount of regulation, however, they score much lower than the Estonian families in Estonia and also lower than the Swedish families. It is difficult to explain this. All Estonian families were visited by Estonian researchers, so it could hardly be explained by the fact that the families were victims of some "observer's paradox" and thus were trying to behave in a "Swedish" way.

*Equality of family members*

The finding that Swedish children are more actively regulating their parents than all Estonian children supported the second hypothesis of the study that more asymmetrical interaction will occur in families living in Estonia than in Sweden. Whereas many previous studies on regulation have concentrated on maternal, and sometimes also child regulation of mothers, we have chosen to study also fathers' regulation. Although the Estonian fathers in Estonia do not speak much, but when they do, it is often in order to regulate child behaviour. Because of the fathers' and children's contributions, the Swedish families as a group are regulating more than Estonian families (Table 4a). This finding demonstrates the bigger asymmetry in family interactions in Estonia, but also the fact that in Estonia, mothers are the main socializers of children. The result is in accordance with a previous finding about the centrality of maternal role in the former Soviet Union family structure (see Narusk & Pulkkinen 1994).

When compared to their total number of utterances, however, Estonian mothers in Estonia regulate more than Swedish mothers and Estonian mothers in Sweden. The Estonian fathers in Estonia are more active than the Swedish fathers and the Estonian fathers in Sweden, who do not regulate behaviour at all.

Although the mothers dominate during dinner conversations in all three groups, the Swedish mothers turned out to be significantly more talkative than Estonian mothers living in Estonia as well as Estonian mothers living in Sweden. The study showed that the Swedish families are more equal in that the fathers talk as much as their children. In the Estonian families, both in Estonia and in Sweden, the fathers speak less than both mothers and children. The equity in conversation in the Swedish families is found in many different types of behaviour - in amount of talk, in regulation, in use of metapragmatic comments (De Geer et al. in press) and even in participation in recordings. The Swedish fathers were present during the recordings in 16 of 19 families (see Table 1). This may be a reflection of the overall relative gender equity principle that exists to a higher degree in Sweden than in Estonia. For several decades now, Swedish men take an increasing responsibility not only for their children's financial support but also for their daily life. Many Swedish fathers take paternity leave, pick up children from day care or after school centres and spend afternoons and evenings together with their children. The explanation why Estonian fathers take a less important role in dinnertime conversation than Swedish fathers is probably that Estonian family life is more traditionally patriarchal than the Swedish.

*Syntactic form in regulation*

Behaviour is thus proportionally most frequently regulated by Estonians in Estonia. However, different syntactic means are used. Estonian parents, both in Estonia and Sweden, use mainly imperatives and Swedes use declaratives and questions. These findings confirm earlier results, which have shown that Estonian mothers use more imperatives than Swedish mothers (Junefelt & Tulviste 1998). In our study we show that this difference applies also to fathers. Interestingly, the Estonian children in Sweden use a more varied "repertoire" than the Estonian children in Estonia, in that they use imperatives, declarative statements and question on a fairly equal basis. This demonstrates that Estonian children in Sweden have been influenced by the Swedish preference for using less direct ways for regulating other people's behaviour. The Estonian immigrant children share with the Swedish children the use of fewer imperatives than their parents, and use instead more questions: *Kas ma*

*saaksin apelsini?* 'May I have orange?', *Kas sa saad kallata või?* 'Can you pour?'. This might be a result of Swedish interference following their going to school and playing with Swedish children. Although their parents speak Swedish at work and with Swedish friends, their linguistic system appears to be more robust with respect to language change.

#### *Outcome of behaviour regulation*

The study found that compliance to the behavioural directive is the most common outcome category in all three groups, e.g. children from all groups most frequently do what they are told to, regardless what syntactic form their parents prefer. This fact supports the notion that the ways of using language while interacting with children are culture-specific. Previous studies (see Kagitçibasi 1996) have demonstrated that the way how the same parental behaviour (for example, behaviour control) is perceived by children from different cultures (as hostility and rejection vs. warmth and acceptance) depends on which pattern of socialization children have been used to. In this respect the finding that Estonian children living in Sweden comply significantly less frequently than Swedish children, is of special interest. According to our data mothers of Estonian children use behavioural directives as frequently as Swedish mothers, but the syntactic form of it is different. While Swedish mothers prefer declaratives and questions, Estonian mothers in Sweden direct towards their children a regulatory speech that consists chiefly of imperatives. Maybe it is more difficult to follow direct behavioural directives in a country where most people use more indirect ways to get other people do what you want. Furthermore, the more direct way of regulating by imperatives may be successful towards infants and toddlers, because imperatives are easy to understand. However, they seem to be less effective when used towards adolescents, at least in the case when the adolescent is capable of performing activities (e.g. eat a meal) without the help of a parent. Estonian children in Sweden used more questions and fewer imperatives than their mothers. It demonstrates that they have been influenced by the Swedish preference for regulating by declaratives and questions.

