

## 8. Children's arguing

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Whereas a great deal of research in sociolinguistics has been directed toward the investigation of politeness as an organizing feature of conversation (and, in particular, of women's conversations),<sup>1</sup> far less attention has been given to how people manage opposition, a type of talk that is generally evaluated negatively and viewed as disruptive.<sup>2</sup> The present study will present an ethnographically based description of how girls and boys carry out the activity of arguing.<sup>3</sup> When this activity is examined in detail, it is found that, rather than being disorderly, arguing provides children with a rich arena for the development of proficiency in language, syntax, and social organization. Moreover, in contrast to the prevalent stereotype that female interaction is organized with reference to politeness and a dispreference for dispute (Gilligan 1982:9–10; Lever 1976:482; Piaget 1965:77), we find that girls are not only just as skilled in argumentation as boys but have types of arguments that are both more extended and more complex in their participation structure than those among boys.

In this chapter we first provide some background information on the Maple Street group and fieldwork methods. Then we examine how everyday instances of conflict are conducted in cross-sex situations, paying close attention to the formulation of opposition moves. Finally we turn to a consideration of how more serious confrontations, in which one's reputation is at stake, are managed in girls' and boys' same-sex groups.<sup>4</sup> By looking at how children handle conflict in cross-sex as well as same-sex groups, we hope to avoid the problems of studies that exaggerate differences between females and males and that, in Thorne's (1986:168) words, "tend to abstract gender from social context, to assume males and females are qualitatively and permanently different."

## The children and the methods used to study them

The children whose conversations are examined in this chapter are working-class black preadolescent girls and boys from Philadelphia, ages 4–14, whom I (Marjorie Harness Goodwin)<sup>5</sup> audiotaped for a year and a half as they went about their everyday activities while playing on the street. The “Maple Street group,” as the children will be referred to, includes forty-four friends living within a block’s radius of one another who talk and play together after school, on weekends, and daily when school is not in session.

### *Fieldwork*

As an anthropologist I was interested in documenting the ordinary activities of the people I was observing in their natural environment. Focusing on activities, rather than communities or groups, for the study of culture is congruent with Goodenough’s analysis of the relationship between culture and activity. Goodenough (1981:102–103), noting that members of any society have not one culture but many, which become appropriate on different occasions, observes with concern that

... in practice, anthropologists have rarely considered simple clusters associated with one or only a few activities as the units with which to associate the phenomenon of culture. . . . Culture has been so strongly associated with social groups and communities – as distinct from activities – in anthropological practice that one often reads about people as being “members of a culture,” a truly nonsensical idea.

Analysis in this chapter will focus on the activity of arguing and seek, through qualitative analysis of its structure, to explicate the procedures used to construct it.

In order to disturb as little as possible the activities I was studying I attempted to minimize my interaction with the children while I was observing them. In this respect my role was quite different from that of other ethnographers of children (see for example Corsaro 1981) and, indeed, most anthropologists, in that I was more an observer of their activities than a participant in them. The phenomena that were being examined in my fieldwork, the ways in which the children used language, would have been especially sensitive to more intrusion on my part. As research in conversation analysis has demonstrated, talk, rather than being performed by an abstract, isolated speaker, emerges within particular speaker–hearer relationships and indeed can be modified by in-

teraction between speaker and recipient even as the talk is emerging (C. Goodwin 1981; Schegloff 1972). If I had acted as a principal recipient of the children's talk I would necessarily have influenced that talk. In brief, I was interested more in how the children interacted with one another than in how they interacted with an adult ethnographer. For similar reasons I chose to ask as few questions as possible.

My actual methods of working consisted of traveling with the children as they went about their activities, a Sony TC110 cassette recorder with an internal microphone over my shoulder. The children knew they were being recorded. I did not use a movie or video camera because of its intrusiveness. I recognize, however, that visual phenomena are an important part of the organization of face-to-face interaction, and in other work (for example, C. Goodwin 1981 and M. Goodwin 1980c) we have studied them intensively.

### *Data and transcription*

This study draws on a collection of more than five hundred argumentative exchanges; however, only a few representative argument fragments are included in this chapter. Texts of actual instances of the phenomenon we are discussing are provided so that others may inspect the records that form the basis for my analysis.

Data are transcribed according to the system developed by Jefferson and described in Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974:731-733). The following are the features most relevant to the present analysis:<sup>6</sup>

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2. Cutoff: A dash marks a sudden cutoff of the current sound. Here, instead of bringing the word "twelve" to completion, Pam interrupts it in midcourse.
3. Italics: Italics indicate some form of emphasis, which may be signaled by changes in pitch and/or amplitude.
4. Overlap bracket: A left bracket marks the point at which the current talk is overlapped by other talk. Thus Bruce's "Fourteen" begins during the last syllable of Pam's "Thirteen." Two speakers beginning to speak simultaneously are shown by two left brackets at the beginning of a line.
5. Lengthening: Colons indicate that the sound just before the colon has been noticeably lengthened.
6. Overlap slashes: Double slashes provide an alternative method of marking overlap. When they are used, the overlapping talk is not indented to the point of overlap. Here Pam's last line begins just after the "Four" in Bruce's "Fourteen."
7. Intonation: Punctuation symbols are used to mark intonation changes rather than as grammatical symbols:
  - A period indicates a falling contour.
  - A question mark indicates a rising contour.
  - A comma indicates a falling–rising contour.
8. Latching: The equal sign indicates "latching"; there is no interval between the end of a prior and the start of a next segment of talk.
9. Inbreath: A series of *h*'s preceded by a dot marks an inbreath. Without the dot the *h*'s mark an outbreath.
10. Rapid speech: Apostrophes between words indicate slurred, rapid speech.
11. Comments: Double parentheses enclose material that is not part of the talk being transcribed, for example a comment by the transcriber if the talk was spoken in some special way.
12. Silence: Numbers in parentheses mark silences in seconds and tenths of seconds.
13. Increased volume: Capitals indicate increased volume.
14. Problematic hearing: Material in parentheses indicates a hearing that the transcriber was uncertain about.
15. Breathiness; laughter: An *h* in parentheses indicates plosive aspiration, which could result from events such as breathiness, laughter, or crying.
16. Citation: Each example is preceded by a citation that locates the tape and transcript where the original data can be found.

### *Subgroups and their play preferences*

The children divided themselves into four separate clusters with members of each cluster interacting more with each other than with outsiders.

The clusters were differentiated from each other by the age and sex of the participants in each:<sup>7</sup>

Younger girls	Ages 4–9	5 children
Younger boys	Ages 5–6	3 children
Older girls	Ages 10–13	15 children
Older boys	Ages 9–14	21 children

Children 14 and older generally interacted in couples, and not necessarily with friends from the neighborhood; companions were chosen because they had similar interests rather than because they lived nearby. In this chapter we shall primarily be investigating conversation of children aged 9–14.

There were marked differences in the play preferences of older girls and older boys. The activities of the older boys included flying kites, yo-yoing, walking on hands, playing coolie and dead blocks, playing football and basketball, pitching pennies, playing halfball, making and riding homemade go-carts, flying model airplanes, shooting marbles, practicing dance steps, and playing musical instruments in a small group. The older girls seldom engaged in organized sports activities or indeed played games of any kind. Instead they liked to jump rope, play house and school, practice original dance steps, organize club meetings, and make things such as crocheted and knitted scarfs and hats, glass rings from bottle rims, and food, such as cake, pizza, and water ice, to sell. Older boys and girls on occasion would participate in similar activities, playing cards, house, or school, skating, riding bikes, yo-yoing, or jumping rope.

Most of children's activities took place outside their homes. Except for special activities such as practicing dance steps to music, playing instruments, or having a club meeting, the inside of the house was generally designated off limits by parents. With the exception of jump rope, many of the girls' activities took place on the shaded steps of their row houses, where boys often played as well. From this location they were in range of most of the boys' activities, which were characteristically conducted on the sidewalk and street. Only on occasion did boys make use of backyards (as an area for making such things as go-carts or slingshots) or parks (for flying kites, sledding, and conducting acorn or slingshot fights). Given the preferences for playing near one's house as well as girls' and younger children's obligations not to wander too far from home, girls and boys were frequently in one another's presence and had ample occasion to talk with one another. The relationships of girls and boys in the Maple Street group were characterized by a type of "arrangement between the sexes" (Goffman 1977) that involved an alternation between joining with and separating from each other for various activities.<sup>8</sup>

### Argument structures used by both girls and boys

We begin by investigating some of the basic structures and procedures used by the children to construct argument. Two phenomena will be focused on: (1) the construction of opposition and (2) format tying, ways in which return moves tie to the detailed structure of the talk that they are opposing. Though there are some differences in the ways in which girls and boys organize their arguing (to be discussed in a later section), the features they use in common are far more pervasive. Were one to focus just on points where girls and boys differ, the activity itself would be obscured. Although we shall not focus on gender per se in analyzing this activity, the reader will observe in many of the data to follow that girls not only use the same structures as boys but frequently emerge as the victors in their disputes with boys.

#### *Opposition moves*

Displaying deference to others present is implicated in the organization of a range of behavior that occurs in human interaction (Goffman 1967:47–95, 1971). This is accomplished in part through watchful concern that potential discord not emerge as an explicit event in encounters. Looking at talk from such a perspective has provided a focus for much research on the pragmatic organization of language, with extensive investigation being made of such phenomena as how disagreements between participants might be stated while preserving the face of each. For example, Brown and Levinson have studied how a speaker in conversation avoids the extreme of acting “baldly without redress” (1978:74) and assumes an orientation toward both positive and negative politeness. Such an orientation characterizes a range of speech actions, including the “hedged request” reported for American English-speakers by Lakoff (1973a:56 – “Won’t you please close the door?”) and Labov and Fanshel (1977:85 – “This room is going to be dusted, isn’t it?”), and for Tzeltal by Brown (1980:120 – “You don’t, perhaps, have any chickens, it is said”).

