

REGULATORY TALK AND POLITENESS AT THE FAMILY DINNER TABLE

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Abstract

This study examined the use of regulatory talk at dinnertime in twenty Swedish families with children between the ages of four and seventeen years. The aim of the study was to explore activity regulation in the light of contextual factors, such as the age of the participating children, the number of participants and the different kinds of conversational contexts. Regulatory talk extracted from twenty videotaped dinner conversations was transcribed, coded and analysed within the framework of theories about the impact of context on control acts, indirect speech and politeness.

Regulatory utterances, about 7 % of all utterances produced by all family members, were mostly formulated as direct requests and about 15 % of them were mitigated, softening the impact of coerciveness. Indirect regulators occurred, however, in nearly one half of the cases whereas hints were rather uncommon. Age of the children, as well as activity and conversational context had an obvious impact on the way regulatory utterances were performed. Most instrumental regulators (related to the dinner routine) were direct (somewhat more than 60 %) and most non-instrumental regulators were indirect (nearly 60 %). Furthermore, the intended goal i.e. what action was required from the addressee seemed to affect the use of regulators: Regulation at the dinner table mostly concerned nonverbal actions and requests for objects and was related to the main activity.

Compared with the American and Israeli groups in Blum-Kulka's study (1997), the Swedish parents together tended to be more indirect but less mitigating. However, in instrumental contexts i.e. when regulating routine actions relating to the meal, most parental regulators were direct (60 %) whereas about 75 % of the utterances were indirect in non-instrumental contexts. A comparison of these findings with the data from Blum-Kulka (1997) and with other similar intercultural studies leads to the conclusion that situational factors, such as family structure, conversational genres and communicative goals, might have more impact on regulatory talk than socio-cultural background.

Keywords: Family discourse, Dinner talk, Behaviour regulation, Control acts, Politeness, Indirect speech.

1. Introduction

Regulating the nonverbal or verbal behaviour of others is one of the most fundamental and universal functions of language. However, its use and performance is governed by culturally conditioned norms and a system of situationally dependent rules. In certain contexts e.g. one-way communication between parties with unequal but inherent and accepted access to power such as between captain and crew during a flight or between doctor and nurse during surgery (see Watts 1991), behavioural regulation may, and must, be fairly direct. In this case, cooperation requires distinctive directives, regardless of social demands for indirectness, but should not cause offence. Also, in social settings without obvious differences in power relations, there may be a need for some

instrumental cooperation. At the dinner table, for example, a joint activity is facilitated by routine control acts ("Pass the salt, please."), which may arise in the middle of other kinds of talk or conversation, serving a more social function ("How was your day in town?").

However, in such social settings as dinner conversations, regulatory speech may be potentially threatening to the self-esteem ("face") of the addressed party. To avoid social conflicts and misunderstandings due to offensive directness, the use of control acts may be attenuated by, for example, indirect speech or other mitigating devices ("Would you, please, ...?"). This kind of "linguistic politeness" seems to exist in all known speech communities, although the expressions used may vary across cultures and situations.

In this respect, dinner talk in families with children does not differ so much from other types of table conversations. Generally, talk at the table seems to serve two main functions: Regulating the dinner routines and creating an atmosphere of social ambience (Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997). Just as in other social settings, regulatory talk usually requires some mitigation to preserve positive relationships between the participants. However, family table talk normally differs from other kinds of dinner conversations in some important respects. First, there is a naturally asymmetric power relationship between parents and children that appears particularly obvious at the dinner table. Second, as a consequence, the coming together of parents and children around the dinner table provides an excellent opportunity for explicit and implicit (modelling) socialization. Third, in many modern Western families, the dinner has a special status as one of the few remaining moments to consolidate family bonds of solidarity and affection. Thus, there seems to be a conflict between the need to display the unequal power relation for socialization purposes on the one hand and the desire to create an atmosphere of solidarity by avoiding face-threatening directives on the other. The question posed as a starting point for the present study is therefore: How do families of different shapes with children of different ages manage to keep the balance between social solidarity and the need for social control and socialization at dinnertime?

2. Aim and focus of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore how the realization of regulatory functions of dinnertime conversation varies with contextual factors such as age and number of participants at the family dinner table. The study focuses on the use of direct regulatory expressions and mitigating strategies (through indirectness or reformulations) in the context of dinner conversations in twenty, middle-class, monolingual Swedish families with one to four children aged between 4 and 17 years. The families chosen were socio-culturally homogenous but since they differed with regard to the age of the participating children and the number of participants at dinner, they were divided into *age groups* 1 and 2 (4-11 years and 11-17 years) and *number groups* A and B (2-4 participants and 5-6 participants).

The study is based on the general assumption of behaviour regulation as a universal element of human communication, crucial to activity related discourse such as dinner talk and highly context dependent with regard to the performance of regulatory utterances.

Thus, the use of regulatory talk in a family dinner context may depend on socio-culturally conditioned speech habits, as suggested in a recent study by De Geer & Tulviste (2002) but also on contextual constraints exerted by *background factors* such as the different ages of the children and the number of the participants at the table (cf. Tannen 1981). Earlier research has found that behaviour regulation occurs frequently in communication between adults and small children (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990) in a family context (Snow et al. 1990), not least at dinnertime (Blum-Kulka 1990, 1994, 1997). There is also clear evidence of a decrease in the amount of direct regulation by parents as children approach school age (Bellinger 1979) but seemingly no reports about the impact on directness caused by the presence of both very young and older (adolescent) siblings during family dinner conversations.

Furthermore, observations of multiparty encounters suggest that conversations including more than four participants need more routine regulation (Brumark 2003, 2005) but little attention seems directed toward the distribution of direct and indirect regulatory talk in multiparty dinner conversations. However, the present study assumes that the presence of younger and older siblings as well as more than four participants at the table influences the use of direct or indirect regulation at dinnertime.

However, not only the background factors mentioned above but also the situational framing of the *activity* and *conversational context* (or co-text) with its inherent goals seems to determine the use of regulatory speech (Goffman 1981). Children, as well as adults, have been observed to be sensitive to the impact of conversational genres appearing during dinner (Snow et al. 1990; Brumark 2003) and able develop their use of indirect and mitigated devices (Snow et al. 1990) according to the requirements of the situation. In this study, I have also distinguished between different genres of talk or conversational episodes, in which regulatory utterances may arise at different stages of dinner. Furthermore, there might be variations in the use of direct regulation depending on the *goal* of regulation i. e. the behaviour being the target (dinner routine activities, table manners or transfer of information).

Finally, supposing regulation in communication is both linguistically, socio-culturally and situationally conditioned, the distinction between directness and indirectness in regulation requires careful intra-cultural and intra-language observations of regulatory speech. In earlier research, directness has sometimes been described as equivalent to the imperative form of the verb although this syntactic form might be experienced as more or less directive depending on culture and language (Brown & Levinson 1987). Furthermore, declaratives, especially if accompanied by a demanding tone of voice and facial expressions or if uttered within an obligatory context, may function as more or less straight directives. In the present study, a careful linguistic and contextual analysis has been carried out before coding regulatory expressions as direct or indirect (c. f. Ervin-Tripp 1976).

Thus, the questions to be addressed in this study are: 1) To what extent do the family members use behaviour regulation at the dinner table and what behaviours are the targets? 2) How does regulation at dinner vary with age of the participating children and the number of participants at the table? 3) How do conversational contexts and goals of regulation affect the performance of regulatory expressions? 4) How do the Swedish families use direct and indirect regulation to balance between social solidarity and social control? This last question will be considered by discussing concrete examples in relation to the findings of other studies.

3. Dinner table conversation

This study focused on regulatory talk appearing in the context of conversations at the family dinner table. Like other well-defined socio-cultural activities, dinner table conversations are governed by a host of explicit and implicit rules and norms. This means that conventions govern not only how to perform the physical activity of having dinner but also which nonverbal and verbal means are permissible for regulating dinner routines (Goffman 1981).

In certain cultures, verbal activities during the meals are reduced to a necessary minimum in order to regulate the physical activity e.g. in certain rural families (see examples quoted in Blum-Kulka 1997). In most Western, well-educated, urban populations on the other hand, dinner conversation is not only permitted but socially expected and even required.

3.1. *Family dinner as a socio-cultural event*

In contrast to many other types of social events including meals involving adults, family dinners are “bound in time and space, delimited in its participants and governed by /.../ own rules of interaction (Blum-Kulka 1997: 8). Moreover, the participation of small children during meals implies a more asymmetrical power relationship between the participants than in dinners with adults only because of the need for social control by the parents.

However, the use of “social control acts” (Blum-Kulka 1997) may also be potentially “face-threatening” (Brown and Levinson 1987) in the family context and therefore threaten the social bonds within the family. In Western, middle-class families the use of social control is therefore generally balanced by efforts to preserve an emotional atmosphere. The degree of formality and the roles prescribed for the participants may differ considerably between different cultures as well as within the same socio-cultural context. Thus, family dinners generally appear less formal but governed by rules, in a “place of continuum between mundane, day-to-day informal encounters and formal public events” (Blum-Kulka 1997: 8).

3.2. *The functions of family dinner conversations*

As pointed out in the introduction, family dinner talk has certain components in common with other types of social encounters – including other dinner settings – but it also differs from other types of dinner table conversations by serving a multitude of different specific functions. The most obvious communicative function is that of regulating the activity of having dinner by routine talk: Laying the table, serving, passing dishes and spices and, eating. This “instrumental” talk accompanies and relates to an activity and may arise in the middle of other kinds of talk or conversation.

Apart from instrumental talk regulating dinner routines, family dinner table conversations serve two other main functions: Creating an atmosphere of social ambience (sociability, Blum-Kulka 1997) and serving socialization purposes (socialization Blum-Kulka p. 34).

More generally speaking, the sociability goal entails the phatic and the informative function, moving within certain thematic frames (van Dijk 1981), whereas the socialization goal is achieved directly and explicitly through pedagogical and regulatory talk on the one hand, and indirectly through all kinds of socio-culturally conditioned talk on the other. This means that anything happening during the dinner might have a potential socialization value. The frequent use of more or less mitigated control acts, not only aimed at regulating the eating activity but also having a socializing purpose, appears to be evidence of the seemingly conflicting goals of table talk during family meals.

4. Regulation of behaviour

The regulatory functions of communication, performed by different kinds of communicative acts, generally termed requests, directives or control acts, have attracted attention from a theoretical as well as an empirical perspective (Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1975; Grice 1975; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Ervin-Tripp 1982; Ervin-Tripp & Gordon 1986).

In the research review below, the more widely used term, control act, is used as a common denominator.¹

4.1. *The components of control acts*

From a speech perspective, Austin (1962) was one of the first to recognize the functions of locutions in natural discourse. Although examining isolated, primarily performative acts out of context, he distinguished that an utterance may have similar locutionary content and syntactic form but different illocutionary force, or communicative function, depending on the situation (Austin 1962).

Further, in addition to the illocutionary force of a control act e.g. a request, we also have a varying perlocutionary force, which may be defined as the expected outcome of the request in an actual situation (Searle 1969; Coulthard 1978). The perlocutionary force can have several dimensions. According to Ervin-Tripp (1982), a request is successful with regard to its outcome if it:

- attracts the attention of an appropriate partner in case of no joint activity
- helps the addressee to know what to do, explicitly or implicitly by the aid of contextual clues
- is persuasive and convinces the addressee to act
- establishes or maintains an appropriate social relationship.