We find a higher degree of compliance in children than in parents in all groups, a fact that possibly reflects the relatively asymmetrical character of adult-child conversation. All parents sometimes leave the regulation unanswered, uncommented or do not react at all. An interesting fact is, however, that during a video-recorded meal Estonian children do not regulate their fathers at all.

The study revealed that in Swedish families compliance is the most frequent outcome. Is it a result of using more indirect ways of regulating? Or is it part of a "Swedish" communicative style? We just want to note here that Swedes have been described as a nation avoiding getting into open conflicts with others (see e.g., Daun 1991).

The category ignoring does not involve any verbal reply; it means neither compliance nor overt resistance, only silence, which can of course be a sign of both protest and avoidance. Resistance is one means of expressing power; silence is another. This - together with the fact that the Estonian parents in Estonia regulate more - could suggest that Estonians are more likely to exhibit power than Swedish parents. Although Estonians in Sweden do not regulate much, it is a fact that when they do, their directives are just as often met by resistance or ignoring as the directives in Estonian families in Estonia.

However, silence can also be a way of expressing agreement or acceptance. Then the category ignoring, which is found more often in Estonian families, could be a sign of the generally lower talkativeness found in these families. In the Estonian groups we find

higher proportions of ignoring than in the Swedish group. This should not necessarily be taken as evidence that Estonians are ignoring each other but rather that silence in this culture often means agreement.

Thus, silence following behaviour regulation may suggest both protest and agreement. It seems that, at least in the family context (and in this case family context with researchers present) the communicative style of Swedes is that of using indirect regulation followed by compliance. The Estonian style, on the other hand, is characterized by direct forms of regulation, and is followed by compliance more frequently in Estonia than in the Estonian families residing in Sweden, although the difference does not reach statistical significance.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that language socialization differs not only between Estonian and Swedish families but also between Estonian families living in Estonia and Sweden with respect to the amount and the means of behaviour regulation. Mothers regulate most in all groups. In the Swedish families regulation is performed more "equally" than in the other groups. The Swedish children are more actively regulating their parents than the Estonian children. It seems that the Pontecorvian idea of language socialization as a bi-directional activity (1998) is a cultural feature, which is subject to change, rather than a universal one.

The Swedish fathers take a more active part in mealtime conversation than the Estonian fathers in Estonia, but the latter regulate more than the former.

When it comes to means of behaviour regulation - at least in terms of syntactic form - this seems to be more resistant to change. It appears that among the Estonians in Sweden, at least the children may have been influenced by the Swedish way of regulating, because they use fewer imperatives than their parents. This is not the case with the Estonian parents in Sweden, who do not differ from Estonian parents in Estonia in this respect. In the Estonian families in Sweden it is only the children who use the syntactic forms preferred by Swedes. Syntactic form can hardly be regarded as part of a person's conversational style - it is rather a trait of the language. What we see in the Estonian children in Sweden is probably a case of grammatical interference. The preferred Swedish syntactic form for behaviour regulation is the question and declarative form. The Estonian children in Sweden use these forms when they are speaking Estonian at home. Obviously, they have been more influenced by people outside the home when developing their communicative style. This result provides strong support for Tannen's (1981) claim that conversational style is more resistant to change than language itself. The Estonian children have changed their language: They use proportionally fewer imperatives than their parents, but they have not changed their conversational style: They speak as little and use as little regulatory speech as their parents.

The study demonstrated that the bicultural mothers combine features of the original culture (little talk, a large number of imperatives in their regulatory speech) with patterns adopted from the majority culture (being not as directive as Estonian mothers in Estonia) in their language socialization and child rearing practices. With respect to the syntactic form of regulation, their offspring behaved more like Swedes do. At the same time they were talking less and directed fewer behavioural directives towards other family members



than Swedish children did. With respect to this behaviour they were similar to children living in Estonia.