The opposition moves of Maple Street children are built in ways that contrast with actions designed to display deference to the other. The children frequently seek opportunities to test or realign the current arrangement of social identities among their peers (M. H. Goodwin 1980b, 1982a, 1982b); opposition provides an effective way to accomplish this.<sup>9</sup> When the actions of another can be construed as a violation, the offended party can take action to remedy such an affront, an event that provides the opportunity to display character. Thus, instead of

attesting to “the actor’s current willingness to accept the status quo” (Goffman 1967:254), the children create miniature versions of what Goffman (pp. 237–258) has termed “character contests” – “moments of action [during which] the individual has the risk and opportunity of displaying to himself and sometimes to others his style of conduct” (p. 237). In brief, rather than organizing their talk so as to display deference to others, the children frequently seek opportunities to display character and realign the social organization of the moment through opposition.

In order to highlight as clearly as possible the structures used to build opposition it is useful to compare the organization of opposition turns with that of talk that displays a preference for agreement. In her work on agreement and disagreement in assessment sequences Pomerantz (1984:64) distinguishes a *preferred-action turn shape*, which maximizes the salience of actions performed with it, from a *dispreferred-action turn shape*, which minimizes the action performed with it. In the data she examined, disagreement was a dispreferred activity and its occurrence was minimized through use of phenomena such as delays before the production of a disagreement and prefaces that mitigated the disagreement. Indeed, these prefaces sometimes took the form of agreements that were followed by the disagreement.<sup>10</sup> The following provide examples:

(1) SBL:L:03

A: She doesn’t uh usually come in on Friday, does she.  
 B: Well, yes she does, sometimes,

(2) G.26(T)7:30

1 John: You could live in thih– in this area.  
 2 I belie:ve you c’d really live in this  
 3 area inna tent.  
 4 (0.7)  
 5 John: Y’know?  
 6 Don: I think you’d if– if– if (you did it  
 7 you’d be) ro(h)bbbed,

The disagreement in (1) is mitigated by both the hesitant “Well” that precedes it and the qualifier “sometimes” that follows it. In (2) the statement being disagreed with is followed by a long pause (line 4), and the explicit disagreement occurs only when initial speaker in line 5 explicitly requests a response. The disagreement that is at last produced is further modulated by being prefaced by a hedge (“I think”). In these examples, though disagreement occurs, it is organized as a dispreferred activity through use of phenomena such as delays in its occurrence and prefaces that mitigate the disagreement when it at last emerges.

By way of contrast, when the Maple Street children oppose one an-

other they organize their talk so as to highlight that opposition. For example, rather than being preceded by delays, turns containing opposition are produced immediately. Moreover, such turns frequently contain a preface that announces right at the beginning of the turn, characteristically in the first word said, that opposition is being done.

## (3) 9-25-70-13

Chopper: Get outa here you wench! You better get outa here.

Pam: No! You don't tell *me* to get out!

## (4) 10-24-8-20

((talking about Sharon's hair))

Eddie: Wet it!

Sharon: No. I don't wanna wet it.

## (5) 8-28-70-3

Earl: ((asking for rubber bands)) Just *two*.

Darlene: No! Y'all losin all my rubber bands up.

## (6) 10-21-70-3

Eddie: ((singing)) You didn't have to go to school today did you.

Terri: Yes we *did* have to go to school today!

In these data opposition is signaled immediately through the expression of polarity (Halliday and Hasan 1976:178) that is used to initiate the turn.<sup>11</sup> The shape of these disagreements is such that they do not delay or disguise the alignment a participant is taking up with respect to a prior move but instead emphasize opposition.

A second type of preface used to begin opposition turns consists of repetition of part of the talk that is being opposed:

## (7) 8-2-71-4

((on reaching a city creek))

Pam: Y'all gonna walk in it?

Nettie: Walk in it, You know where that water come from? The toilet.

## (8) 8-2-71-28

((The girls are trying to trick the boys into believing that they have found some frogs.))

Pam: We found a frog.

Chopper: A *frog*, y'all did not.

Partial repetition of prior talk occurs in a variety of conversational activities including disagreements with prior speakers' self-deprecations (Pomerantz 1984:83-84) and other-initiated repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). In these activities, as well as in opposition, the partial repetition is used to locate a trouble source in another's talk. But the partial repetitions that occur at the beginning of opposition moves differ



from the repetitions in some other activities in several important respects. In other-initiated repair the discovery of error is characteristically modulated through use of markers of uncertainty, for example pronouncing the partial repetition with rising intonation. Moreover, locating the trouble source is frequently the only activity performed in the turn. For example:

## (9) GTS1:II:2:54

- |                                     |                   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| A: 'E likes that waider over there, | A: Trouble source |
| → B: Wait- <i>er</i> ?              | B: Find trouble   |
| A: Waitress, sorry.                 | A: Provide remedy |

In these data the activities of locating the trouble and providing a remedy are separated into distinct turns performed by different individuals. Although B points to something problematic in A's talk, A is allowed to do the correction himself. By restricting the activity in his or her turn to locating the error, B proposes that the party who made the error has the competence to remedy it, and provides him or her with an opportunity to do so (see Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977 for further analysis of this process).

By way of contrast in aggravated opposition, such as that performed by the Maple Street children, the partial repeat does not characteristically stand alone, but instead is immediately followed by further talk that explicitly opposes what prior speaker said.<sup>12</sup> If subsequent speaker's opposition proposes that prior speaker has made an error of some type (e.g. Ex. 7) that party is not portrayed as having the competence to remedy the error himself or herself; and, since speaker moves on to oppose prior speaker immediately after the initial challenging, he or she is not given an opportunity to modify or correct the statement being opposed.<sup>13</sup> As these examples make clear, actions of this type are used by both boys and girls.

A second way in which opposition prefaces differ from other-initiated repair is in terms of the intonation pattern used. Rather than modulating the discovery of a trouble source with a tentative, rising intonation, opposers use distinctive contours that not only focus attention on the trouble as trouble, but also call into question the competence of the party who produced such an object. The partial repeats in Exx. 7 and 8 are spoken with falling-rising contours (Gunter 1974:61), a pattern that Ladd (1978:150) notes may be used to "do something like a holistic 'contradiction' or questioning of speaker A's assumptions." Challenge can also be conveyed by affiliating "who" or "what" with a partial repeat produced with falling intonation (as in Exx. 10 and 11) or the words

“what” or “huh” produced with emphatic rising intonation (as in Exx. 12 and 13).

(10) 10-12-70-12

Juju: Terri go and get your pick.  
Terri: *What* pick. I'm not goin in the house now.

(11) 9-2-70-7

Sharon: When it snows outside where y'all have gym at.  
Eddie: In the basement.  
Vince: *What* basement. *No* we ain't.

(12) 9-28-70-40

((discussing bottles for making rings))  
Poochie: Can't use this kind.  
Terri: *What?* We already- sh- Candy show him them things.

(13) 11-11-70-7

((discussing a foster child))  
Eddie: Her mother didn't want her.  
Pam: *Huh?* She said cuz her sister ran away and she ain't have nobody to take care of her while she go to work so,

Rather than simply disagreeing with something in prior talk, the aggravated character of the intonation used in opposition prefaces actively challenges what has just been said.

In brief, both the intonation structure of opposition prefaces and the sequential organization of the turns begun by such prefaces (e.g. the way in which opposer does not provide a space for prior speaker to deal with the trouble source located by the preface) treat prior speaker as someone who is not only wrong but unable or unwilling to modify the talk being objected to on his or her own. Looking at such phenomena from a slightly different perspective, we can see that in such opposition what is being called into question is not simply the trouble source in the prior talk but the competence or status of the party who produced that talk. In essence what is being opposed is not simply a position but also an actor responsible for stating such a position. In view of this it is not surprising that another phenomenon found quite frequently in opposition turns is an explicit characterization of the person who produced the talk being opposed. For example:

(14) 10-19-70-110

((Boys are discussing slings they are making for a slingshot fight.))  
Tokay: All right we got enough *already*.

→ Michael: No– man! You must be crazy. (0.8) Must be. (0.6) Talkin about I got *enough*. = Boy. You must– I *know* you have never played *now*. Thinkin I got *enough*. (0.8) Ma:n you need three *thousand* to have *enough*. (1.8) I *always* like to have– I *always* like to have more than my enemy has. Cuz if I don't have more than my enemy ma:n I is *doomed*.

## (15) 10–19–70–119

((Discussing slings))

Chopper: I don't want these big thick ones.

→ Michael: You is crazy boy. I swear to god. You need that– thick like that. Cuz that hurts people.

In both of these examples the party who produced the talk being opposed is characterized as “crazy” for having said what he said. In Ex. 14 this is elaborated to include the judgment that a party who would produce such talk must be unfamiliar with the activity being talked about (“I *know* you have never played *now*”). Opposition can thus call into question not only what has been said, but also the general competence of someone who would produce such talk. Moreover such an action provides the opportunity for a reciprocal display of opposer's expertise. Thus the talk does not simply portray its recipient as defective but rather invokes a particular relationship between speaker and addressee that categorizes each of these participants in an alternative way. Data such as these emphasize the fact that in analyzing opposition it is not sufficient to focus exclusively on the talk through which opposition is done; one must also take into account how actors are portrayed and constituted through that talk.

Looking at opposition from such a perspective sheds light on another frequent component of opposition turns: pejorative person descriptions and insult terms. Such objects provide resources that are used quite frequently to build a turn that not only opposes prior talk but also explicitly characterizes the person who produced that talk. For example:

## (16) 9–23–70–9

Michael: Me and Huey saw– we saw um: the Witch and the Hangman.

Huey: The *Hangman* and the *Witch* knucklehead.

## (17) 9–15–70–11

Sharon: It's something like Johnny bike. It's hot hot– // ( )

Terri: Johnny's bike is orange you egg.

## (18) 10–19–70–58

Huey: Gimme the *things*.

Chopper: You sh:ut up you big lips.

Data such as these demonstrate how a single opposition turn can contain a variety of components that attend to and operate on differential phe-

nomena (e.g. one component of the turn might deal with something said in prior talk and another address the character of the person who produced that talk). The multiplicity of action within individual turns raises questions about the common practice of analyzing argument by glossing a turn as an instance of a particular kind of speech act.