¹ It should be pointed out that most research reviewed refers to English-speaking cultures due to lack of comparable studies of Swedish speakers (see however Brumark 1989, 2003, forthcoming; Tryggvason & De Geer 2002; De Geer & Tulviste 2005).

4.2. *The realization of control acts in natural communication*

In a classical study, Ervin-Tripp (1976) demonstrated through a large number of examples that not only may the same locutionary content and syntactic form require different interpretations in different situations, but the same intention can be realized in a number of different ways depending on the setting and the response required. In her extensive material she found, for instance, at least six different ways of asking for a match: need statements ("I need a match."), imperatives ("Give me a match!" or elliptically "A match!"), embedded imperatives ("Could you give me a match?"), permission directives ("May I have a match?"), question directives ("Have you got a match?") and hints ("The matches are all gone.").

The first two categories mentioned above i.e. need statements and imperatives, are frequent within family discourse with children and is one of a child's first means to express a want. Among the imperative requests, Ervin-Tripp observed four main structural variants, apart from ellipses: a) you + modal verb ("You shall....") b) attention-getters ("Excuse me!"), postposed tags ("Carry these, will you?") and rising pitch. Further, she found a distinctive social distribution of different variants. In certain settings, for instance at table, "please" was used to mark rank or age difference and, in certain professional groups, request forms were likely to co-occur with other speech features, such as slang, casual phonology and first-naming.

A third category, embedded imperatives, formed as questions and thus more indirect, according to the system elaborated by Brown & Levinson (1987) and Blum-Kulka (1994), appear nevertheless to be understood successfully in most situations, even by two-years-olds. Imbedded imperatives, noted as frequent in communication between parent and child in activity-oriented situations, are the earliest structurally differentiated forms in children (Ervin-Tripp 1976). Furthermore, the social distribution in the use of embedded imperatives is quite distinct.

The reason for the transparency of embedded imperatives is probably because the object and agent are expressed explicitly, as pointed out by Ervin-Tripp, but also because they contain a) the modal verbs can, could, will, would b) a subject that is identical with the addressee and c) a predicate that describes an action physically possible at the time of utterance (Sinclair & Coulthard 1974). According to Brown & Levinson (1987), who used the term indirect for this category, the verb forms "would" and "could" might serve as hedging and thereby mark the utterance.

The permission directives resemble the embedded imperatives, being transparent but still indirect (according to the terminology of Brown & Levinson 1987), but they differ from the latter type by the shift of focus to the sender. It was observed that permission directives were lacking in communication between adults but occurred frequently among children ("Can I have X?"). Equally indirect (despite the term created by Ervin-Tripp (1976) signalling directness), the non-explicit question directives require more inference and interpretation from the addressee. On the other hand, their ambiguity allows the addressee "an escape route", if he does not want to comply (Ervin-Tripp 1976). Despite the risk of misunderstandings, this indirect (Brown & Levinson 1987; Blum-Kulka 1990) variant of requests appears to be quite frequent and has the same social determinants as embedded imperatives, although the former seem to be more optional.

As pointed out by several theorists, the indirectness is counterbalanced in the cases mentioned above by the normative force of the conventional system of rules. According to a rule model suggested by Sinclair & Coulthard (1974), declaratives and interrogatives should be interpreted as requests (or commands) if a) "the agent is we, someone or there is no agent" b) "it refers to an action or activity within the obligations of the addressee" c) "in the case of "we", it is directed to a subordinate".

The most opaque form of request is a hint, demanding inference and leaving interpretations and options open to the addressee. Ervin-Tripp (1976) found this type of request in situations, on the one hand, where the demand was special and the sender did not want to be explicit and, on the other hand, where the necessity of the demanded act was clear by the fact that everyone knew what had to be done and by whom. Furthermore, hints were found to serve a multitude of different functions and were frequent in families and communal groups, alluding to shared knowledge and serving solidarity-enhancement. Due to their indirectness, these "condition directives" appear to be ineffective under most circumstances, "except under strong obligation or solicitude" (Ervin-Tripp 1976: 44).

The selective factors influencing the realization of requests have thus been observed to be rank, age and familiarity between the parties (Ervin-Tripp 1976), power, solidarity and affection in family settings (Blum-Kulka 1990), distance and deference in the relation of the parties (Brown & Levinson 1987), presence of outsiders, especially those of high rank (Ervin-Tripp 1976), territorial location (Ervin-Tripp 1976), the imposition exerted by the request (Brown & Levinson 1987) or the seriousness or cost of the service asked, the relation of the directive to expected roles, and whether compliance may be assumed due to the type of service, normal roles or power relations (Ervin-Tripp 1976).

Studies of both adults and children show that the activity context is most important for the choice of request. Children also make a role-relevant differentiation between familiar and unfamiliar addressees as well as between addressees who are presupposed to comply and those from whom no compliance could be expected.

4.3. The realization of control acts related to directness and politeness

Why does the realization of control acts differ with such situational factors as social, distance, power and the cost of the demanded acts or actions. Some possible explanations have been conveyed by theories about politeness.

Despite different perspectives, theorists and empirical researchers seem to agree upon the use of politeness in conversations as a strategy for conflict avoidance (Lakoff 1977; Brown and Levinson 1978; Leech 1980; Fraser 1990). For instance, Brown and Levinson (1987) depart from the standpoint derived from Goffman's assumption (1967) of communication as a fundamentally dangerous occupation where participants adopt "the diplomatic fiction of the virtual offence" as a basic interactional strategy. Among acts considered as potential offences are for instance requests, offers and promises that impose some positive or negative want on the addressee.

Thus, the underlying social motivation for systems regulating acts of politeness would be that of "face-concerns" (Goffman 1967). Politeness is used to satisfy the "face-needs" of self and others if threatened. It is expressed by strategic or culturally constrained choices affected by such variables as the necessity to communicate

something efficiently or urgently, the social distance and power between the parties, the degree of perceived imposition (for instance by the cost of the act demanded) i.e. the “negative face”, as well as the need for enhancement of a positive self-image. In a concrete situation, the speaker has, if he wants to perform a “face-threatening act” e.g. a request, to choose an “on-record” strategy, with or without redressive actions (such as mitigations) or an “off-record” strategy e.g. by using a hint, at the risk of offending the addressee or forcing him/her to make inferences about the aim of the “face-threatening” act. The greater the distance between the parties, the more obvious the difference between them with regard to social power and the higher the degree of the imposition of the offending act, the more urgent the need for redressive action by mitigation or politeness strategies, for instance “on-record” conventional indirectness.

However, in contrast to most acts in “positive face” situations, control acts always imply the risk of a “face threat”, being implicitly imposing or intruding. Ervin-Tripp (1976) states that the realization of requests from imperatives, embedded imperatives, question imperatives to hints “are successively more coercive” (Ervin-Tripp 1976: 51). Statements do not require a response, interrogatives allow the listener to interpret the directive as an information request and embedded imperatives give the listener the possibility to react as if he had done it voluntarily. Thus, indirectness protects both parties from explicit non-compliance. The different forms also require differing amount of inference or background knowledge.

However, if the directness of requests may be imposed by intrusion and coerciveness in certain situations, indirect requests may in other situations, where efficiency is important, create irritation by being ambiguous and requiring the addressee’s inference. In this case they might increase the imposition instead of neutralizing it. The counter-balance between these two poles has been studied in empirical research in terms of politeness. As pointed out by Ervin-Tripp et al (1990), persuasiveness and politeness are “separable dimensions of control acts” (Ervin-Tripp et al 1990: 310).

4.4. Directness and politeness in adult-child communication

The use of control acts by parents has been widely studied ever since the rise of interest in natural parent-child communications (Ervin-Tripp & Gordon 1986; Snow et al. 1990; Blum-Kulka 1987, 1990). Blum-Kulka claims that conversation between adults and children is “essentially polite”, which means “richly mitigated”, though “highly direct” (Blum-Kulka 1990: 259). In the three groups studied, adult directives were observed to be direct in 60-80 % of the cases in three cultural groups and mitigated in about 50 % of the cases in the parental directives.

The reason for these apparently contradictory facts would not only be the high degree of asymmetry, informality and affection between the parties but also the clear relation between the choice of speech acts and situational constraints. Blum-Kulka suggests that parents have the choice of two modes available to be polite: the solidarity politeness mode, expressed through directness attenuated by mitigation and the conventional politeness mode, expressed by different forms of indirectness.

In children, the ability to “read” the requirements of a given communication situation may be seen as early as two to four years of age (Bates 1976; Ervin-Tripp 1982). Children’s comparative ratings of politeness show that permission requests are

initially judged to be more polite than conventional modal requests for action from others which are “on record”. Hints seem not to be recognized as requests by the youngest children.

However, even if very young children manage to discern and respond to requests, making successful requests politely themselves may not only be cognitively demanding but also incompatible, as pointed out by Ervin-Tripp et al. (1990). On the one hand, children have been taught and learnt that a direct want may reveal a lack of good manners and might be counter-persuasive. On the other hand, a conventionally indirect i.e. polite request may signal that an imposing demand is involved and thus increase the risk of refusal from the addressee, which also has been shown to happen in most cases of conversations between adults and children (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990).

Nevertheless, Ervin-Tripp et al. (1990) have shown awareness of an addressee as a form differentiator and adaptive ability in a study of children’s requests. In natural contexts, children used polite markers in 10 % of their requests to mothers, while 15 % of the requests to experimenters were mitigated. Similarly, an aggravated tone of voice (showing that the demand was supposed to be motivated) appeared in 5% of requests to experimenters, in 12 % to fathers and in 22% to mothers. By the age of five years, children differentiate whom to be polite to, how to adapt politeness to rights and costs and how to use polite devices persuasively, which show as a higher percentage of mitigation in retries (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990).

Both experimental and natural studies (Garvey 1977; Dore 1977; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990) have revealed that children are quite good at using both social and persuasive tactics, by attention-getters, such as “Mummy!” to remind the adult of parental duties, or as justification to motivate and decrease the cost of the action demanded. However, when the role of the adult was presupposed so that compliance could be expected, five and six year-olds would use direct need statements or non-mitigated ellipses. Thus, children select people from whom they can expect support and who do not provide polite makers in low-cost requests.

Furthermore, by seven or eight years of age children display considerable elaborative forms of distancing or mitigating, such as the use of the past tense and conditionals. Older school children, however, appeared to drop politeness markers, which might be due to their discovery that politeness reduces compliance in familiar addressees or to the home setting with younger siblings present or simply to a general change of attitudes toward values of the adult world.

4.5. Cultural constraints on directness and politeness

The socially conditioned politeness variables, the distance between speaker and hearer, and the relative power between them, may vary however, not only across situations within the same culture (the relation between parent and child compared to the relation between two equals or between strangers) but also within the same situation across cultures.