Whilst conversational style is of course determined by more features than those focussed on here, it is interesting to notice that it is indeed resistant to change. Our investigation is based on a limited population and although many of our findings about Estonians in Estonia and Swedes in Sweden have confirmed earlier studies, there is still more research needed on the Estonian group in Sweden, in family conversation as well as in other situations.

## References

- Andersen, Elaine Slosberg (1990) *Speaking with style: The sociolinguistic skills of children*. London: Routledge.
- Becker, Judith (1982) Children's strategic use of requests to mark and manipulate social status. In Stan Kuczaj II, (ed.), *Language Development Vol 2: Language, Thought and Culture*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass., pp. 1-35.
- Becker, Judith (1988) The success of parents' indirect techniques for teaching their preschoolers pragmatic skills. *First Language* 8: 173-181.
- Becker, Judith (1990) Processes in the acquisition of pragmatic competence. In Gina Conti-Ramsden, & Catherine Snow (eds.), *Children's Language* 7. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass., pp. 7-24.
- Bellinger, D. (1979) Changes in the explicitness of mothers' directives as children age. *Journal of Child Language* 18: 41-49.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana (1997) *Dinner talk. Cultural patterns of sociability and socialization in family discourse*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, & Catherine E. Snow (1992) Developing autonomy for tellers, tales, and telling in family narrative events. *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 2.3: 187-217.
- Daun, Å. (1991) Individualism and collectivity among Swedes. *Ethnos* 56.3-4: 165-172.
- De Geer, Boel, Tiia Tulviste, Luule Mizera, & Marja-Terttu Tryggvason (in press) Socialization in communication: Pragmatic socialization during dinnertime in Estonian, Finnish and Swedish families. *Journal of Pragmatics*.
- Goodwin, Marjorie Harness (1990) *He-Said-She-Said. Talk as social organization among black children*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Halle, T., & M. Shatz (1994) Mothers' social regulatory language to young children in family settings. *First Language* 14: 83-104.
- Heath, S.B. (1983) *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Junefelt, Karin, & Tiia Tulviste (1997) Regulation and praise in American, Estonian and Swedish mother-child interaction. *Mind, Culture and Activity* 4.1: 24-33.

Junefelt, Karin, & Tiia Tulviste (1998) American, Estonian and Swedish mothers' regulation of their children's discourse construction. In M. Lyra, & J. Valsiner (eds.), *Construction of psychological processes in interpersonal communication*. pp. 137-154.

Kivik, Piibi-Kai (1998) What silence says: Communicative style and identity. *Trames* 2.52/47.1: 66-90.

Kulick, Don (1990) *Having head and showing knowledge*. Department of Anthropology: Stockholm University.

Kagitçibasi, Ç. (1996) *Family and human development across cultures*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McDonald, Lynda, & Diana Pien (1982) Mother conversational behaviour as a function of interactional intent. *Journal of Child Language* 9: 337-358.

Narusk, Anu, & Lea Pulkkinen (1994) Parental relationship and adolescents' conceptions of their interaction with significant others. *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 9: 203-213.

Ochs, Elinor (1988) *Culture and language development: Language acquisition and language socialization in a Samoan village*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ochs, Elinor (1996) Linguistic resources for socializing humanity. In John Gumperz, & Stephen Levinson (eds.), *Rethinking linguistic relativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 407-437.

Pan, B.A., A. Imbens-Bailey, K Winner, & C. Snow (1996) Communicative intents expressed by parents in interaction with young children. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 42: 248-267.

Pontecorvo, C. (1998) *Discourse and socialization in families*. Paper presented at the fourth Congress of the International Society for Cultural Research and Activity Theory, Århus, Denmark.

Schneiderman, M.H. (1983) Do what I mean, not what I say! Changes in mothers action-directives to young children. *Journal of Child Language* 10: 357-367.

Shieffelin, Bambi, & Elinor Ochs (1986) *Language socialization across cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tannen, Deborah (1981) Indirectness in discourse: Ethnicity as conversational style. *Discourse Processes* 4: 221-238.

Tulviste, Tiia, & Margit Raudsepp (1997) The conversational style of Estonian mothers. *First Language* 17: 151-163.

Tulviste, Tiia (2000) Socialization at meals. A comparison of American and Estonian mother-adolescent interaction. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 31.5: 537-556.

Welles-Nyström, Barbara (1996) Scenes from a marriage: Equality ideology in Swedish family policy, maternal ethnotheories, and practice. In Sarah Harkness, & Charles M. Super (eds.), *Parents' cultural belief systems: Their origins, expressions, and consequences*. New York: Guilford, pp. 192-214.