As the data just examined demonstrate, opposition can be signaled at many places within a turn. One of the most common ways of displaying opposition in the midst of a turn is through use of what Halliday and Hasan (1976:146) call "substitution," or "the replacement of one item in a sentence with another having a similar structural function." For example:

(19) 10-10-70-144

Chopper: Get your four guys.  
Michael: You get *three* guys.

(20) 11-2-71-7

Deniecey: An that happend *last* year.  
Terri: That happened *this* year.

(21) 9-25-70-5

Michael: How'd you lost those two games.  
Chopper: *One* game.

(22) 10-26-70-2

Robby: You got on a blouse too. I can see the sleeves.  
Terri: I got a *sweater* on dear heart.

As is the case with the talk following an aggravated preface, opposition done through substitution does not provide the party being opposed a place to remedy the trouble source on his or her own. For example if Terri in Ex. 22 had wanted to do her correction as other-initiated repair rather than as opposition, a turn consisting only of "Blouse?" could have been produced. Such a turn would have provided Robby an opportunity to attempt a remedy on his own.

When the substitution format is used to do opposition, a number of phenomena are used to heighten the salience of the term being offered as a correction. First, the utterance containing the correction characteristically repeats some of the prior talk, with the exception of the item being replaced. Such repetition of another's talk frames the item being corrected and helps to emphasize that what is being done is a correction of something he or she said. Second, the replacement term is typically spoken with heightened emphasis, giving it "contrastive stress" (Ladd 1978:78).<sup>14</sup> Such a way of signaling a correction differs from that found by Yaeger-Dror (1974, in press) for talk among adults in which a pref-

erence for agreement was operative. In her data nonsalient intonation was used in expressions of disagreement.<sup>15</sup>

We shall now briefly investigate how the components of opposition turns can engender more extended disputes. To examine this process it is useful to distinguish two types of opposition moves.

1. Disagreement (Ex. 23) or refusal to perform some requested action (Ex. 24):

**(23) 10-13-70-13**

Raymond: Boy you broke my skate board.

Earl: No I *didn't*.

Raymond: Did *too*.

Earl: Did *not*.

Raymond: Did *too*.

**(24) 10-24-70-20**

((discussing Sharon's hair))

Eddie: Wet it.

Sharon: No I don't wanna wet it.

2. Return and exchange moves (Pomerantz 1975:26), in which a move equivalent to the one being opposed is returned:

**(25) 9-23-70-6**

Sheridan: You cheat.

Chopper: *You* cheat.

Although both types of action can occur in a single opposition sequence, these procedures are alternative to each other in that they provide for quite distinctive types of sequencing. Disagreement and correction sequences involve the assertion (and reassertion) of positions. Such assertions can be buttressed by accounts that have sequential consequences of their own. Exchange and return sequences, by contrast, are constructed not out of moves that assert the validity or invalidity of a position but, rather, from actions that return a reciprocal action. Note that even though the words may be the same (as in Ex. 25), the action is a reciprocal one, not an identical one, since features of it, such as who is referred to by the pronouns in it, change as the participation framework changes. What is preserved is the relationship of action, current speaker, and current recipient.<sup>16</sup>

The most common way of sustaining contradiction is through "recycling." Each of two opposing parties repeats a prior position with the effect that an extended series of disagreements is produced (see M. H. Goodwin 1983:672-675).<sup>17</sup> For example in the following Sharon and Pam playfully object to Johnny's version of his age, 14, and recycle their version of his age, 13, through several turns.

## (26) 9-28-70-18

((Johnny, age 12, going on 13, is discussing his upcoming birthday.))

- 1 Johnny: Till I be fourteen,
- 2 Sharon: How old are you? Thirteen?
- 3 Johnny: *Fourteen.*
- 4 Sharon: *Thir//teen.*
- 5 Johnny: *Four//teen.*
- 6 Pam: *Thirteen.*
- 7 Johnny: *Fourteen.*
- 8 Pam: *Thir//teen.*
- 9 Sharon: *Thirteen.*
- 10 Johnny: *Four//teen.*
- 11 Sharon: *Thirteen.*
- 12 Pam: *Thirte(hh)n. heh.*
- 13 Johnny: I'll be thirteen next week.

Only after Pam embeds laughter in her talk, shifting its framing, does the argument reach closure. In line 13 Johnny concedes.

Participants may, alternatively, attempt to effect closure in a dispute by justifying their point of view through an account or explanation of the position taken up.<sup>18</sup> Some research has postulated that a justification "is significantly more likely to lead to a termination of the episode" (Eisenberg and Garvey 1981:166). However, in the following the accounts themselves engender extended dispute. With the introduction of a justification for a position, the focus of the argument shifts to the new account. In this example accounts are indicated in the left-hand column by #.<sup>19</sup>

## (27) 10-7-70-5

((While children skate Raymond bumps into Terri.))

- 1 Terri: Get off Raymond. Get off!
- 2 Sharon: Now Terri just aim at Raymond butt and
- 3 let's see if we could knock him down.
- 4 Terri: Oh yeah you- you be // you better
- 5 Raymond: Y'all better *not* knock me *down!* =
- 6 Terri: Yeah?
- # 7 Sharon: If we do that's what we // playin.
- # 8 Terri: Play and you gonna get knock down.
- 9 Raymond: Nuh *uh*!
- 10 Terri: Mm *hm*!
- # 11 Raymond: Nuh *uh* y'all. I ain't playin.
- 12 Terri: Yes you *are* playin.
- 13 Raymond: I can't af//ford
- # 14 Terri: If you- if you put a skate on you
- 15 playin.
- 16 Raymond: *No* it ain't.
- 17 Terri: *Yes* it is.
- 18 Raymond: I ain't playin // nuttin!
- 19 Terri: Is you playin Sharon,

- 20 Raymond: Nope!  
 21 Terri: Huh // aren't we playin Sharon,  
 # 22 Sharon: If you–  
 23 if you put that skate on // you are.  
 # 24 Terri: Yeap. If you put the skate on you  
 25 playin.  
 26 (2.2)  
 27 Terri: Pam! If they  
 28 p//ut a skate on // aren't they playin,  
 29 Raymond: This her skate.  
 30 Sharon: You want this?  
 31 Terri: If they put a skate on?  
 32 (1.4)  
 33 Terri: All except Earl.

This argument is composed of two sequences in which recycling of positions (similar to Ex. 26 above) and arguments about accounts occur. In this interaction Sharon and Terri treat Raymond's bumping into them while skating as an offense, as demonstrated by their command for him to "get off" (line 1). In response they propose a reciprocal action, knocking him down (lines 2–3), which Raymond first objects to in line 5: "Y'all better *not* knock me *down*!" In lines 7 and 8 Sharon and Terri legitimate their proposed course of action – knocking Raymond down – by stating that such actions are appropriate within the context of the activity: "If we do that's what we playin." "Play and you gonna get knock down."

The first recycling of positions follows this first justification:

(27) 10–7–70–5

- # 7 Sharon: If we do that's what we // playin.  
 # 8 Terri: Play and you gonna get knock down.  
 9 Raymond: Nuh *uh*:!  
 10 Terri: Mm *hm*!  
 # 11 Raymond: Nuh *uh* y'all. I ain't playin.

Raymond's justification for his position of disagreement, "I ain't playin," becomes the lead-in to a new series of recyclings of positions.

(27) 10–7–70–5

- # 11 Raymond: Nuh *uh* y'all. I ain't playin.  
 12 Terri: Yes you *are* playin.  
 13 Raymond: I can't af//ford  
 # 14 Terri: If you– if you put a skate on you  
 15 playin.  
 16 Raymond: *No* it ain't.  
 17 Terri: *Yes* it is.  
 18 Raymond: I ain't playin // nuttin!  
 19 Terri: Is you playin Sharon,  
 20 Raymond: Nope!

- 21 Terri: Huh // aren't we playin Sharon,  
 # 22 Sharon: If you–  
 23 if you put that skate on // you are.

The dispute is eventually dissipated following a display of Terri and Sharon's alignment with a single position. Sharon in lines 22–3 explicitly agrees with Terri's question in line 21. The account that a position is shared by two people is a move children offer in their attempts to assert their positions. In line 29 Raymond begins a nonargumentative move.

In this section we have investigated a number of different procedures for carrying out disputes and examined both how opposition is accomplished and how more extensive argument sequences are constructed. As these examples have shown, boys and girls have access to similar types of ways of disputing. These data are thus important with regard to the relationship of language and gender. Researchers investigating black language and culture have repeatedly argued (e.g. Abrahams 1970, 1975, 1976; Abrahams and Bauman 1971; Hannerz 1969:129–130; Kochman 1970, 1981; Reisman 1970, 1974) that such character contests are peculiar to Afro-American males. But as studies of everyday arguments among black and white families (Vuchinich 1984) and in white middle-class Anglo-American children's groups (Brenneis and Lein 1977; Cook-Gumperz 1981; Corsaro and Rizzo 1985; Eisenberg and Garvey 1981; Genishi and Di Paolo 1982; Hughes 1983; Maynard 1985a, 1985b), as well as among Italian (Corsaro and Rizzo 1985) and part-Hawaiian (Boggs 1978), children and children in a multinational suburban American school setting (Adger 1984), have shown, contest frameworks for interaction occur among other groups as well. Moreover, as both previous research (M. H. Goodwin 1980b, 1985b; Hughes 1983) and this chapter demonstrate, the opportunity to create and display character within oppositional interaction is not confined to males, but is quite important for females as well. Indeed, some of the interactive frameworks available to females for doing this, the "he-said-she-said," for example (to be examined below), are both more extended and more elaborate than anything yet reported for males.

### *Format tying*

Much of the work on discourse and pragmatics has made a distinction between the surface structure of the utterance (that is, the actual words spoken) and the actions embodied by the utterance (that is, the actual words spoken) and the actions embodied by the utterance (that is, its illocutionary force), and has argued that sequencing between utterances occurs on the level of action. For example, Labov and Fanshel



(1977:25)<sup>20</sup> state; “Sequencing rules do not appear to be related to words, sentences, and other linguistic forms, but rather form the connections between abstract actions such as requests, compliments, challenges, and defenses.” One effect of such a position is that sequential and discourse phenomena, such as speech acts, are treated as distinct and separable from the phonological, syntactic, and semantic phenomena traditionally analyzed by linguists. There is, however, evidence that approaching sequencing entirely from the perspective of larger speech acts misses much of the work participants in conversation are doing. Thus the work of Sacks (1967) on tying techniques has demonstrated that much of the connectedness between separate turns is achieved through systematic syntactic operations. Such a perspective sheds important light on a range of phenomena central to the use of language in argument sequences.