Studies report, for instance, that families from different cultures differ in their requirements of politeness strategies within the family (Blum-Kulka 1990). The reason for this would be that, within a given culture, social situations or types of speech events (Hymes 1974) play a formative role in determining politeness values not only because they reflect specific configurations of socially significant variables, but because they

create their own interpretative frameworks, which in turn affect both the expression and meanings attached to linguistic choices. Thus, the definition of the speech event, as constructed by the participants, creates event-specific frames, which affect both the repertoire and the interpretation of politeness values. The perceived imposition of the “face-threat” may therefore differ, not only culturally, but also situationally – perhaps even on different occasions within the same situation. An instrumental demand e.g. a request for something on the table, may be considered as less imposing than a request for a loan. Therefore, as pointed out above, strategic politeness has to be distinguished from politeness and social indexing (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990). Children have been shown to acquire socio-culturally dependent social indices before and independently of politeness strategies. On the one hand, cross-cultural studies on politeness strategies have demonstrated certain similarities (Brown & Levinson 1987) but also striking differences (Rosaldo 1982; Wierzbicka 1985) between cultures. For instance, cross-cultural data on requests support, to some extent, the hypothesis that imposition on the addressee is regularly counterbalanced by mitigation, but data also reveals that the amount and kind of strategies used may differ considerably (Rosaldo 1982; Wierzbicka 1985). Generally speaking, societies minimizing social distance and perceived imposition tend towards positive politeness, whereas societies linguistically marking distance, power and imposition tend towards negative politeness.

5. Methods

5.1. *Participants*

Nineteen mothers, ten fathers and 46 children of age from 4 to 23 participated in the dinner conversations. As mentioned, the families were divided in groups depending on age of the children and number of participants (table 1a and b). In each group, 10 children aged 11 (+/- one) years were focused as *target children*. The target children in the first group had 12 younger siblings and those in the second group had 12 older siblings². The families were urban middle-class and from a similar socio-economic background, living in or in the neighbourhood of Stockholm. They were recruited after letters giving a short description of the study were distributed to elementary schools in the area. In addition, a questionnaire about demographic data, beliefs about the role played by conversation during meals and beliefs about pragmatic socialization in general was distributed after checking the socio-cultural homogeneity of the group.

² There were also two younger siblings, 4 and 7 years old, and one adult sibling (23 years) invited as a visitor

Table 1a: Family groups defined by age of the children

Group	adults		children			gender	
	gender		age (years)			fe ma	
	fe	ma	>10	10-12	<13	fe	ma
1	10	5	12	10		16	6
2	9	5	2 ³	10	12	13	11
	19	10	14	20	12	29	17
							75

Table 1b: Family groups defined by number of participants (>4 or <4)

Group	adults		children			gender	
	gender		age (years)			fe ma	
	fe	ma	>10	10-12	<13	fe	ma
A (>4)	14	5	8	15	5	16	12
B (<4)	5	5	4	7	7	13	5
	19	10	12	22	12	29	17
							75

5.2. Recordings

The dinner table conversations were recorded in their entirety, usually in the family kitchen while the researcher was absent or waiting elsewhere in the house. The family members were told to act as normally as possible. The average duration of the meal was 17 minutes.

5.3. Transcription

The 20 recordings were transcribed using a modified version of the CHAT system (McWhinney 1991) for transcription of natural discourse. The recordings were transcribed in their entirety, starting and finishing by devices such as “Now it is time to start/finish!” setting limits on the meal. Verbal utterances and non-verbal expressions having a clear communicative function relevant to the conversation, as judged by two researchers, were identified and coded by means of the coding categories presented below. Selected parts of the transcripts were judged, as to their reliability with regard to the video recording, by two researchers familiar with the actual transcription methods. The interrater reliability was 85%.

5.4. Basic coding units

For the segmentation of the recorded conversations, the units of *turn* and *utterance* were considered to be most appropriate, both from an informative and an interactional perspective.

³ One sibling was 7 and one 4 years old

Turn was defined as the verbal utterances and the nonverbal expressions by which one participant holds the floor in the conversation (c. f. Sacks et al. 1974).

Utterance was defined as a part of a turn corresponding to one prosodic clause and syntactically to one or more syntactic clauses (see for instance Hellspång 1988; Brumark 1989). Most often one turn corresponded to one utterance (see table 2 for a ratio between turn and utterance).

Turns consisted of one or more utterances carrying the main function of regulating nonverbal or verbal behaviour and thus constituting the minimal coding units of social control acts, here termed *regulators*.

5.5. Coding categories

The regulators (see Hellspång 1988; Brumark 1989, cf. requests in Ervin-Tripp 1976 or “control acts” in Ervin-Tripp 1990; Blum-Kulka 1994, 1997), directing and controlling nonverbal and verbal acts, actions and activities during the dinner, may be realized in a number of different ways and may appear as *nonverbal* or *verbal* acts i.e. verbal utterances.

In this study, the focus was on verbal utterances, with two exceptions: Attention getters (see Hellspång 1988) and focus regulators (see Hellspång 1988) which quite often are nonverbal e.g. eye contact and points.

The target or *goal* of regulation might be other participants’ expected *attention* or *focus* on the one hand, and nonverbal or verbal *acts* or *actions* on the other. Nonverbal, as well as verbal attention and focus regulating utterances, usually realized by the addressee’s name or by kinship terms, such as “*Mamma!*” (“Mummy!”), or by conventionalized vocatives such as “*Hörru!*” (verbatim: “Can you hear?”) or by pre-requests (see Levinson 1983: 345ff; Brumark 1991), such as “*Mamma, vet du vad?*” (“Mummy, do you know what?”), were collected and accounted for, but omitted from further coding. It must be noticed, however, that names and other vocatives may be used as requests for actions e.g. “*Peter!*”, meaning: “Don’t do that!”).

Verbal utterances regulating acts or actions (apart from the attention-getting vocatives and pre-requests mentioned above) were further coded in the following *contextual* dimensions, relating to function, focus and effect (or outcome) of the regulators.

Function, goal and (intended) outcome of regulatory utterances

Function

A preliminary distinction was made between two main general *functions* of dinner talk, the realizations of which formed *two kinds of conversational contexts* in which the regulatory utterances could appear:

- *instrumental* function relating to the routine talk accompanying and monitoring the dinner activity (Blum-Kulka 1997)
- *non-instrumental* function i.e. all other types of conversation during the meal.

The regulation of nonverbal actions may regard instrumental as well as non-instrumental actions i.e. eating behaviour or table manners as well as other behaviour

patterns during the dinner. Individual regulatory utterances were thus supposed to appear in both instrumental and non-instrumental parts of the accompanying speech.

Instrumental regulators further appeared as:

- *routine* i.e. utterances regulating the dinner activity, often as brief adjacency pairs without interrupting the ongoing (non-instrumental) conversation,
- *pedagogical* i.e. utterances (regulating the activity or not) with a clear pedagogical purpose. The following examples will demonstrate the difference between routine and pedagogical regulators:

Example (1)

- Routine regulator: *Varsågod å ta för dej!* 'Please help yourself.'
- Pedagogical regulator: *Men du måste lägga upp på din tallrik så kallnar de.*
'But you need to put it on your plate so it cools down.'
Du kan använda skeden om du vill.
'Use the spoon if you want.'

Example (2)

- Routine regulator: *Testa lite!* 'Try some.'
Bananer, gurka ... 'Bananas, cucumber ...'
- Pedagogical regulator: *Men ni ska inte ta soya, det är inte bra.*
'But don't take any soya; it's not so good/it's
not good for you.'

The first (routine) examples, but hardly the second (pedagogical), would be natural in a conversation between two equal parties e.g. adults of similar social status.

Goal

Furthermore, regulators were focused on a goal i.e. some action or act to be performed by the addressee:

- *nonverbal* actions or acts or *verbal* acts, to be performed in the
- *immediate* i.e. the outcome is expected at the present time or *non-immediate* (*mediate*), i.e. the outcome is expected in the future.

Within the category nonverbal action/acts were:

- requests for *stopping ongoing* (undesirable) *activity* (cf Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997)
- requests for *handing over objects* immediately or in the future ("request for non-verbal goods", cf. Blum-Kulka 1997) and
- *other* i.e. responses impossible to code in any other category.

The category of "verbal acts" corresponds to the "request for verbal goods" in Blum-Kulka (1997).

Politeness: directness, conventionality and mitigation of regulatory utterances***Directness***

- *Direct*, expressed by explicit or implicit naming of the act, either by the mode of the imperative e.g. “*Sluta!*”, “*Sitt ner!*”, “*Ge mig X!*” (“Stop it!”, “Sit down!”, “Give me X!”), by the main verb in the present tense e.g. “*Du är där!*” (“You are there!” in a directive tone of voice), by a modal verb in the present or past tense and the action verb in the infinitive, negated or not e.g. “*Du måste X!*”, “*Du kan X nu!*”, “*Du bör X!*”, “*Du får X!*” or “*Så får du inte göra!*”, indicating the actual action to be stopped (“You have to X”, “You can X now”, “You should X”, “You may do X”, “You shouldn’t do that!”) or by a explicit declarative or a performative, marking the sender’s wish that the addressee does X e.g. “*Jag vill att du X!*”, “*Jag tycker att du ska X!*”, sometimes mitigated as in “*Jag föreslår att du X.*” (“I want you to X”, “I think you should X”, etc.), as well as direct expressions of wants and wishes e.g. “*Jag vill ha Y!*” or only “*Y!*”, followed by pointing at the desired object (“I want Y!”, “Y!”), or simply by directive ellipses such as “*Mjölk!*” (“Milk!”, meaning “Give me the milk!”) or “*Här!*” (“Here!”, meaning “Here you are!”).
- *Non-direct (indirect)*, expressed by the interrogative form which, at least fictively, gives the addressee the option to refuse to perform the expected action e.g. “*Kan du X?*”, “*Skulle du kunna X?*”, “*Vill du vara snäll att X?*” (“Can you X?”, “Could you X?”, “Could you please X?”), focused on the wanted action, or “*Kan jag få Y?*” (“May I have Y?”), focused on the wanted object, or certain declaratives expressing a need like “*Jag ska be att få Y.*” (approximately: “I’m going to ask if I may have Y.”)

Utterances not coded as regulatory are “Do you want Y?” etc., intended as requests for prerequisite information about a possible wish of the addressee.

Conventionality

- *Conventional*, expressed for example by habitual indirect forms such as questions e.g. “*Vill du vara snäll att X?*” (“Could you please X?”) i.e. most of the examples mentioned above under the heading *indirect*.
- *Non-conventional*, expressed by non-conventional forms such as idiosyncratic hints e.g. questions like “*Har du någon läxa?*” (“Do you have any homework?”), in cases where this question is meant to function as a request for prompt action. Included in this category were idiomatic expressions, not conventional in their use like regulators, such as the Swedish expression “*Nu är du ute å cyklar*”, (verbatim: “Now you are out cycling”, in the actual case to be interpreted as “Now, you don’t know what you are talking about!”) and hints aiming at more proper or correct responses e.g. “*Va sa du?*” (“What did you say?”, meaning “Say it properly!”).

Mitigation

- *Mitigated*, endearments, nicknames, pluralization (by “we”), point-of-view-manipulations, external modifications by pre-requests or reasons and

justifications, or internal modifications by politeness markers e.g. “Take this Robban!”, “We don’t sing at the table”, “I suggest you ...(cf. above), “Mummy!” – “Can I have some more?”, “Don’t touch! It’s hot!”, “Can you pass the salt, please?”)

- *Non-mitigated* i.e. lacking the markers mentioned above.

In order to get a picture of the different conversational contexts of regulation and politeness, the *goal of verbal regulators* was coded with regard to *time* i.e. if they were to be performed immediately or in the near or remote future.