In producing a subsequent argumentative move, participants frequently tie not only to the type of action produced by last speaker but also to the particulars of its wording.<sup>21</sup> Consider the following:

(28) 10-24-70-20

((Eddie, who has been teasing Sharon about her hair, has just laughed.))

Sharon: I don't know what you *laughin* at.

Eddie: I know what I'm *laughin* at.

Your *head*.

If all that were at issue in this sequence were an exchange of information, the second line of Eddie's turn by itself could constitute a complete reply to Sharon: “Your head” tells Sharon what is being laughed at. Eddie, however, precedes this component of his turn with another longer sentence that semantically seems to state the obvious – that he knows what he is laughing at. If this sentence is not providing relevant information, what is it doing? When we look at it in relationship to Sharon's talk we find that it is not only closely tied to the particulars of what she just said, repeating many of the exact words that she used,<sup>22</sup> but that it in fact constitutes a systematic transformation of her sentence. The skeleton of her structure is retained, but Sharon's “you *laughin*” is changed to “I'm *laughin*” and the negation in her sentence is deleted.<sup>23</sup> These are precisely the minimum and adequate changes necessary to transform her talk into a reply to that very talk. In an almost literal sense Sharon's own words are used against her. To focus analysis of this sentence on its information content, the presuppositions it embodies, or the speech act it makes visible would be quite misleading. This sentence constitutes an adequate reply to what has just been said by virtue of the way in which it reuses the materials provided by that talk to shape a counter to it.<sup>24</sup>

Some demonstration of how important such format tying is to the organization of the talk that is occurring here is provided by what happens next:

## (29) 10-24-70-20

- ((Eddie has been teasing Sharon about her hair.))
- 1 Eddie: heh heh!
- 2 Sharon: I don't know what you *laughin* at.
- 3 Eddie: I know what I'm *laughin* at.
- 4 Your *head*.
- 5 Sharon: I know I'm *laughin* at your head too.
- 6 Eddie: I know you ain't *laughin* cuz you ain't
- 7 *laughin*.
- 8 Sharon: ((mirthless laughter)) Ha ha.
- 9 Eddie Ha ha. I got more hair than you.
- 10 Sharon: You do not. Why you gotta laugh. You
- 11 *know* you ain't got more hair than me.
- 12 Eddie: ((taking out shoestrings)) Fifty-four
- 13 inches.

The talk examined earlier is found in lines 2-4. In line 5 ("I know I'm *laughin* at your head too") the "I know I'm *laughin* at" framework provides a point of departure for yet another return, this time from Sharon to Eddie. In line 6 it is used again, and indeed, the same types of transformations that were applied to line 2 to produce line 3 - changing pronoun structure to keep action constant over shift of participants and adding or deleting negation - are used on line 5 to build line 6. Although speakership changes, the underlying pattern used to construct the utterance of the moment is preserved.

Conceptualizing what happens here as a sequence of abstract actions obscures the way in which the participants, in an almost musical way, are exploring one after another the possible variations provided by the detailed structure of the utterances they are producing. The surface structure of the talk in these data is anything but superficial in terms of its power to provide organization for the sequencing of the exchange.

In line 8 the particular pattern that we have been examining is abandoned when Sharon shifts from talking about laughter to laughter itself. However, in line 9 the practice of building a return action from the materials just provided by the other party continues as Eddie uses laughter to begin his reply to her laughter. In line 10 Sharon challenges what Eddie has just said, and in line 12, rather than dispute with her, Eddie shifts to a different topic.

Format tying can occur in many different ways. The following provides an example of one of the simplest, that is, exact repetition of what the other has said:

## (30) 10-21-70-1

((Cameron is sitting on Terri's top step as Joey approaches him from the street.

The initial talk refers to an incident in which Cameron was reported to have cried because he lost a key.))

- 1 Joey: He- he was gettin ready to cry.  
 2 Cameron: But that wasn't mine.  
 3 (1.0)  
 4 Cameron: Mole!  
 5 (1.0)  
 6 Joey: Mole.  
 7 (0.3)  
 8 Cameron: Ah shud up.  
 9 (0.4)  
 10 Joey: Ah shud up.  
 11 Cameron: *Make me.*  
 12 (0.3)  
 13 Joey: *Make me!*  
 14 (0.4)  
 15 Cameron: Why donchu make *me.*

In lines 6, 10, and 13 Joey constructs a counter to Cameron by using the exact words Cameron himself has just used.<sup>25</sup> But although the surface structure of the original and that of the repeat are identical, the meanings are not; the change in discourse structure produced by the change in speakers requires a new interpretation of each utterance. Thus "me" in line 11 refers to Cameron but in line 13 to Joey, and in all cases agent and recipient of action are changed. By holding the linguistic form constant Cameron is able to highlight changes in interactive organization by reversing the participation framework created by Joey's prior utterance.

In line 15 a more complex type of format tying occurs. Rather than simply repeat what Joey has said, Cameron, by prefacing Joey's "Make me" with "Why donchu" (and stressing "me"), creates a new sentence that includes Joey's prior talk as an embedded component within it<sup>26</sup> and reverses the agent of the proposed action.

Embedding such as this is, in fact, one of the prototypical ways of taking the words of the other and using them against him or her in a reciprocal action. Consider the following in which Chopper transforms Huey's command into a challenge. This is achieved by reusing the structure of the prior utterance and adding the words "make me" (while dropping the possessive reference to the yard that the children are in). Huey's sentence is now embedded within a new sentence of Chopper's:

## (31) 10-20-70-59

Huey: Why don't you get out my yard.

Chopper: Why don't you *make* me get out the yard.

Huey's request that Chopper leave is thus transformed into a challenge to Huey to enforce such an action.

As Ex. 29 demonstrated, transformations of prior speaker's talk can occur by the deletion of elements of a prior utterance as well as by the embedding of such talk within a new action. Consider the following:

## (32) 10-19-70-58

Chopper: Don't gimme that. I'm not talkin ta y:ou.

Huey: I'm talkin ta y:ou!

Here, rather than embed prior talk in a new sentence, Huey constructs a return to Chopper by deleting the negation in Chopper's sentence.

The format tying and embedding that occur in Ex. 31 and 32, rather than operating on a "linguistic" level that is distinct from the "discourse" level of speech acts, are intrinsic components of the way in which the actions produced in these examples are constructed to be the things that they are. Whereas it is possible to escalate an argument with a subsequent action whose structure is unrelated to that of the action being dealt with, the utterances of Ex. 30 and 31 display their status as escalations<sup>27</sup> of prior actions, and challenges to the producers of those actions, by making use of the talk of prior speaker and transforming it to their advantage; in essence they turn the prior action on its head. Indeed, there is a nice fit between the social activity of escalating a sequence and challenging a prior move and the syntactic structure of these utterances, in which the prior move becomes an embedded sub-component of the sentence used to answer it. Looking at these data from a slightly different perspective it can be noted that by performing such embedding the children are openly making use of, and creatively playing with, the syntactic resources provided by their language as they transform prior sentences into new sentences appropriate to their current projects.

Huey's talk in Ex. 32 consists of almost the same words as Chopper's (with the exception of the negation). It is not, however, a repetition of what Chopper has just said. First, as was noted in Ex. 30, both pronoun reference and participation framework change when the party producing the talk changes. Second, in reusing the words provided by prior speaker subsequent speaker can substantially modify what is being done with those words by the way in which he or she speaks them.<sup>28</sup> For example, in these data the emphasis in Chopper's sentence falls on the action that is the topic of the sentence, "talkin," whereas in Huey's version the emphasis is shifted to the recipient of that action, "y:ou!" The focus

and import of the sentence are thus modified by the way in which it is spoken.

The following provides a more vivid example of how the way in which something is spoken can substantially change what is being done with those words:

(6) 10-21-70-3

Eddie: ((singing)) You didn't have to go to school today did you.

Terri: Yes we *did* have to go to school today!

Terri's utterance maintains a structure parallel to that of Eddie's with two major exceptions: (1) the word "Yes" at the beginning of her talk, which, through its display of polarity, constitutes an opposition preface, and (2) the replacement of Eddie's "didn't" with "did," which is spoken with contrastive stress (Ladd 1978:77).<sup>29</sup> Both the contrast replacement and the opposition preface enable Terri to modify substantially the import and focus of the talk she is reusing, that is, to turn it into a challenge of what that talk originally proposed. But the changes she is able to accomplish through her pronunciation of the talk go beyond this. Eddie's statement, with its singsong intonation, could have been interpreted as a bid for an alliance with its recipient against the school establishment. Instead of participating in the proposed alliance, Terri focuses on Eddie's error in having said what he did. Through the way in which she speaks, Terri is able to display indignation, something that contrasts quite strongly with the playfulness that was found when Eddie spoke these words. In essence, Terri not only changes the semantic meaning of the prior utterance but also the affect it had conveyed.

Looking at the change from "didn't" to "*did*" from a slightly different perspective, we can see that such replacement in fact constitutes an instance of contrast-class replacement or substitution. Since the use of substitution in the construction of counters has already been examined, it will not be looked at in detail here, except to note that it is common in format tying. Indeed, the repetition of structure provided by format tying frames the substitution so that it becomes highlighted as a noticeable event. Format tying and substitution thus work hand in hand, the similarity of structure between two utterances provided by format tying making the relevant difference in the second utterance, the substituted term, stand out with particular salience.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to operating on the semantic, syntactic, and propositional structure of a prior utterance, the children may also play with its phonological structure. Consider lines 14-15 of the following:

(33) 6-3-71-2

((Nettie is sitting on top of Pam.))

1 Pam: Get off!

- 2 Nettie: No. Ain't there's another way?  
 3 Pam: Come on, Nettie.  
 4 Nettie: Come on, Where we goin. Don't say that  
 5 either.  
 6 Pam: Come on. // Get off. All y'gotta do-  
 7 Nettie: Cuz I gotta answer.  
 8 Pam: Get off.  
 9 Nettie: All ya gotta say is (0.2) I mean get -  
 10 I mean um - um - *Move* please and I can't  
 11 get no rhymes on that one.  
 12 Pam: °Move please.  
 13 Nettie: Where the *move* at.  
 14 Pam: I'm tryin to get off rather,  
 15 Nettie: *Wather*, wh- oh: the weather you want?  
 16 The day is sunny and tomorrow's gonna  
 17 be ra-

In line 15, by systematically varying its phonological structure Nettie transforms "rather" into "weather." This is accomplished by first changing the *r* in "rather" to *w* and then changing the *æ* in "rather" to *ε*.

↓  
 rather  
 wather  
 weather

Through this stepwise transformation Nettie is able humorously to change Pam's request for her to move into a request for information about the weather.

This sequence also contains a number of other playful mishearings that demonstrate yet other ways in which children might transform a prior utterance in a subsequent move. For example, within the sequence occurring here, the words "Come on" in line 3 are clearly a recycle of the request made in line 1, that Nettie get off Pam. But when abstracted from a particular context, the words could have a range of different meanings, and in line 4 Nettie plays with this fact, first repeating what Pam has said and then treating it as a request to go somewhere, rather than as a request to get off. In line 12 Pam makes a request ("Move please") that has the following format:

[Verb (action requested)] + [Please]

A similar format, however, is used with nouns when asking for objects (for example "Salt, please" to request salt at the dinner table):

[Noun (object requested)] + [Please]

In line 13 Nettie treats the verb in line 12 as a noun by asking, "Where the *move* at." A similar creative reorganization of the syntactic cate-

gories provided by a prior utterance is found in the following, in which Huey transforms an adjective in Chopper's utterance into a verb:

## (34) 10-19-70-58

Chopper: Ah you better sh:ut *up* with your *dingy* sneaks.

Huey: I'm a *dingy* your hea:d. How would you like *that*.

While sitting on top of Pam, Nettie is in fact playing in rather abstract ways with a range of basic structures used by her group not only to construct their talk but also to interpret its meaningfulness. In lines 10-11 she refers to the process through which she is able to avoid providing next moves to Pam's requests as "having rhymes" on Pam's utterances. Such an expression describes as aptly as any outside analyst could the process of playful but systematic transformation she is engaged in.

We are now in a better position to investigate how a range of different strategies for format tying might be combined in a single dispute. In the following a group of girls are practicing steps for a future dance contest against the boys:

## (35) 9-28-70-25

((Girls sing as they practice original dance steps.))

- 1 Huey: You sound terrible.
- 2 Sharon: We sound just like you *look*.
- 3 Michael: What's the matter.
- 4 Terri: What's the matter with *you*.
- 5 Michael: Same thing that's the matter with you.
- 6 Terri: Well *nothing's* the matter with me.
- 7 Michael: Well nothing the matter // with *me* then.
- 8 Terri: Well then *go* somewhere.
- 9 Michael: Well I wanna stay *here*.
- 10 Terri: Ah: I hate you.
- 11 Sharon: Go ahead, go ahead. Go ahead y'all.
- 12 Act like he just ain't even here.

In these data a variety of argumentative actions are organized through format tying into a series of rounds. Moreover, while attending to the details of the structure of prior talk, the participants also play with the operations used by that talk to reference phenomena.

In line 1 Huey delivers an insult to the girls: "You sound terrible." In her return action Sharon reuses the "[girls] sound" structure but replaces "terrible" with talk that equates how the girls sound with an attribute of the boys': "We sound just like you look." Instead of producing an explicit insult term of her own, Sharon uses the power of talk to refer to other talk to create a boomerang so that the boys now become the target of their own insult.

For clarity, format tying has so far been discussed in terms of the

operations on explicit phonological, syntactic, and semantic elements of prior talk. It can, however, be more abstract than this, as is demonstrated by lines 3–5 of this exchange. Michael's talk in line 3 is disjunctive with the talk that just preceded it, but it quickly becomes the template for a new sequence of format-tying operations in lines 4 and 5. Since the way in which actions such as these reuse the materials provided by prior talk has already been examined, this process will not again be looked at in detail here. We wish rather to focus attention on the way in which Michael in line 5 makes the pejorative attribute of himself being asked about by Terri (i.e. the answer to the question "What's the matter with *you*") an attribute of Terri as well ("Same thing that's the matter with *you*"). In effect he constructs another boomerang. Thus, although the surface structure of the talk in lines 3–5 is completely different from that found in lines 1–2, Michael nonetheless makes use of material from that earlier sequence. What is being reused, however, is not specific words or phrases but, rather, a particular structural solution found by Sharon to the problem of building an appropriate return.

The talk in lines 3–5 refers to a phenomenon, the answer to the "What's the matter" question, that has not yet been specified. In lines 6 and 7 this issue is resolved in a way that takes into account the fact that it has now become an attribute of both contesting parties, i.e. it is defined as "nothing." Parenthetically it can be noted that if one were to approach argument from the perspective of resolving conflict, this would appear to constitute a prototypical example of conflict resolution; that is, the contesting parties come to agreement, and moreover agree in a way that is not pejorative to either of them. Clearly such an approach to what is happening here would be seriously in error.

In lines 8 and 9 the pattern of providing reciprocal actions through format tying is broken. In line 9 Michael provides an account rather than a reciprocal move to Terri. Despite the fact that similarity in action is not achieved, similarity in structure is maintained. Michael's utterance ("Well I wanna stay *here*") repeats the "well" of the talk just before it and produces contrast-class substitutions for both verbs ("stay" is substituted for "go") and adverbs ("here" replaces "somewhere"). In addition both tied utterances share the same stress and rhythmic pattern.

The way in which format tying poses the task of using the immediately prior talk to build an appropriate return casts light on how this process might be related to a range of other phenomena. For example it would appear to have close structural ties to "sounding" or "ritual insult" (Abrahams 1970; Kochman 1970; Labov 1972a, 1974). The recipient of an initial ritual insult (an insult about the target recipient known not to be literally true) must use the scene described in prior speaker's talk to produce a second description that turns the initial insult on its head and



is even more outrageous. As noted by Goffman (1971:179), “the structure of these devices establishes a move that is designed to serve as a comparison base for another’s effort, his object being to exceed the prior effort in elegance or wit.”<sup>31</sup> A successful return insult leaves the other party with nothing more to say and is responded to with laughter (Labov 1972a:325). The following are excerpts from a lengthy playful ritual-insult battle:<sup>32</sup>

## (36) 6-3-71-4

((Simplified transcript))

- 39 Nettie: One day- (0.2) *my* brother was spendin’  
40 the night with *you*, •h And // the next  
41 mornin’ he got up,  
42 Michael: I don’t wanna hear about it. Your  
43 brother // ain’t *never* been in *my*  
44 house.  
45 Nettie: THE NEXT TIME HE GOT UP, •heh He was  
46 gonna brush his teeth so the roach  
47 tri(h)ed ta(h) bru(h)sh hi(h)s!  
48 Michael: Don’t // swag.  
49 Nettie: •h *Ha ha ha ha ha* •hh!  
50 •h Eh heh heh // *heh* he he he he  
51 Michael: [[ An if he was up there If the roach was  
52 tryin’ ta *brush* it // he musta brought  
53 it up it up there *with* him.  
54 Nettie: •heh!  
55 •h *Eh* // he heh heh heh he he he he  
56 Michael: •h eh heh!  
57 Robby: ((falsetto)) *Ha* // he! he  
58 Nettie: He he he he ha // ha ha // ha  
59 Johnny: •heh!

In this fragment Nettie (lines 45–7) describes her brother’s finding roaches brushing their teeth in Michael’s house. Michael’s response builds upon this description in lines 51–3, stating that if that is so, her brother must have brought the roaches with him. The point is not to negate or contradict prior talk but to show that second speaker can take a feature of first speaker’s talk (here, the statement about roaches) and transform it.

In the following a three-part insult sequence occurs. Nettie’s initial description of talking roaches at Michael’s door is answered by a return insult from Michael in lines 99–100, which is subsequently overturned by a response in lines 101–2.

## (36) 6-3-71-4

- 74 Nettie: Ah ha:. (0.2) And one *more* thing! One  
75 day (0.2) *I* went in your hou- *I* was  
76 gonna walk in the door for *two* sets

- 77 a roaches.  
 78 Michael: [[ For what.  
 79 For what.  
 80 Nettie: One roach here (0.2) and one roach here.  
 81 THE ONE RIGHT HERE,  
 82 Michael: Oh you tryin' ta *sell* // em for him.  
 83 Nettie: THE ONE RIGHT HERE W-  
 84 Michael: You tryin' to se(hh)ll e(hh)m.  
 85 Nettie: THE ONE RIGHT HERE // WAS UP HERE SAYIN'-  
 86 Michael: *Somebody* gonna buy your // damn roach.  
 87 Nettie: THE ONE RIGHT here was up here sayin-  
 88 (0.2) "People movin' *ou:t?*" (0.2) And  
 89 the one right here was sayin' (0.2)  
 90 "*People movin' in-*"  
 91 Why? Because of the odor of their // *ski(hh)n*.  
 92 Michael: [[ You understand their language. You  
 93 must be one of 'em.  
 94 Johnny: ((falsetto)) Eh *heh!* Heh he heh!  
 95 Nettie: What'd he s(hhhh)ay? Wha(h)d he(h)  
 96 say(h)y? •H What he(h) sa(hh)y? What  
 97 he sa(heh heh)y? What you say? What's  
 98 he // say Candy?  
 99 Michael: You understand their language cuz you  
 100 *one* of 'em.  
 101 Nettie: I(h) *know(h)* you(h) ar(hh)re! You was  
 102 *born* from the roach fam//ily.