5.6. Coding and analysing procedures

As a preliminary procedure, verbal and certain nonverbal behaviour patterns in the dinner conversations were distinguished and separated into turns and utterances, whereupon the total amounts of turns and utterances, frequencies and percentages for each category was accounted for. The material thus consisted of 5105 turns and 6245 utterances (turn/utterance ratio: 1.25).

The regulatory categories appearing in the conversational contributions of adults as well as of children were then coded, using *utterance* as a basic unit. The main regulative categories (table 3a and 3b), the means, standard deviations and proportions were calculated in order to get an overall picture of the different kinds of regulators occurring during family dinners.

Since the regulatory function, though related to single utterances (in contrast to other functions of dinner conversations), has an impact on larger parts of conversation, the share of regulatory talk as well as clearly perceived effects of regulatory utterances, was taken into account for each participant in the conversations. The addressees of regulators were, however, not considered, for two main reasons. First, in a large number of cases there were more addressees than one for the same regulator and secondly, even regulators explicitly directed to one person might be intended to be overheard, and even perceived as a regulator, by other – potential – addressees.

Figure 1. Coding categories considered in this study.

Function				
Instrumental	routine pedagogical	Non-instrumental		
Goal				
Verbal acts		Nonverbal actions	pass objects perform actions stop actions	
Time				
Immediate		Non-immediate (mediate)		
Directness/politeness				
Direct		Non-direct	conventional non-conventional	Mitigated Non-mitigated

The amount and proportion of turns/utterances performed by each family member were thus coded and calculated according to the regulatory categories and the contextual variables, as well as for the politeness dimensions listed above. In order to distinguish similarities and differences between the twenty family dinner conversations due to different background contexts, the families were further divided into groups 1 and 2, defined by the ages of the participating children (younger or older than 11(+1) years, see table 1a), and groups A and B, defined by the number of participants (1 – 4 or 5– 6, table 1b). The *target children* of both groups were particularly focused. In addition, to obtain results comparable to other research (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990; Blum-Kulka 1990), *the parents' use of regulators* was particularly considered, both in their entirety and separately as maternal and paternal variables. Their distribution in the age- and number groups was also taken into account, in order to get a picture of parental regulation during the meals and possible differences due to the contextual factors mentioned above.

Since the number of participants and the amount of speech differ in the twenty families, the tables 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8a and 8b in the next section (Results pp17-33) show the proportion of all regulators for all participants at the dinners, compared with the total amount occurring in the family dinner conversations and in relation to the total amount of different regulators of each individual. Individual amounts of regulators are thus related both to the total amount in the actual family and to the total amount of different individual regulators. Significance of differences between proportions of the *main variables* referred to and discussed was calculated, using Fisher's Exact Test for small populations and ANOVA (one way).

Table 2: Basic data for coding: Number, mean number and ratio of utterances/turns

Group	1	2	A	B
Number of turns	2610	2495	3639	1466
Mean number of turns	237.3	277.2	242.2	293.2
Number of utterances	3083	3162	4223	2022
Mean number of utterances	280.3	351.3	281.5	404.4
Mean number of utterances/minute	17.7	19.5*	17.0	22.8*
Number of utterances/turn	1.18	1.27	1.16	1.38

* Note that the amount of utterances per minute increases with age of the children in general and with the number of participants in particular

6. Results

In the following sections, the contextual background variables mentioned in the current text have been marked in italics. The different age groups are distinguished by naming the group with younger siblings *group 1* and the group with older siblings *group 2* (italics). Similarly, the group of families with four or less members is called *group A* and that comprising families with five or more members is called *group B*. Family members in the two groups are referred to as *target child 1, 2, A or B, sibling 1, 2, A or*

B, *mother* 1, 2, A or B, and *father* 1, 2, A or B.⁴ Generally, the proportions presented refer to the share of a certain category related to the total share of that category of a certain individual (mother, father or children) or of all individuals within the family group. If not, this is explicitly noted.

6.1. General overview of regulators in the family groups

The proportion of all *regulators* (the regulator/utterance ratio) within each family ranged from 6.3 % to 8.6 % (see table 3a and 3b). Of all regulators made by all family members, those regulating *acts and actions* amounted to 50 – 95 % whereas *attention* and *focus* was the target of regulation in 4–24 % of the cases. *Verbal acts (utterances)* were prompted by regulatory utterances in 2.8% to 25% of the cases (mean 6.8%).

The share of the *childrens'* regulation showed a more scattered pattern, which could be expected due to the asymmetrical power relation between children and parents. Examining different contexts, the amount of regulators produced by the children was found to vary from 9 % to somewhat above 60 %, apparently due to various situational conditions. However, with some exceptions, the *target children* seemed to account for between one *quarter* and one *third* of *direct regulators* of the total amount in the family, which was somewhat more than their expected share.

Table 3a: Percentages of action, attention and focus regulators in family groups 1 and 2

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
1	action	49 ⁵ (90) ⁶	15 (84)	17 (74)	19 (73)	80(6.2) ⁷
	attention	19 (7)	14 (16)	27 (24)**	40 (25)	18(1.3)*
	focus	50 (3)	0	25 (2)**	25 (2)	2 (0.2)*
						7.7 ⁸
2	action	48 (95)	13 (91)	24 (83)	15 (72)	83(5.3)
	attention	18 (4)	12 (9)	23 (9)**	47 (10)	8 (0.6)*
	focus	2 (1)	0	29 (8)**	69 (17)	7 (0.5)*
						6.4

* Significant differences between group 1 and 2 regarding attention and focus regulation (Fisher Exact: $p = <0.05$)

** Significant differences between target children in the two groups ($p = <0.01$)

(1) Group 2/B: Utterance regulating nonverbal and verbal actions

Father *ta de här säg stopp*
'Take this. Say stop.'

⁴ Notice that group 1 and 2 on the one hand, and groups A and B on the other hand, overlap when defined by two different background variables.

⁵ Percentage of all regulators of the category made by all mothers (etc) within the family group

⁶ Percentage of all individual regulators of the category made by mothers (etc) within the family group

⁷ Percentage of the regulatory category of all utterances within the family group

⁸ Percentage of all regulators out of all utterances within the family groups

Age appeared to be of some importance in influencing the use of regulators although not as much as expected. Regulatory talk amounted to 7.7% of all utterances in *group 1* with younger siblings compared with 6.4% in *group 2* with older siblings. However, a closer look at different regulatory utterances, revealed twice as many *attention* regulators in *group 1*, whereas family members in *group 2* seemed to use more *focus* regulation (8 % versus 3 %, see table 3). The names of the addressees (“Mummy”, “Eva”) and deictic devices (“Look there.”) were most common. In the conversations with the youngest children (4 – 7 years), exchanges of attention and focus regulating devices preceding the request to come could be observed (c.f. Linell 1998; Linell & Gustavsson 1987; Brumark 2003):

(2) Group 1/A: Attention and focus regulation

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Child 1 | <i>mamma</i>
'Mummy.' (attention regulator) |
| Mother | <i>mm</i> |
| Child 1 | <i>vet du vad</i>
'Do you know what.' (focus regulator) |
| Mother | <i>mm</i>
(The child initiates a narrative) |

When different groups of family members were considered, there seemed to be some relation between regulators made by adults and the participation of younger children during the meal, at least regarding *focus* regulation. A comparison suggested that *mothers* in *group 1* with younger siblings, regulated their children's focus considerably more often than the mothers in *group 2* with older siblings (table 3a). However, *fathers* did not regulate child behaviour as much as mothers, but often more directly:

(3) Group 1/A: Paternal action regulator

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Father | <i>nä nä nä sluta nu</i>
'No, no, no, Stop it.' |
|--------|--|

In this example, however, the father continues by hinting:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Father | <i>nu är du ute å cyklar</i>
'Now you don't know what you are talking about/doing.' |
|--------|--|

Furthermore, both *target children* and *siblings* in *group1* used more *attention* regulators but less *action* and *focus* regulators than *target children* and *siblings* in *group2* (remember however that the target children were the same age). The amount of attention regulators among the siblings in group 1 might reflect the situation of the youngest children – they had to try hard so that their needs were responded to. On the other hand, the excessive use of focus regulation among older siblings in group 2 could be explained by the large number of indexing devices in their narratives.

Table 3b: Percentages of action, attention and focus regulators in family groups A and B

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
A	action	54 (90)	12 (84)	15 (74)	19 (73)	86(5.4)*
	attention	30 (6)**	19 (15)	15 (10)***	36 (19)***	11(0.7)*
	focus	33 (3)**		44 (10)***	23 (4)***	4 (0.2)*
						6.3
B	action	40 (94)	15 (86)	28 (77)	17 (50)	76(6.6)*
	attention	8 (4)**	7 (9)	37 (21)***	48 (28)***	16(1.4)*
	focus	6 (2)**	7 (5)	9 (2)***	78 (22)***	8 (0.7)*
						8.6

* Significant differences between group A and B regarding attention and focus regulation ($p = <0.05$)

** Significant difference between mothers, and between mothers and children ($p = <0.05$)

*** Significant differences between target children ($p = 0.001$) and between siblings ($p = <0.05$)

Also, the *number of participants* seemed to affect the use of regulators (table 3b). A comparison between the two number groups showed a larger proportion of regulators in general and of *attention* and *focus regulating* devices in particular in *the families with more than four member*: 16 % of attention regulators in the “large family” *group B* against 11 % in the “small family” *group A*, and 8 % of the focus regulators in the larger group against 4 % in the smaller. Thus, regulating attention or focus seemed, not surprisingly, more important in conversations including more than four participants (see table 3b).

However, the share of *maternal regulation* of *attention* and *focus* seemed less dominant in the group of large families, to the advantage of the *children* in this group (table 3b). As pointed out above, these results suggest great problems for the younger children to make themselves seen and heard in families with more than four members.

In conclusion, the most frequent regulators were those monitoring the non-verbal activities during dinner, whereas only a few had the aim of regulating speech.

6.2. Direct and indirect regulation

In a study of parental politeness in three different cultural groups, Blum-Kulka concluded that parental communication with children is fairly direct but still polite (Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997). This is to some extent also true in the present study, although the observations here are more detailed with regard to the impact of context on conversation. Moreover, this study also examines politeness strategies used by the children.

The regulators used by all family members in the twenty Swedish families proved to be *direct* in somewhat more than 50 % of the cases. As expected, however, this tendency was more accentuated in *group I* with small children (table 4a) and in *group B* with more than four participants (table 4b). Among the *indirect* regulators, those realized by linguistically *conventional* forms amounted to slightly more than 85 % in all groups. *Mitigation* occurred in 15 % of all *direct* regulators (example 4 - 6).

(4) Group 1/A: Direct

Mother *kom å ät*
'Come and eat.'

(5) Group 2/A: Indirect

Mother *ska du börja Pelle*
'Would you like to start, Pelle.'

(6) Group 1/A: Mitigated

Mother *du kan väl säga stopp*
'You can say stop, when it's enough.'

All in all, the *parents* used as many *indirect* as *direct* regulatory strategies and mostly *conventional indirect* forms (table 4a and 4b). Thus, the *Swedish parents* in this study seemed to be *more indirect* compared with the Israeli and American parents in the study of Blum-Kulka (1990), producing 17 % and 38 % of indirect utterances respectively. Furthermore, the *mothers* (except those in *group B*, see table 4b) seemed to be less direct than all other family members. In contrast, *fathers* in all groups used *direct* regulators in two thirds of the cases (table 4a and 4b). When being *indirect*, *mothers* in all groups choose *conventional* forms (in 85-95 % of the cases).