In each of these insult sequences speaker does not refute prior statement but instead accepts the description and builds upon it, arguing that if the statement is so, then the consequence is that an even more pejorative description can be made of prior speaker. In lines 87–91 Nettie sketches a scene of roaches on either side of Michael's doorway speaking the words of the Jackson Five song "Ball of Confusion" with her quotes "People movin' *ou:t?*" and "People movin' in." Michael then in lines 92–3 states that Nettie is able to understand talking roaches because she herself is "one of 'em." In response Nettie (101), using the preface "I know," transforms Michael's insult about her into a statement authored by him about himself and tops his insult; she argues that Michael "was born from the roach family." In brief, ritual insults do not constitute an activity or genre that is totally distinct from other, less stylized talk. Rather, through the way in which participants use the material provided by prior talk to construct return actions, ritual insults build from resources that are already present in opposition sequences.<sup>33</sup>

In this section of the chapter we have attempted to demonstrate that within argumentation children do not simply tie to the action contained in a prior utterance but also to a range of features implicated in its construction and that such format tying provides an arena for the pro-

ductive creation of new structure through systematic operations on existing structure. Such findings have a number of larger implications.

First, in sociolinguistics context is frequently treated as something external to the talk being examined; for example, it may be described in terms of attributes such as the setting in which talk occurs or the characteristics of the participants. Such an approach to discourse is compatible with categorizing talk as instances of different types of "actions" and then focusing analysis on the sequencing of those actions rather than on the details of the talk through which those actions become visible. But a most important context for any talk is the talk that has just preceded it, in all of its multifaceted complexity. If preadolescent children are able to attend in detail to the rich variety of structures found there and to use those structures for the organization of subsequent talk, discourse analysts must attend to them as well. Trying to describe how participants in conversation move from one utterance to another without close attention to the details of their talk is like trying to describe the work that a musician does while ignoring the music being played.

From a slightly different perspective it can be noted that arguing has generally been evaluated negatively by adults, for example treated as behavior to be both stopped and sanctioned by parents and teachers. Thus children who engage in arguments at school, even on the playground, are treated as troublemakers. Work on children's arguments (Eisenberg and Garvey 1981) has been concerned with the study of how conflicts can be "resolved"<sup>34</sup> rather than with how they might be sustained. Instead of viewing argumentation as an activity to be pursued for its own sake (as, indeed, psychologists [Hartup 1978:138] have argued it should be viewed), researchers consider it something to be remedied and moved past as quickly as possible so that harmony can be restored. But as the data presented here and previous work among urban black children (M. H. Goodwin 1982b, 1983), as well as naturalistic studies conducted among middle-class preschool white children (Corsaro and Rizzo in press; Genishi and Di Paolo 1982; Maynard 1985a, 1985b), part-Hawaiian children (Boggs 1978), and Italian children (Corsaro and Rizzo in press) have shown, children do not share this bias against argumentative behavior.<sup>35</sup> The present data would suggest that, despite the tendency to cast argumentation in a negative light, there might be rather good reasons for children to treat argument as they do. When arguments are looked at as natural phenomena, it is found that, rather than being disorderly, argumentation gives children an opportunity to explore through productive use the structural resources of their language. When format tying, a child must immediately produce an appropriate subsequent utterance by transforming the prior utterance in

a way that shows integrated attention to both the action embodied by it and the details of its linguistic structure.

Moreover, since this process occurs within argumentation, an activity where the stakes are high for the participants and one's character and reputation are not only on the line but in fact being created and evaluated, there is a strong motivation for the child to display as much quickness, skill, and inventiveness in her or his transformations as possible.<sup>36</sup> It would be difficult to imagine adults constructing for children, in the classroom or any other learning setting, drills for practicing and experimenting with the underlying resources of their language that are as effective or creative as the ones the children spontaneously perform with each other when engaged in argumentation, an activity that adults systematically try to ban from the learning situations that they administer.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, as Labov (1970:33, 34) has noted, although children initially learn to speak from their parents, surprisingly they "*do not speak like their parents* [italics in original]. . . . Instead it is the local group of . . . children's peers which determines this generation's speech pattern." The present data, by locating a domain of action specific to the peer group within which creative use of language structure is not only made salient but also evaluated by other peers in contests of some moment, locate one place where children can and do affect one another's talk in complex ways, away from adult supervision, models, or intrusion.<sup>38</sup>

### Disputes with members of the same sex

Although they had much in common, when the boys and girls on Maple Street interacted in same-sex groups they displayed different interests, engaged in different activities, and constructed different types of social organization. This had consequences for the types of disputes that occurred within each group. To illustrate some of the differences between the groups, it is useful to describe briefly how girls and boys performed two types of action: making comparisons and organizing tasks.

One of the major activities of the children involved comparing oneself with others. In a group where individuals share similar types of living conditions, have parents with roughly the same income, and within which there is no fixed status hierarchy or division into specialized roles,<sup>39</sup> making comparisons is one of the ways group members can differentiate themselves from one another. Older girls and older boys differ with respect to the criteria they use for making comparisons. Girls focus on the types of relationships they can be seen as maintaining with others, both peers and adults, and their appearance. For example:

(37) 3-23-71-2

Terri: And Johnny gave me his phone number when I first moved around here?  
He done *gave* em to me.

(38) 10-20-70-2

Maria: These are my *mother* earrings.

Within the girls' group, statements such as these may be heard as attempts by speaker to show herself superior to others. Recipients frequently counter such claims by showing that prior speaker is, in fact, not special (Ex. 37), or by turning the attempted boast on its head (Ex. 38):

(37) 3-23-71-2

Terri: And Johnny gave me his phone number when I first moved around here? He done *gave* em to me. And they- and they was talkin bout- wanna call him?

Maria: → <sup>[[Talk that sweet talk.</sup> He gave me his phone number *too*.

(38) 10-20-70-2

Maria: These are my *mother* earrings.

Pam: → She let you wear your- her stuff now. She don't hit you no more. First- first she didn't hit Jeanie no more and now she don't hit you no more. And now she just hittin Antony and them. = Right?

In Ex. 38, after Maria's claim to special status Pam indicates that she is, in fact, in a relationship that is certainly not to be envied.

The importance of such claims about relationships in the girls' dealings with one another is further demonstrated by the fact that hearers of such statements do not simply counter a speaker who makes them but also talk about the making of such claims when the speaker is no longer present:

(39) 9-12-71-4

Terri: Maria going around tellin everybody that- that Pam- that Pam mother like her more than anybody else. She said she think she so big just because um, Miss Smith let her work in the kitchen for her one time.

By contrast, when boys talk to other boys, they rarely discuss relationships with the opposite sex or make claims about privileged status vis-à-vis their relatives. Instead, they openly compare themselves with each other on the basis of individual skills and abilities. A rotating cycle of games among boys provides for changing realms in which ranking can take place; different activities may rank the same participants in different ways, and each boy knows his relative position in a variety of pastimes:

## (40) 11-10-70-5

((during a yo-yo contest))

Earl: Who winnin? Who winnin? Earl Masters.

## (41) 9-24-70-1

Raymond: I could walk on my hands better than anybody here. Except him.  
And Chuckie. Robert can't walk.

Actions of this type are interpreted as attempts to view oneself as superior to another, and quite frequently they are followed by counters.

## (42) 10-19-70-105

((concerning pliers))

Poochie: Hey these- hey these cut better than yours.

Michael: So good. Good.

## (43) 11-12-70-6

((discussing whose bus arrived first at school))

Chuckie: We was first this afternoon!

Vincent: We was first this *mornin* baby!

In brief, the comparisons made by girls characteristically deal with ties they have to others or their appearance, whereas the boys employ a variety of criteria to explicitly rank themselves against each other.

Differences between the girls' group and the boys' are also found in the way in which they organize task activities. Since these have already been analyzed in detail elsewhere (M. H. Goodwin 1980a), at present we simply note that the boys organize their talk so as to display hierarchy (for instance, with imperatives from "leaders," e.g. "Gimme the pliers," and mitigated requests from their subordinates, e.g. "Can I be on your side Michael?"). Girls, on the other hand, choose directive forms that minimize differences between the party being requested to do something and the party making the request (e.g. "Let's do x"). It should be noted, however, that in situations other than task activities the girls make use of the entire range of directive forms, (M. H. Goodwin 1980a:170-171, 1985a, 1985b:324-325).

The ways in which disputes are organized within each group are consistent with the differences found in other activities. The themes of boys' disputes frequently involve issues of relative power, as can be seen in some of the disputes between boys that have already been examined (e.g. Ex. 30), as well as in the following:

## (44) 10-19-70-58

((Nate is using Huey's pliers.))

Huey: Gimme the *things*.

Chopper: You shut up you big lips.

Huey: Shut up.

Chopper: Don't gimme that. I'm not talkin ta you.

(1.4)

Huey: I'm talkin ta y:ou!

Chopper: Ah you better sh:ut up with your *dingy* sneaks.

(1.2)

Huey: I'm a *dingy* your hea:d. How would you like *that*.

Chopper: No you won't you little- •h *Guess* what.

Since most of the opposition structures used here – and indeed many of the couplets found in this exchange – have already been examined, this dispute will not be looked at in detail here.<sup>40</sup>

In boys' disputes, opposition is generally restricted to two opposing positions, though a number of parties may side with a particular position. The shape of argument will vary, depending on both the type of actions used to promote conflict and the parts of utterances selected out to be countered. When commands, insults, and threats are used, argument may be constructed in rounds of exchange and return moves, with each round daring the other party to take steps to make good his actions and visibly prove he can carry out the action he proposes. This was particularly evident in Ex. 30, which was discussed above in terms of format tying.

Though issues of power are not the dominant themes of girls' disputes, the forms of action we have been examining, as well as the strategies for sequencing cycles of these actions, are used by both girls and boys. Boys use rounds of insults, commands, or accusations when disputing among themselves as well as in cross-sex interaction. Girls, however, tend to use them more often in their interactions with boys than when by themselves, reserving actions that are "face-threatening" for acting out hypothetical confrontations (M. H. Goodwin 1982a:810) or to be performed as deliberate affronts to girls whose offenses are deemed especially serious.