As mentioned above, mitigation was used in 15 % of all direct regulative utterances (including those of the children). However, the parents all in all mitigated their direct regulators in about 25 % of the cases and the mothers in all groups mitigated 21-48 % of their regulators. Thus, the mothers showed a pattern similar to that of both mothers and fathers in the study of Blum-Kulka (1990) where 45-50 % of the direct parental regulators were mitigated. For fathers in the present study, mitigation was observed in only 4 to 14 % of their direct regulators (see example 7 and 8 below).

(7) Group 1: Mitigation

Father *sitt still Eva (whispering)*
'Sit still, Eva.'

(8) Group 1: Mitigation

Father *ni behöver väl inte bli tysta för att kameran är på*
'You don't have to be quiet because they're filming.'

Comparing the *age* groups in their totality, there were no significant differences. However, the *target children* in *group 1*, just like the fathers, generally displayed *directness* in about two thirds of the cases, as in example 9, whereas those in *group 2* (with older siblings) were more indirect (example 10):

(9) Group 1: Direct child regulation

Child *lingonsylt!*

‘Jam.’

(10) Group 2: Indirect child regulation

Child *kan jag få fruktsoppan*
‘Can I have the fruit soup?’

Table 4a: Percentages of *direct*, *indirect* and *mitigated* regulators in groups 1 and 2

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
1	<i>directness</i>					
	direct	39 ⁹ (46) ^{10*}	17 (68)*	26 (70)*	18 (62)	56¹¹
	indirect	60 (54)	10 (32)	15 (30)	15 (38)	44
	conventional	61 (87)	9 (70)	16(100)	14 (93)	82
	nonconven.	50 (13)	5 (30)	0	8 (7)	18
	<i>mitigation</i>	76 (33)	14 (14)	10 (6)	0	17
2	<i>directness</i>					
	direct	33 (41)*	19 (74)*	32 (67)*	16 (50)	54
	indirect	56 (59)	8 (26)	18 (33)	18 (50)	46
	conventional	54 (86)	9 (100)	16 (79)	21(100)	88
	nonconven.	67 (14)	0	33 (21)	0	12
	<i>mitigation</i>	71 (21)	4 (29)	0	0	16

* Significant differences between group 1 and 2 in parents ($p = <0.001$) and target children ($p = <0.01$)

Furthermore, the children did generally not use *non-conventional* forms except for the *target* children in *group 2* (with older siblings) and *B* (“large” family group). Neither did they seem to bother much about *mitigation* – only 3-8 % of the target childrens’ regulators were mitigated (see example 11 below).

(11) Group 2: Child mitigation

Child *kan ja få lite majs*
‘Can I have *some* corn?’

Table 4b: Percentages of of *direct*, *indirect* and *mitigated* regulators in groups A and B

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
A	<i>directness</i>					
	direct	42 (40)**	17 (66)	25 (75)**	16 (50)	51***
	indirect	67 (60)	9 (34)	8 (25)	16 (50)	49***
	conventional	66 (84)	7 (64)	10(100)	17 (85)	84
	nonconven.	63 (16)	21 (36)	0	16 (15)	16
	<i>mitigation</i>	78 (27)	17 (14)	5 (3)	0	15
B	<i>directness</i>					
	direct	26 (52)**	18 (73)	27 (59)**	28 (71)	62***

⁹ Percentage of all regulators of the category made by mothers (etc) within the family group

¹⁰ Percentage of all individual regulators of the category within the family group

¹¹ Percentage of all regulators of the category within the family group

indirect	40 (48)	11 (27)	32 (41)	17 (29)	38***
conventional	41 (95)	12(100)	29 (6)	18(100)	91
nonconven.	20 (5)	0	80 (18)	0	9
mitigation	85 (48)	0	15 (8)		15

** Significant differences between group A and B in mothers ($p = <0.05$) and target children ($p = <0.01$)

*** Significant differences between directness and indirectness in group A and B ($p = <0.05$)

6.3. Directness and the impact of conversational context

In this study, I have also analysed how regulatory talk changed with conversational context at different stages of the dinner. In a pilot study (Brumark 2003), communication during family dinners was seen to vary considerably with regard to the function and content of utterances, depending on different types of dinner conversation. In the present study, two main types were distinguished: *Instrumental talk* regulating the main activity during the meal and *non-instrumental conversation*.

There seemed to be a clear difference between instrumental and non-instrumental contexts with regard to regulatory communication in Swedish families. In all groups, about 60 % of the *regulators* occurred in the context of *instrumental talk*. Furthermore, *routine* regulators outweigh *pedagogic* utterances (ca 60 % against ca 40 %) in all groups except *group 2* with older children, which was unexpected. In both routine and pedagogic contexts there also seemed to be a preference for *direct* regulatory utterances (table 5a and 5b). *Mitigation* occurred in 4 – 18 % of all instrumental talk. This was less than in non-instrumental conversation (table 5a and 5b).

In a *non-instrumental* context, the conditions appeared to be reversed with regard to directness, the regulators being *indirect* in all groups except *group B*, the “large family” group, where the share of *direct* regulators in *non-instrumental contexts* equalled the total share of instrumental regulators in this group, namely 56 %. The results suggest that instrumental routine talk in informal multiparty encounters with more than four participants is more direct (c. f. however the mothers in group B).

Regarding the *instrumental regulators of the parents*, their share generally amounted to more than 60 % (see table 5a and 5b). Most of the *instrumental* parental regulators, about 60 %, were *direct* whereas the opposite tendency could be seen in *non-instrumental* regulators – at least for the mothers (the mothers in group B did not, for instance, use any direct non-instrumental regulators at all despite a larger share of directness in this group). Remember that the ratio of the total amount of direct and indirect regulators, regardless of context, was about 50%. Thus, directness in maternal regulation did not seem to play such a dominant role in *non-instrumental contexts*. The mothers displayed roughly the same tendencies as the groups in their totality, only more accentuated: a higher frequency of *direct* regulators in *instrumental* contexts but a reverse pattern i. e. more *indirectness* in *non-instrumental* contexts. However, indirect maternal regulation occurred even in instrumental routine contexts, as demonstrated by example 12 and 13:

(12) Group 2/B: Indirect regulation in an instrumental context

Mother *Eva-Lotta e de du som har ställt/ de e inte din*

‘EL have you put that (them) there/ It’s (They’re) not yours.’

(13) Group 2/A: Indirect regulation in instrumental context

Mother *kan du ge mej brödfatet*
 'Can you pass the bread?'

The *fathers*, on the other hand, mostly preferred *direct* communication, except for two fathers who frequently used *non-conventional hints* (a special kind of ironic jargon, cf. example 3) which yielded a higher degree of indirectness. However, fathers did not participate and contribute to the conversations in the families to such an extent that comparisons could be made. Their contributions varied considerably between different variables.

Table 5a: Percentages of direct/indirect regulators in *instrumental* and *non-instrumental* contexts in family groups 1 and 2

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
1	<i>instrumental</i>	44¹²(63)¹³	13 (55)	18 (50)	24 (76)	61¹⁴*
	<i>routine</i>	35 (48)	8 (33)	28 (96)	30 (86)	62
	direct	34 (64)**	4 (33)	31 (73)***	31 (67)	65
	indirect conv.	40 (36)	3 (17)	24 (27)	32 (33)	31
	indirect non-mitigated	0	100(50)	0	0	5
	mitigated	75 (11)	25 (17)	0	0	5
	<i>pedagogic</i>	66 (52)	24 (67)	2 (4)	8 (14)	38
	direct	65 (67)**	21 (58)	3 (100)***	12 (100)	68
	indirect conv.	73 (24)	27 (25)	0	0	22
	indirect non-mitigated	60 (9)	40 (17)	0	0	10
	mitigated	67 (18)	11 (8)	22	0	13
	<i>non-instrum</i>	46 (37)	16 (45)	27 (50)	11 (24)	39*
	direct	22 (21)**	27 (71)	41 (65)***	11 (44)	44
	indirect conv.	63 (74)	9 (29)	18 (35)	11 (56)	54
	indirect non-mitigated	100(5)	0	0	0	2
	mitigated	78 (18)	22 (7)	0	0	9
Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
2	<i>instrumental</i>	43 (61)	18 (78)	24 (57)	15 (54)	61*
	<i>routine</i>	32 (37)	6 (17)	38 (79)	24 (80)	50
	direct	28 (56)**	9 (100)	38 (63)***	25 (67)	64
	indirect conv.	27 (25)	0	47 (47)	27 (37)	30
	indirect non-mitigated	100(19)	0	0	0	6
	mitigated	25 (6)	9 (50)	0	0	8
	<i>pedagogic</i>	54 (63)	30 (63)	10 (21)	6 (20)	50
	direct	45 (56)**	30 (67)	15(100)***	9(100)	66
	indirect conv.	64 (33)	36 (33)	0	0	28
	indirect non-mitigated	100(11)	0	0	0	6
	mitigated	75 (11)	25 (6)	0	0	8
	<i>non-instrum.</i>	44 (39)	8 (22)	28 (43)	20 (46)	39*
	direct	22 (18)**	17 (80)	48 (61)***	13 (23)	36

¹² Percentage of all regulators in the category within the family group

¹³ Percentage of all individual regulators in the category within the family group

¹⁴ Percentage of all regulators in the category of all members within the family group

indirect conv.	53 (71)	3 (20)	18 (39)	26 (77)	59
indirect non-	100(11)	0	0	0	5
mitigated	100(18)	0	0	0	8

* Significant difference between instrumental and non-instrumental regulation ($p = <0.005$)

**Significant difference between instrumental and non-instrumental context in the mothers' direct and indirect regulation ($p = <0.05$)

*** Significant differences between direct and indirect regulation in the target children ($p = <0.05$)

As could be expected, *all children* performed most of their instrumental regulators in *routines*. Only a few had a pedagogic function, even if "mock correcting" regulators occurred, especially among the older children, as in the following indirect example:

(14) Group 2/B: "Mock correcting" child indirect regulator

Child *Lena, gästerna tar först*
'Lena, guests go first.'

(Target child tells her sister not to serve herself first since that would not be very polite.)

Furthermore, the choice of *direct* regulators appeared to be general among all the children in *instrumental* contexts (table 5a and 5b), whereas the pattern is more scattered in non-instrumental context. The *target children* (who were the same age) seemed to choose direct regulators regardless of context, whereas the *siblings*, especially the older ones, conformed to the group as a whole in their use of indirectness in non-instrumental context. On the other hand, some children preferred *conventional indirectness* also in instrumental context, sometimes mitigated through social indices, as in the example 15 below:

(15) Group 1/A

Child *kan ja få mjölken, mamma*
'Can I have the milk, *Mummy?*'

Some of the children used a special polite indirect form:

(16) Group 2/B

Child *kan jag be att få såsen/ såsen pappa*
'Please may I have the sauce, *Daddy?*'

Most often, however, needs and wants were expressed more directly:

(17) Group 1/B: Direct child regulator

Child *ja vill åsså ha salad*
'I want salad, too.'