The structure of girls' accusations reflects their concerns with what others say about them and their use of indirect speech forms (Mitchell-Kernan 1972). Rather than confronting someone directly with an accusation such as "Boy you broke my *skate* board!" girls talk about offensive actions of others in their absence. Through an elaborated storytelling procedure called "instigating" (M. H. Goodwin 1982a) girls learn about offenses of absent parties that have been committed against them – principally having talked about them behind their backs – and commit themselves to future confrontations with such individuals. The stories of girls used in he-said-she-said disputes contrast with those used by boys in several ways. (See M. H. Goodwin 1982b for more detailed analysis of stories used by boys in disputes.) First, they deal with pejorative actions of absent parties rather than present ones; second, they

function not to counter others' argumentative moves in the present but, rather, to elicit commitments to courses of action against which moral judgment can be diverted in the future; third, they transform the impending dispute into a large public event that others can anticipate and participate in.

Such instigating can lead to a formal accusation. In pursuing such character contests the girls use actions that are distinctive to their way of handling grievances; these differ from baldly stated accusations both in terms of their syntactic structure and with regard to the participation framework they make available for those present. For example the types of embedded structures girls use to open a type of argument they call he-said-she-said<sup>41</sup> are of the form "A said you said I said x":

(45) 10-20-70-76

Flo: They say y'all say I wrote *everything* over there.

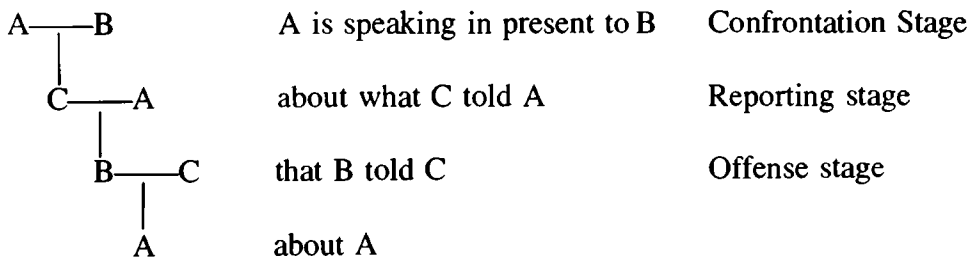
(46) 10-19-71-19

Darlene: And Stephen said that *you* said that *I* was showin off just because I had that *bl:ouse* on.

(47) 6-7-71-1

Pam: Terri said you said that (0.6) I wasn't gonna go around *Poplar* no more.

Each of these accusations provides an ordering of participants and events in a past culminating in the present. This pattern can be diagrammed as follows:



The pattern contains three basic stages. At each stage two parties in the immediate presence of each other are situated as speaker and hearer. A third party, neither speaker nor hearer, is talked about. Participants change positions within this basic triad<sup>42</sup> at each stage in a regular fashion:



The ordering of events at each stage and the rules for sequencing stages



through a regular rotation of participants provide a past with a particular structure that makes relevant specific types of next moves in the present. In essence the current hearer is charged with the offense of having talked about the current speaker behind her back, with the report of the third party establishing the grounds for that charge.

It is traditional in the social sciences to treat language, culture, and social organization as essentially different types of phenomena, and indeed frequently to relegate them to entirely different disciplines (linguistics, cultural anthropology, and sociology for example). Thus Radcliffe-Brown (1973:310) was of the opinion that whereas there may be "certain indirect interactions between social structure and language . . . these would seem to be of minor importance." Here, however, we find these apparently separate phenomena being dealt with by the girls as integrated parts of a single whole. Thus the structure of the utterance, and in particular the pattern embedding it makes visible, creates not simply a linguistic form but also what Goodenough (1981:110) has termed an operating culture, a small activity system providing relevant social identities for participants (e.g. accuser and offender/defendant), a set of relevant actions for them to perform, and a formulation of the types of events they are engaged in. In addition to being this cultural organization, the utterance functions socially to shape the behavior of the participants into a particular type of coordinated action, and makes relevant specific types of future action.

Examining the organization of a he-said-she-said confrontation in more detail, one may note that the framing of offenses in an indirect way as the girls do allows for next actions that protect the face of both accuser and the accused. By including in the accusation a statement that another party supports the charge being delivered, a girl establishes a warrant for her action and argues that an alignment of "two against one" is maintained against the offender. In that a third, generally non-present, party, rather than current speaker, is stated to have originated the report of the offense, the offender cannot counteraccuse her accuser. This contrasts with the situation found in Exx. 24 and 25 for baldly stated actions that can receive similar actions as returns. Denials to he-said-she-said accusations address the actions in the third stage from the present, the offense stage – either denying the charge or attributing blame to another party:

(48) 10-12-71-71

Naynay: *Uh uh. I ain't say anything.*

(49) 10-20-70-76

Pam: *UH UH. = THAT WAS VINCENT SAID.*

Alternatively, the accused may charge that the reporter (the nonpresent party) lied during the second stage from the present:

(50) 11-2-71-18

Deniecey: Well I know that *they* tellin a *lie* cuz I know I ain't say nothin about you.

(51) 10-12-71-78

Naynay: I don't know who said it but- now- I- now if I ain't say it, whoever told you musta said it.

In that the offense is known about only through a report, the accuser cannot definitively establish whether or not the act at issue was in fact authored by the defendant. Therefore answers to the offending party's denials tend to be recycles of the initial accusation or refutations of accounts that the defendant provides. Consider the following short he-said-she-said dispute:

(52) 6-7-71-1

- 1 Pam: Terri said you said that (0.6) I wasn't  
 2 gonna go around *Poplar* no more.  
 3 Darlene: You said you weren't.  
 4 Nettie: She- Terri say-  
 5 Pam: And Terri said that um that you said  
 6 that *Pam* wasn't gonna go around *Poplar*  
 7 no more.  
 8 Darlene: That's what Terri said.  
 9 Pam: Well, I *know* what Terri said that you  
 10 said. She said- She sat there and  
 11 looked at you. And Terri- And she  
 12 said- And if you have anything to say  
 13 about *me* you come and say it in front  
 14 of my *face*. And *here* and *right here*  
 15 you say whatever you got to say cuz  
 16 everytime you go around *Poplar* you  
 17 always got something to say.  
 18 Nettie: Terri said it *too*.  
 19 Pam: And I'm tellin Terri *too* that she said  
 20 it.  
 21 Darlene: I gotta go somewhere.

After Darlene's defense (line 3), Pam, the plaintiff, recycles the initial accusation (lines 5-7).<sup>43</sup> When Darlene provides a second defense (line 8) addressing actions at the reporting stage, Pam refutes Darlene's account - "Well I know what Terri said that you said" - and provides a descriptive detail of her previous encounter with Terri to justify her position. Pam closes up the he-said-she-said sequence with an admonition to Darlene, as well as with a framing of this particular offense as

representative of Darlene's more general way of behaving: "Everytime you go around Poplar you always got something to say."

An even more complex type of floor may be created, however, when the intermediary (the reporter) is present, as well as a number of spectators who can affiliate themselves with the changing arrays of identity relationships made operative as the dispute unfolds. Consider the type of field created through the utterance "They say y'all say I wrote everything over there" (line 7) in the following example:

## (53) 10-20-70-76

- 1 Maria: WE AIN'T SAY THAT PA:M.  
 2 Flo: You said that // I said-  
 3 Pam: °Where. Where.  
 4 Maria: [[ °Sh'said-  
 5 Pam: ((°Lemme see.)  
 6 Maria: Um-  
 7 Flo: They // say y'all say I wrote everything  
 8 o//ver there. I ain't // wrote  
 9 everythi:ng.  
 10 Maria: They say- (0.2) Y'all said that she  
 11 (0.2) Wrote that um, They wrote // that  
 12 bi:g  
 13 Terri: You // said -  
 14 Flo: Only thing // is the car.  
 15 Terri: H Pam tol: // me-  
 16 Pam: UHUH. = THAT WAS VINCENT SAID.  
 17 Terri: But y//ou told me that  
 18 Flo: I know it was Vincent cuz Vincent was  
 19 the one that wrote that // on that car.  
 20 Sharon: ((falsetto)) Uhuh. = We started to tear  
 21 that- °h uh that out. We tol- we said  
 22 that we- all said- °h I said // all-  
 23 Maria: ((falsetto)) I said, "Who wrote it on  
 24 the car." Sharon say "Either Vincent,  
 25 (0.2) or, Vincent or um- // Florence.  
 26 Pam: [[ Florence.  
 27 Sharon: [[ Florence. I put th//is  
 28 Flo: Vincent di:d it. Vincent had that  
 29 crayon more than anybody.  
 30 (0.7)  
 31 Sharon: °h An plus- an =  
 32 Flo: Oo this's cold out here // t'day.  
 33 Terri: WELL WHY YOU TELL HER I said it.  
 34 Pam: YEAH BUT RIA- YEAH BUT RIA WAS SAYING WE  
 35 WRO:TE ALL OVER THE STREET AND WE  
 36 DIDN'T. =  
 37 Flo: [[ We ain't write over no street nothin.  
 38 Terri: [[ I'm'not'talkin'bout' B'//t why did-  
 39 Maria: Vincent say he wrote in the street. ((sigh)) =  
 40 Sharon: = Well I ain't write // in the street.

- 41 Flo: Oh *you* fin' s'n in the st//r:ee:t then.  
 42 Pam: I ain't *wrote nuttin* in no str:ee://t,  
 43 Terri: Well how come *you told Florence* that I  
 44 said that *she* wrote it.  
 45 (0.6)  
 46 Sharon: I said that *who* wrote it. =  
 47 Terri: = *Not you.* = *Pam.*  
 48 Pris: °Well // who did.  
 49 Pam: That *she* wrote it,  
 50 Pam: [[ °That- that you was-  
 51 Pris: All they hadda do is // look in the street.  
 52 Sharon: Well come on out here. Let's see it.  
 53 (1.2)

((Girls move to the site where pejorative things were written about Terri on a car and garage door.))