A comparison between "*number groups*" displayed some interesting tendencies (although only the most general variables yielded significant variations between the groups). The difference between instrumental and non-instrumental regulation was more

obvious in the considerably smaller share of *non-instrumental* regulation performed by both mothers and fathers in *group B* compared with those in *group A*.

On the other hand, the *children* of *group B*, *targets* as well as *siblings*, used comparably more *non-instrumental* than instrumental regulators (note that these comparisons regard individual shares due to different amounts of utterances as well as regulatory talk). However, the *target children* of *group B* used considerably more regulation (66 %) than others in a *non-instrumental* context (table 5b). A possible explanation might be that the meal activity needed regulation as well as the conversation that was not directly related to the dinner activity. Remember that both attention and focus regulation seem to play a more important role regardless of other contextual factors in encounters of more than four people (c. f. table 3b). Furthermore, this need for regulation becomes more accentuated among the younger children, who have to fight to make themselves heard in a large family.

Table 5b: Percentages of direct/indirect regulators in instrumental and non-instrumental contexts in family groups A and B

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
A	instrumental	52 (66)	13 (61)	15 (58)	20 (63)	60*
	<i>routine</i>	43 (51)	11 (53)	20 (78)	26 (77)	61
	direct	41 (60)**	14 (80)	22 (72)	24 (58)	67
	indirect conv	8 (40)**	6 (20)	15 (28)	30 (42)	33
	indirect non-mitigated	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>pedagogic</i>	75 (8)	25 (3)	0	0	6
	direct	65 (49)	15 (47)	8 (22)	12 (23)	39
	indirect conv.	64 (54)**	9 (33)	15(100)	12 (57)	58
	indirect non-mitigated	75 (46)**	13 (33)	0 (0)	13 (43)	39
		0	100(33)	0	0	3
		86 (18)	14 (9)	0	0	10
	non-instrum	47 (34)	14 (39)	19 (42)	20 (37)	40*
	direct	19 (10)**	27 (58)	46 (71)	8 (20)	40
	indirect conv.	71 (84)**	9 (42)	7 (29)	14 (80)	55
	indirect non-mitigated	75 (6)	0	0	0	5
		70 (14)	10 (8)	20 (12)	0	5
Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
B	instrumental	49 (86)	21 (72)	17 (34)	13 (49)	56*
	<i>routine</i>	33 (42)	20 (62)	29 (88)	19 (100)	62
	direct	25 (56)**	22 (80)	31 (79)	22 (89)	73
	indirect conv.	54 (44)**	15 (20)	23 (21)	8 (11)	27
	indirect non-mitigated	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>pedagogic</i>	50 (13)	50 (13)	0	0	8
	direct	73 (58)	20 (38)	7 (12)	0	38
	indirect conv.	74 (64)**	16 (50)	11(100)	0	63
	indirect non-mitigated	73 (36)**	27 (50)	0	0	37
		0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	100(100)	0	7
	non-instrum	9 (14)	9 (28)	38 (66)	24 (51)	44*
	direct	0 **	14 (63)	31 (44)	55 (59)	56
	indirect conv.	20 (83)**	4 (13)	56 (56)	20 (42)	40
	indirect non-mitigated	33 (17)	67 (24)	0	0	4
		33 (17)	67 (24)	0	0	4

* Significant difference between instrumental and non-instrumental regulation ($p = <0.05$)

** Significant difference between instrumental and non-instrumental context in the mothers' direct and indirect regulation ($p = <0.05$)

6.4. Directness related to goal of regulation

The frequency and realization of regulators were found to vary considerably, not only with situational contexts (instrumental or non-instrumental), as was pointed out in the section above, but also with the *goal of regulation* i. e. with the kind of act or action required from the addressee. Not unexpectedly, the most common regulators during the recorded meals were *requests for actions* and for *objects* or "*non-verbal goods*" i.e. requests for dishes and spices etc (table 6a and 6b). Regulation of undesirable actions (*stop action*) during the meals amounted to 7 – 15 % of all regulatory utterances, whereas *requests for verbal responses* ("*verbal goods*") only amounted to 4 – 6 % (see examples below).

(18) Group 1/A: Direct requests for action

Mother *kom å ät*
'Come and eat.'

(19) Group 1/B: Direct request for "nonverbal goods"

Child *men ja ska/ja vill åsså ha*
'But I'll /I want some too.'

(20) Group 1/A: Direct request for "stop action"

Mother *men sparka inte på hennes fot va*
'But don't kick her foot.'

(21) Group 1/A: Mitigated request for "verbal goods"

Mother *du kan väl berätta vad du gjorde/ när vi va å handlade*
'You can tell everyone what you did/ when we were out shopping.'

Furthermore, there was some variation in the use of *direct* and *indirect* forms in all groups depending on the goal of regulation. The most obvious difference was found between the requests for *actions* and the requests for "*stop action*", the latter being performed considerably more often by *direct* rather than *indirect* regulators (table 6a and 6b). Further, *requests for verbal response* ("*verbal goods*") seemed to be formulated by *indirect non-conventional* forms more often than other regulators (example 22 below).

(22) Group 1/A: Indirect non-conventional request for "verbal goods"

Father *kan vi få ett svar eller ska vi brevväxla*

'Can we have an answer or shall we put it in writing?'

All in all, the Swedish *parents* showed features of conversation that were surprisingly similar to the three culturally different groups studied in Blum-Kulka (1990). Requests for *action* amounted to between 60 and 70 % (compared with 68.1 % in Blum-Kulka 1990), requests for "*stop action*" amounted to 7-15 % (compared with 15.1% in Blum-Kulka), requests for "*nonverbal goods*" amounted to between 7 and 19 % (as opposed to 7.5 % in Blum-Kulka) and requests for "*verbal goods*", verbal responses amounted to 6 % (as opposed to 5.9 % in Blum-Kulka). Thus, the situational impact on regulation by parents seems to be stronger than cultural constraints as claimed by De Geer & Tulviste (2002).

Moreover, a differentiation with regard to *goals of parental regulation* in the Swedish families showed that *requests for "stop action"* most often were *direct* (see table 6 for individual shares of parents), *requests for actions and objects* ("*nonverbal goods*") were direct in slightly more than *one half* of the cases, whereas *requests for "verbal goods"* appeared as *direct* regulators in less than half of the cases:

(23) Group 2/A: Direct request for "verbal goods"

Mother *nu ska du berätta vad du gjorde på museet*
'Now you can tell everyone what you did at the museum.'

Table 6a: Percentages of direct/indirect regulators related to goal of regulation in group 1 and 2

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
1	action	61 (77)	11(48)	19(54)***	8 (30)	60*
	direct	52 (48)**	14 (67)**	26 (76)	8 (55)	56
	indir. conv.	73 (48)**	6 (20)**	12 (24)	9 (45)	40
	indir. non	67 (5)	33 (13)	0	0	4
	stop action	33 (11)	27 (29)	21 (15)***	18 (16)	15*
	direct	32 (64)	32 (78)	9 (29)	27(100)	67
	indir. conv.	25 (18)	13 (11)	62 (71)	0	24
	indir. non	67 (18)	33 (11)	0	0	9
	nonv. goods	13 (6)	11 (16)	31 (30)***	44 (54)	11
	direct	7 (33)	11 (60)	41 (79)	41 (55)	60
	indir. conv.	22 (67)	11 (40)	17 (21)	50 (45)	40
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0
	verb goods	71 (6)	22 (6)	0	0	4
	direct	67 (29)	33 (50)	0	0	33
	indir. conv.	100(71)	0	0	0	56
	indir. non	0	100(50)	0	0	11
	other					10
Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
2	action	45 (73)	16 (83)	22 (62)***	16 (67)	71*
	direct	41 (46)**	22 (68)**	22 (50)	14 (42)	50
	indir. conv.	48 (54)**	10 (32)**	22 (50)	5 (58)	50
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0
	stop action	60 (8)	20 (9)	10 (2)***	10 (4)	9*
	direct	56 (83)	20(100)	10(100)	10(100)	90
	indir. conv.	100(17)	0	0	0	10
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0

nonv. goods	24 (10)	3 (4)	48 (33)***	24 (25)	9
direct	26 (71)	5 (100)	47 (64)	21 (57)	66
indir. conv.	20 (29)	0	50 (36)	30 (43)	34
indir. non	0	0	0	0	0
verb goods	67 (8)	11 (4)	11 (2)***	11 (4)	5
direct	40 (33)	20(100)	20(100)	20(100)	56
indir. conv.	0	0	0	0	0
indir. non	100(67)	0	0	0	44
other					9

* Significant differences between group 1 and 2 regarding "action" and "stop action" (p = <0.05)

** Significant differences between mothers and fathers in group 1 and 2 (p = <0.01)

*** Significant differences between target children in group 1 and 2 (p = <0.001)

The parents seemed to ask for "non-verbal goods" less often and request *nonverbal* and *verbal actions* more often (probably due to the "need for behavioural control", c. f. Blum-Kulka 1990:275), but also in a more *indirect* way than their children. However, the *children* appeared to ask for "non-verbal goods" more often than their parents, which could perhaps be seen as reflecting the asymmetrical power relationship between them and the distribution of different roles at the dinner table (see example 24 and 25).

(24) Group 2/B: Indirect request for "nonverbal goods"

Child *kan jag be att få mjölken pappa*
'Please may I have the milk, Daddy.'

(25) Group 1/B: Direct request for "nonverbal goods"

Child *ja vill åsså ha mjölk*
'I want milk too.'

Table 6b: Percentages of direct/indirect regulators related to goal of regulation in group A and B

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
A	action	65 (78)	10 (47)	16 (63)	10 (37)	65*
	direct	57 (48)	12 (67)	24 (80)	7 (40)	54
	indir. conv.	74 (48)	5 (20)	8 (20)	14 (60)	42
	indir. non	67 (4)	33 (13)	0	0	4
	stop action	40 (9)	30 (28)	7 (5)	23 (18)	13*
	direct	33 (66)	29 (78)	8(100)	29(100)	80
	indir. conv.	50 (17)	50 (22)	0	0	13
	indir. non	100(17)	0	0	0	7
	nonv. goods	15 (5)	12 (16)	29 (30)	44 (45)	7 *
	direct	10 (33)	15 (60)	35 (58)	40 (44)	49
	indir. conv.	19 (67)	10 (40)	24 (42)	48 (56)	51
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0
	verb goods	71 (8)	21 (10)	7 (2)	0	4*
	direct	57 (40)	29 (67)	14(100)	0	50
	indir. conv.	0	100(33)	0	0	7
	indir. non	100(60)	0	0	0	43
	other					10
Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total

B	action	40 (80)	20 (82)	25 (56)	15 (40)	64*
	direct	33 (44)	25 (67)	25 (52)	17 (60)	53
	indir. conv.	47 (56)	14 (33)	25 (48)	12 (50)	47
	indirect non	0	0	0	0	0
	stop action	20 (16)	22(9)	20 (5)	38 (15)	7*
	direct	20(100)	20(100)	20(100)	40(100)	100
	indir. conv.	0	0	0	0	0
	indirect non	0	0	0	0	0
	nonv goods	17 (16)	5 (9)	43 (39)	35 (45)	19*
	direct	17 (71)	7(100)	33 (63)	43 (80)	73
	indir. conv.	18 (29)	0	55 (37)	27 (20)	27
	indirect non	0	0	0	0	0
	verb goods	0	0	0	0	0*
	direct	0	0	0	0	0
	indir. conv.	0	0	0	0	0
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0
	other					10

* Significant differences between group A and B ($p = <0.05$)

** Significant differences between mothers and fathers in group A and B ($p = <0.01$ and <0.001)

*** Significant differences between group A and B in target children ($p = <0.001$)

Once again, a comparison between *age* and *number groups* showed some interesting tendencies. For example, regulation of undesired actions occurred more frequently in the groups of younger children, which was hardly surprising. On the other hand, no children in this group requested verbal responses. Similarly, if there were more than four participants there was more direct and more frequent regulation of “non-verbal goods” at the table (c. f. also the groups in Blum-Kulka 1997), which could also be expected (table 6b).

6.5. Directness related to time of expected effect or outcome

As can be concluded from the findings regarding the *time* of the expected outcome of regulation i. e. in *the immediate* or *non-immediate context* (table 7a and 7b), regulation during dinner primarily concerns matters *in the actual situation*. Furthermore, regulation of the actions and activity in the immediate situation seems to be fairly *direct* (table 7a and 7b).

A comparison between the groups of *parents* suggests that *fathers* more often than mothers regulated actions to be performed in the *immediate context*, except for those in *group B* who equalled the mothers regarding *immediate regulation*. The higher frequency of *maternal* regulators aimed at actions in the future might reflect the need for joint planning, especially in the group of younger children (see Brumark 2003). On the other hand, *fathers* were generally more *direct* than mothers when regulating actions to be performed immediately (table 7a and 7b).

Table 7a: Percentages of direct/indirect regulators related to *time* of expected outcome in group 1 and 2

Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
1	<i>immediate</i>	43 (73)	14 (81)	22 (85)	20 (97)	81*
	direct	37 (54)***	18 (80)***	25 (72)	20 (61)	63
	indir. conv.	53 (45)	8 (20)	17 (28)	22 (39)	36
	indir. non	100(1)	0	0	0	1
	<i>mediate</i>	67 (27)	14 (19)	17 (15)	2 (3)	19**
	direct	54 (25)	8 (17)	31 (57)	8 (100)	31
	indir. conv.	71 (75)	17 (83)	10 (43)	0	69
	indir.non	0	0	0	0	0
Group	Variable	Mothers	Fathers	Target	Siblings	Total
2	<i>immediate</i>	43 (72)	16 (83)	29 (81)	4 (18)	72*
	direct	22 (27)***	20 (68)***	37 (71)	22(100)	55
	indir. conv.	66 (61)	13 (32)	21 (29)	0	40
	indir. non	100(12)	0	0	0	5
	<i>mediate</i>	43 (28)	9 (17)	17 (19)	62 (82)	28**
	direct	65 (75)	17(100)	17 (50)	0	50
	indir. conv.	22 (25)	0	17 (50)	61(100)	50
	indir.non	0	0	0	0	0

* Significant differences between “immediate” and “non-immediate” ($p < 0.05$)

** Significant differences between group 1 and 2 ($p < 0.05$)

*** Significant differences between parents within and between group 1 and 2 ($p < 0.05$)

As expected, a comparison between the age groups revealed more *non-immediate* regulation (i. e. concerning *actions* etc to be performed elsewhere and in the future) in *group 2*, the group with older siblings, and also more *indirect non-immediate regulation* among the children in this group (see table 7a and example 26 below).

(26) Group 2: Direct regulation of actions to be performed in non-immediate context

Father *Kalle du måste ha lyse på din cykel, kolla batterit*
‘K you should have lights on your bike. Check the battery.’

Child regulation concerned the *immediate context* in most of cases, and except for group 1, the children also used considerably more *indirect conventional* regulators rather than direct regulators to demand actions to be performed in the future.

There also seemed to be a clear difference between the *number groups* with regard to the distribution between regulators aimed at immediate and non-immediate responses. Just as in *group 1* with younger children, the parents of *group B* with more than four participants, regulated actions to be performed immediately more frequently and more directly (table 7b). The explanation for this might be a more urgent need in this group to regulate the current activity at the dinner table rather than to offer suggestions for the future. On the other hand, the *target children* were more indirect when regulating future actions (table 7b).

Table 7b: Percentages of direct/indirect regulators related to *time* of expected outcome in group A and B

<i>Group</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Fathers</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Siblings</i>	<i>Total</i>
A	<i>immediate</i>	45 (68)	14 (89)	16 (70)	20 (90)	75*
	direct	42 (56)***	17 (77)	24(100)	17 (56)	66
	indir. conv.	65 (44)	10 (23)	0	27 (44)	33
	indir. non	100(100)	0	0	0	1
	<i>mediate</i>	65 (32)	8 (16)	20 (30)	7 (8)	25**
	direct	33 (3)***	0	67 (17)	0	5
	indir. conv.	67 (97)	13(100)	18 (83)	7 (100)	95**
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Group</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Fathers</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Siblings</i>	<i>Total</i>
B	<i>immediate</i>	29 (82)	15 (86)	29 (95)	14 (81)	87*
	direct	25 (58)***	17 (70)	29 (67)	29 (76)	67
	indir. conv.	44 (42)	10 (20)	31 (10)	15 (24)	31
	Indir. non	0	100(10)	0	0	2
	<i>mediate</i>	42 (18)	16 (14)	11 (5)	22 (19)	13**
	direct	62(100)***	15(100)	0	33 (25)	72
	indir. conv.	0	0	40 (100)	60 (75)	28**
	indir. non	0	0	0	0	0

* Significant differences between “immediate” and “non-immediate” ($p = < 0.05$)

** Significant differences between group A and B ($p = < 0.05$)

*** Significant differences between group A and B in parents’ “directness” ($p = < 0.05$)

7. Conclusions and discussion

In the introduction, four questions were posed about how regulation and the individual contributions to a joint activity were realised at dinnertime in twenty Swedish families. To what extent did the family members use regulatory expressions and what behaviours were the targets? Were there any differences in activity regulation during dinner due to such contextual factors as different talk genres, the age of the participating children and the number of participants around the dinner table? Was the choice of regulators affected by goals and expected outcomes, or the predicted reactions of the addressee? How did the families manage to keep the balance between social control on the one hand and solidarity and intimacy on the other?

7.1. How did regulation in the Swedish families vary with contextual conditions?

To what extent did behaviour regulation occur and what behaviours were regulated?

First, regulatory utterances constituted less than 10 % of all utterances produced (including those of the children) during family dinners in the twenty Swedish families. However, to my knowledge there are few systematic accounts of regulators in different conversational contexts that could serve as a comparison to evaluate the data other than the study of Blum-Kulka (1997) referred to above, Ervin Tripp’s explorative study of “control acts (1976) and a recent intercultural study of “directives” by De Geer & Tulviste (2002). Unfortunately, the first study only accounts for parental regulation, the

second one is not quantitative and the third one is based on units of syntactic sentences and this makes comparisons difficult. However, there are several studies about the interaction of mothers with small children that show a relatively high frequency of maternal requests (more than 50 % in Cross, 1977, 30 % in Brumark, 1989).

In this study with children aged between 4 and 11 years, the behaviours regulated were mostly nonverbal actions (between 76% and 86%). However, in the families with younger children and with more than four participants at the table there was a larger amount of attention regulation which was hardly surprising.

How did regulation at dinner vary with age and number of participants?

As mentioned above, the present study suggests that not only the age of the children but also the number of participants leads to differences in the use of direct regulators among parents as well as among children. Regulation in families with younger children (>11 years) and during dinners with more than four participants was more frequent and more direct although not as much as expected. Most of these differences between the groups were too small to be significant.

How did conversational contexts and goals of regulation affect the regulatory expressions?

The activity and conversational context or different types of talk within the “speech event” of dinner (Blum-Kulka 1990) had an obvious impact on the way regulatory utterances were performed. Most instrumental regulators were direct (somewhat more than 60 %) and most non-instrumental regulators were indirect (nearly 60 %). There was some group variation but the groups were too heterogenous and the differences too small to be significant.

How regulation was performed appeared to depend largely on specific circumstances appearing in the actual situation but the results also suggest strong socially and culturally conditioned constraints on the performances.

However, not only activity context and talk genre seemed to affect the regulators used but also their intended goal i. e. what action was required from the addressee. In the families included in this study, where one fourth of the participating children were adolescents, regulation at dinner time seems to have the primary goal of asking for actions to be performed or objects to be handed over, mostly related to the dinner activity (about 60 %) and preferably phrased by direct expressions. There were also many so called pedagogic regulators, produced by the parents as well as by the children. The adolescents, in particular, often engaged in “mock regulation” of one another’s behaviour. As suggested above, regulation at the dinner table mainly concerned non-verbal actions and requests for objects related to the main activity.

7.2. How is direct and indirect regulation used to balance between social solidarity and social control?

Blum-Kulka concluded in her study of parental politeness in three different cultural groups that parental communication with children is fairly direct and still polite (Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997). This is to some extent also true in the present study although in a

somewhat more nuanced way. Moreover, this study also examines the politeness strategies used by children.

Judging from the relatively high frequency of direct regulators, the conclusion is that Swedish family members are not so concerned about politeness at the table. However, directness at dinnertime can, according to Blum-Kulka, be considered as relatively neutral with regard to politeness, more effective and a sign of both power and intimacy. In other words, direct (or unmarked, to use the term of Blum-Kulka 1990) regulation would be a highly domain-specific and natural characteristic of family dinners.

In Swedish, this might be true for certain highly standardized and instrumental direct utterances, such as "*Var så goda!*" ('Help yourselves.'), "*Kom och ät!*" ('Come and eat.'), "*Torsten, kom och sätt dig!*" ('Torsten, come and sit down.'), "*Anna, ta först du!*" ('Anna, you go first.') or "*Ta lite, smaka!*" ('Take a little, try it.') and the like. (In some cases, regulatory utterances function as cautions such as "*Akta ljuset!*" ('Mind the candle!'), and are thus adequately direct.)

However, other instrumental regulatory utterances, like "*Ge mig saltet!*" ('Give me the salt.') or ellipses like "*Lingonsylt!*" ('Lingonberry jam.'), "*Där!*" ('There you are.') or just "*Öh!*" ('Eh?') accompanied or not by a pointing gesture and requiring a lot of inference from the context, were often corrected by the parents if uttered by the children, although also usually reacted to adequately. Such requests are probably considered as fairly impolite by most Swedes even when used in the family domain.

Among the regulators, classified as direct, there were many utterances containing the modal verbs "*får*" ('may') or "*kan*" ('can'). Using the terms of Blum-Kulka, the examples 27-29 might be rather "neutral" in their instrumental context:

(27) Group 2/B

Mother *nu kan sätta er för nu e de serverat*
 'You can sit down now, dinner is ready.'

(28) Group 2/A

Mother *du kan smaka de här*
 'You can try this.'

(29) Group 1/B

Mother *du får ta smör*
 'You may take some butter.'

However, direct utterances may be interpreted differently in different situational and conversational contexts, as pointed out by Brown & Levinson (1987). Thus, the utterances in example 30 and 31 were produced in a context where the target child's behaviour had provoked irritation, a circumstance that might affect the interpretation of them. In example 30, the mitigated formulation may be perceived as somewhat ironic in a situation where the child wants to obtain permission to leave the table. And in example 31, the tone of voice aggravates the illocutionary implication of the mother's regulatory utterance.

(30) Group 1/B

Mother *du får gärna sitta med*
'You may sit down.'

(31) Group 1/B

Mother *jamen du får pilla bort dom*
'But you have to take them away (irritated tone of voice).'

Not only may regulatory utterances, formulated in the same way, vary with regard to directness (or impoliteness) with the situational context but different successive formulations may also be used, either to aggravate or to mitigate, as in the examples 32 and 33 below:

(32): Group 2/B

Mother *nu får du ta å skriva åsså nu*
'Now, you have to write something. I mean now.'
du har ju inte skrivit något
'But you haven't written anything.'
ska du göra de me en gång
'Are you going to do it straight away?'

In example 32, the maternal regulation starts by a direct directive, followed by a mitigating motivation and ends up by a request, considered as indirect (by the question form, which at least fictively leaves a choice open).

In example 33, the regulator is initiated by an utterance, classified as an indirect request (a formally based identification that might be questioned – considering the demanding posture and tone of voice.). When the child signals a refusal, the mother continues by a direct request, focusing on the expected action:

(33) Group 1/B

Mother *men du kan väl smaka*
'But you can try it, can't you.'
smakar gör du
'You will try it.'

Many "need statements" (Ervin-Tripp 1976) were also characteristic of family dinners with younger children such as "*Jag vill också ha mjölk!*" ('I want milk, too', uttered in a complaining tone of voice) or "*Jag vill inte ha det där!*" ('I don't want that.') in order to stop a parent putting meat on the plate. Similarly, cries for help like "*Mamma du ska skära!*" ('Mummy, cut this for me.') or "*Mamma, du måste hjälpa mig!*" ('Mummy, help me.') appeared quite often. These regulators reflect not only the natural directness of instrumental talk during dinner but, in a wider perspective, also the intimacy of the family encounter on the one hand and the inferiority, dependency and often helplessness of the child, on the other.

The asymmetry of the relationship is also apparent in the number of so called pedagogic regulators during meals. Regulatory utterances, such as: “*Dra tallriken närmre karotten!*” (‘Put your plate nearer the casserole dish.’) or “*Ta inte mer, du vet att det är mäktigt*” (‘Don’t take any more, you know how filling it is.’) are quite natural in parents’ talk to children but would hardly be accepted by an adult addressee (except in very special circumstances).

Actually, there seemed to be a development among the children from “bald on record” imperatives and need statements in the youngest siblings about conventionally indirect requests in the target children, to either extremely polite or impolite utterances among the teenagers.

As pointed out above, direct regulators might be more or less coercive in the actual context but are often counterbalanced by mitigation (or “hedging” to adopt the term used in e. g. Brown & Levinson 1987) especially if there is a risk of non-compliance. As pointed out by Blum-Kulka (1990), mitigated directness represents a special kind of politeness, termed “solidarity politeness” (in Scollon & Scollon 1981). In Swedish, such “solidarity politeness” is often formulated as tags, like “...*är du snäll.*” (‘... will you?’) or “... *eller hur?*”, as in the example: “*Du får ta frukt sen, eller hur?*” (‘You can have some fruit afterwards, can’t you?’), posed after the request, or as adverbs, like “*väl*” in “*Du kan väl hämta mjölken.*” (represented in English by a tag question: ‘You can get the milk, can’t you.’). Pluralization of “I” and “you” into “we” and nicknaming were also used, such as Pelle for Per, or “*lilla gumman/gubben*” addressed to children (verbatim ‘little old lady/man’, approximately translated by ‘love’ or ‘honey’), but not seemingly so often as in the material of Blum-Kulka (1990). The use of “we” for “you” or for “I and you” is well known from research on developmental aspects of communication between adult and child.

In the Swedish families, mitigation was frequent in parental regulation, especially by the mothers (see below) but was more often formulated as internal or external justifying formulations: “*Du kanske kan passa på att ...*” (‘Perhaps you could take the opportunity to ...’) or “*Ta inte mer än du orkar, du vet att de e mäktigt!*” (‘Don’t take more than you can eat, you know how filling it is ‘). This kind of mitigation appeared at least once in each recording:

(34) Group 2/A

Mother *men om du tar upp å lägger på din tallrik så kallnar de*
 ‘But if you put it on your plate it will get cold’.

(35) Group 1/A

Mother *lite skinka vill du ha (inversion)*
 ‘Some ham would you like?’

(36) Group 1/A

Mother *sen tycker ja att du ska dricka lite mjölk faktiskt så man får starka ben*
 ‘Then I think you should have some milk so you will get big and strong.’

(37) Group 1/A

Mother *du kan vänta lite Johannes e åsså snart färdig här*

‘You can wait a *bit* *J. It’ll soon be ready.*’

(38) Group 2/B

Father *sätt dej ner du kan väl vänta tills de/ e färdigt*
 ‘Sit down. You *can* wait until it’s ready, (*can’t* you?).’

(39) Group 1/A

Mother *om du känner att du vill gå från bordet så får du säga tack för maten å gå från bordet*
 ‘If you want to leave the table, say thank you for the food and leave the table.’

(40) Group 2/A

Mother *kan du inte äta färdigt så vi får torka av här*
 ‘Can’t you finish eating so we can clear the table?’

(41) Group 2/A

Mother *ja skulle förslå en dusch*
 ‘A shower would be a good idea.’
ja tror inte du har tvättat håret sen du klippte dej
 ‘I don’t think you’ve washed your hair since you cut it.’

Mitigation occurs, however, not only in routine but also in pedagogic contexts, as demonstrated by the last example, classified as pedagogic rather than regulating the instrumental routine.

That mitigation also appears in indirect regulatory utterances is illustrated by example 42, which is considered as indirect, according to the model elaborated by Blum-Kulka (1990), although this classification might be questioned (see further below). Actually, the results of this study also suggest conventional indirectness is regularly chosen, at least by parents and especially by mothers. Indirect requests are often used for regulating some action to be undertaken in the future such as in the following example concerning the child taking some money to the school for a visit to the cinema:

(42) Group 1/A

Mother *de e väl bäst att du har med dej lite tidigare eller samma dag/ på onsdag väl*
 ‘You had better take it a bit earlier or the same day. On Wednesday, isn’t it?’

As pointed out by Blum-Kulka, parents have to face the option between mitigated direct and conventional indirect utterances if they want to avoid “bald on record” directness. This is also true for children, but they primarily adopted conventional indirectness, despite the fact that their direct requests were more often responded to. In this material, most indirect child requests, both for nonverbal actions and goods, were formulated as questions beginning with the modal verb “*kan*” (“can”), as in the examples 48-50:

(43) Group 1/A

Child *kan ja få en ostbit*
 'Can I have some cheese?'

(44) Group 1/A

Child *kan du hälla på*
 'Can you pour?'

(45) Group 2/B

Child *kan du skicka hit för ja ska åsså ha*
 'Can you pass the (e.g. cake). I want some as well.'

In the last example above, the child's indirect request is mitigated by a motivation. Indirect requests formulated with the verb "*kan*" were also most frequent in parental regulation, although parents made use of more varying conventionally indirect utterances, for instance with formulations as "*vill du*" or "*skulle du vilja*" ('will you' or 'would you'):

(46) Group 2/B

Father *kan du flytta dej lite*
 'Can you move up a bit.'

(47) Group 2/B

Mother *vill du skicka sötsur sås som står där*
 'Will you pass the sweet and sour sauce from over there.'

Are all indirect utterances more polite than direct equivalents? As suggested above, this is very dependent on the way of uttering them and on factors in the actual context. Consider the following utterance not found in the twenty Swedish families but highly possible in a family setting: "*Karl Nilsson, skulle du vilja vara så vänlig att sitta ner på din plats!*" ('K. N., would you be so kind as to sit in your place.'). In this case, the use of the full name and the conventional formality would (as pointed out by Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990 and Blum-Kulka 1997) be in conflict with the normal informality and intimacy within the primary group of the family and therefore be perceived as impolite or even hostile. This does not restrain desperate parents from using it regularly.

Like many other non-conventional requests, hints are often regulators with a low degree of propositional and illocutionary transparency, though their interpretation in certain routine contexts may be perfectly clear. Hints were not frequent in my material but seemed to be adequately interpreted (though not so often complied with due to their appearance in highly "conventional directive frames" (Ervin-Tripp 1976).

As demonstrated by the examples presented in the results, hints might be polite in certain contexts but are seldom so in family dinner situations. Besides, the excessive cognitive inference required of the children, might give the impression of irony, likely to provoke confusion and opposition.

Judging from the last extracts, the conclusion would be that the dinner table is an arena for argumentative discussions and even for giving way to conflicts within the

families. However, the analyses suggest that family members are quite skilful in adapting their regulatory behaviour both to the norms of politeness and to the requirements of the situation. They also accept a relatively high level of direct utterances and even brusque changes between sequences of rather coercive directness and passages of smoothly flowing dinner conversations.

7.3. How do the data generating methods used in this study relate to earlier research?

Finally, the data generating methods of this study should be considered and discussed in relation to earlier research. In order to make the data comparable to other studies (Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990; Snow et al. 1990), the distinct categories, direct and indirect, have been adapted to the theoretical frames of these researchers and, to some extent, modified according to the discussion in Ervin-Tripp (1976). This does not mean that the criteria for the coding of regulation into these categories were strictly based on the “cross-linguistically valid directness distinctions” (according to Brown & Levinson 1987) of the model of “solidarity politeness” presented in Blum-Kulka (1990, 1997: 146-148).

Brown & Levinson (1987) claim that “indirect speech acts are universal and for the most part probably constructed in essentially similar ways in all languages” implying that “indirect speech acts *do* translate across quite unrelated languages and cultures”. But they further maintain that “when they [the speech acts] do not, the translation gaps are due either to particular linguistic gaps or to social filters” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 139). Actually, my data include several specifically Swedish expressions that had to be analysed by Swedish speaking researchers and judged against the actual conversational contexts and according to a Swedish system of politeness (which is hardly investigated at all) to enable any classification.

However, the reason for elaborating the model was not only – and not primarily – the assumed cultural or linguistic-structural differences between Swedish families and those studied by Blum-Kulka but also the design of my study where the balance between directness and indirectness was related to the contextual constraints of for example different types of conversational genres and analysed on an intra-cultural micro level. After analysing regulation in the context of Swedish family dinners, I cannot but agree with Blum-Kulka (1997) that considerable socio-cultural differences on the micro level of language nuances make comparisons difficult if not impossible. Even within the Swedish family groups, there were striking differences in the use of various types of requests, despite certain seemingly culture-related constants. Actually, some direct regulatory utterances might as well be considered as indirect (see examples in the section above). On the other hand, certain indirect utterances could be perceived as fairly direct. Thus, some of the differences seemed to depend more on situational constraints than on culture-specific factors.

Probably, these circumstances might have affected both validity and reliability of the analyses. On the one hand, the reasons of the subjects for the choice of one regulatory expression before another may not always appear clearly even if different contextual components are accounted for in an analysis on a micro level. On the other hand, the small amounts of data generated as an effect of this research design may yield differences that are not significant. Furthermore, applying a general model of classification may, in the light of the problems discussed above, produce artificial

distinctions when used on smaller databases. Perhaps a design more adapted to the Swedish material would have generated more nuanced results. However, the findings in this study may be considered as tendencies and a starting point for further investigation.

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