- 54 Flo: I only said- // so that when I- when we  
 55 were goin to the car.  
 56 Pam: That *she* that *she* wrote it, I TOLD YOU  
 57 THAT // FLORENCE WROTE,  
 58 Sharon: ( )  
 59 Maria: I'm gonna stay *out* from *now* on.  
 60 Terri: Well cuz you- you said that she wrote it.  
 61 Flo: UHUH. UHUH CUZ I ONLY WROTE *ONE THING*  
 62 *IN RED.*  
 63 (0.4)  
 64 Pam: S:o did I. *I* only- °h // Besides- I  
 65 only di:d that where *Aisha* did cuz  
 66 *Aisha* wrote on that *thing*.  
 67 Flo: Vincent did *that*. *Aisha* wrote where.  
 68 Pam: *Aisha* wrote on that thing. = And // I  
 69 only traced what- *Aisha* wrote on it,  
 70 °h cuz *Aisha* wro//te it *sm:all*.  
 71 Sharon: On the side?  
 72 Terri: I know. = I'm not *talkin* bout *that*. But  
 73 how come you told her that I that I was  
 74 *talkin* about her.  
 75 Pam: = YOU WA:S.  
 76 Terri: *When*.

((The division of the conversation at this point into two groups is indicated by separate columns. Simultaneous talk occurs on the same horizontal line.))

- 77 Pam: Remember when um- um- that's when um:  
 78 (0.8) Uh: uh: remember when you sai:d,  
 79 Flo: (°Well he started it) cuz  
 80 he got  
 81 that um, some of it off.  
 82 Sharon: Yeap.  
 83 nuh-  
 84 remember when you Flo: ( )



ducing an absent party into the dispute, Pam forecloses certain next moves in the sequence. Vincent's absence prevents him from countering the charge against him and makes it impossible for Florence to question him.

Terri then reenters the dispute with a recycling of her prior talk (line 17) and a countermove to Pam's talk. She is, however, interrupted by Florence (line 18), who now finds a way to agree with Pam: "I know it was Vincent cuz Vincent was the one that wrote that on that car." She both discontinues her opening accusation to Pam through this action and charges that Vincent, rather than herself, is to blame for the offense of having written about Terri (located as the fourth stage from the present). Sharon (line 20), answering to Terri's incomplete counter to Pam (and thereby aligning herself with Pam), argues that Terri is incorrect in her thinking: Sharon states that she and Pam deleted what Terri was about to charge them with having said. Sharon's utterance, accounting for "all she had said" before, is continued in line 23 by another party, Maria, who now takes up an alignment with rather than against Pam, as she had in lines 10–12. At the tail end of Maria's utterance, three people – Maria, Pam, and Sharon – collaborate in producing an utterance that claims that Florence was in part guilty of the offense (lines 25–7).

In that the action on the floor has now shifted to a charge against Florence, Terri does not again attempt to answer Sharon's counter. The statement that Florence was in part to blame is answered by Florence in line 28 with a restatement of her counterclaim that Vincent was the perpetrator of the offense in question. Argument now shifts from Florence's complaint to Pam to Terri's action vis-à-vis Pam: "WELL WHY YOU TELL HER *I* said it" (line 33). This accusation appears two other times, in line 43 – "Well how come *you told Florence* that I said that *she* wrote it" – and in lines 72–4 – "But how come you told her that I that I was *talkin* bout her." Pam attempts to sidetrack this issue each time Terri poses the question. Her first response to the accusation is an account (line 34), that provides a counteraccusation: In that Maria was saying something about her first, she was justified in saying something about Maria (a friend of Terri's).

Pam's defense becomes the new action on the floor to which participants respond, first with a series of denials and a challenge to the reported accusation (lines 37; 40–2) and then with a repair sequence (lines 46–57). When in 60 Terri reintroduces the offense, writing about Terri, Florence in 61 provides a justification/denial, which is followed by a similar type of justification/denial by Pam (64–6). Terri's third recycling of her accusation to Pam (lines 72–4) is answered by "YOU WA:S" (line 75), which is immediately challenged by Terri: "*WHen*."

An elaborate recounting of the incident at issue takes place during simultaneous talk by Florence and Sharon (lines 77–91). This is then answered by Terri's denial (lines 92–3) that she was the principal party involved in the incident recounted by Pam. Instead Maria is found to have been the author of the deed that is the offense being dealt with in the confrontation. When Pam acknowledges that it is actually Maria rather than Terri who is the guilty party, Maria becomes the new defendant (to Florence), and talk now shifts to Maria's defense.

When conducting a dispute, children make selections from a range of cultural alternatives. In dealing with serious affronts learned about through the elaborated storytelling of an instigating sequence, girls select utterances with a particular embedded structure to carry out their argumentation. The utterance opening up the he-said-she-said dispute provides for an ordering of past events and participants that remains the topical focus throughout (indeed, there is only one utterance – Florence's "Oh this's cold out here" in line 32 – that is outside the frame of dispute). Moreover, it creates a highly ordered and legalistic conversational domain – one in which rights and obligations with respect to the taking of turns and defending of points of view are of primary importance. Nonetheless throughout this dispute the alignments of principals to the argument shift as different stages of the initial accusation statement are dealt with. This provides for a speaking floor of much greater complexity than exists when only two positions to an argument are debated, the general situation in most boys' and cross-sex disputes. Moreover, because of the topical focus they provide, he-said-she-said disputes can become significantly more extended than the disputes found in the boys' groups. Indeed, because of the way in which it creates both a relevant past and an anticipated future, he-said-she-said can provide an arena for action and drama that lasts for days. From a slightly different perspective, the entire he-said-she-said sequence can be seen as an elaborate way to play out games of shifting coalitions, a theme common in the girls' social structure.

## Conclusion

Most efforts at defining argument (Brenneis and Lein 1977:61–62; Corsaro and Rizzo in press; Eisenberg and Garvey 1981:150) have sought to specify its distinctive attributes, the features that set it apart from other activities and provide for its characteristic organization. The concept of opposition has emerged as a key feature of many of these definitions, and considerable attention has been paid to a range of actions

that are used to display opposition within arguments. Such a perspective toward argument has led to fruitful research that has revealed much about its characteristic structure. Focusing entirely on how argument differs from other modes of interaction, however, can obscure some important aspects of its organization. Argument has much in common with many other types of discourse. Indeed, one of its crucial features is its ability to incorporate other forms of speech. Thus within argument one can find a wide range of speech events including stories (M. H. Goodwin 1982a, 1982b), requests, commands, insults, explanations, excuses, threats, and warnings (M. H. Goodwin 1982b). Many of these actions provide occasion-specific social identities for participants (e.g. accuser-defendant).

The ability of argument to encompass disparate phenomena extends as well to intonational and other paralinguistic operations on the talk in progress (including a rich set of "voices" for doing such activities as ridicule, teasing, insult, etc.) and to displays of affect such as anger and righteous indignation. With these resources, participants are able not simply to occupy particular social identities but also to construct fully articulated social personae in the midst of argument (e.g. an offended party bristling with hurt and righteous indignation performing the accusations and challenges appropriate to one in her position). Insofar as such characters exist only as elements in a larger field of action that also encompasses their opponents (and frequently others, such as an audience, as well), dynamic social drama becomes possible. Thus, although argument is usually analyzed as conflict, it can in fact be done in many different ways, some of them, as we have seen here, quite playful; indeed, this playfulness can be elaborated into distinctive artistic genres such as ritual insults. The ability of argument to incorporate such a diversity of modes of discourse within its scope provides a rich arena for research.

In this chapter, rather than attempt to delineate broad categories of differences between female and male speech, we have restricted study to a single activity, arguing, and focused analysis on detailed explication of the procedures used by both girls and boys to accomplish this activity. When data are examined in this way, it is found that the mode of talk that characterizes girls' disputes shows an orientation that differs from that described elsewhere as characteristic of adult black female speech and of female speech more generally. For example, the talk of the argumentative sequences examined here displays anything but a "tone of relaxed sweetness, sometimes bordering on the saccharine," which Hannerz (1969:96) states typifies black female adult speech and is contrastive with black males' argumentative style. Girls' use of dispute structures quite similar to those of the boys was evident both in their



interaction with each other (Exx. 7, 17, 20, 33, 52, 53) and in their interaction with boys (Exx. 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 22, 24). Indeed, they frequently outmaneuvered the boys in more extended dispute sequences (Exx. 26, 27, 28, 35, 36). Abrahams (1976:77) has suggested that the "contest element" in speech lasts for a shorter duration among black females than among males; however, as we have seen, girls' confrontations can be far more expanded than boys' arguments, and in fact talk about the confrontation and repercussions from it may extend over several weeks (see M. H. Goodwin 1980b:688). In addition, in Abraham's work, female values of respectability and the home are contrasted with male values of reputation and the public world (1976:64); however, displaying one's character in a public arena is precisely what is at issue in he-said-she-said.

The form in which opening accusation statements in he-said-she-said are shaped works to protect the face of the parties to the dispute in ways that explicit accusations do not; nonetheless, the extensive debate that ensues in this type of dispute (as well as in cross-sex arguments) is anything but an expression of powerless speech, and neither is it organized in terms of careful attention to forms of politeness. Indeed, the argumentation occurring in he-said-she-said creates a situation of far greater complexity than has generally been discussed for either male or female speech. Moreover, these data show females' skill in domains of talk, such as legalistic debate, traditionally associated with male concerns. McConnell-Ginet (1983:378), for example, has proposed that women's "informal theories of conversation" do not deal with "individual rights and obligations." Within he-said-she-said, however, pre-adolescent girls formulate charges that their individual rights about the way they are to be treated in the talk of others have been violated. They do so by constructing opening accusation utterances of considerable sophistication that not only state the charge formally but also provide the grounds for it – invoking what is in fact a vernacular legal process.<sup>44</sup> Although within this process participants work together to sustain a coherent activity with a well-defined structure, the specific type of collaboration exhibited does not resemble "supportive" forms of collaboration described elsewhere as characteristic of female speech (see Maltz and Borker 1982:211). For example, there is no "underlying esthetic or organizing principle" of "harmony," as Kalčík (1975) found in the adult female storytelling group she studied.

This does not, however, mean that the talk of the girls studied was the same as that of the boys. Indeed, although legalistic argumentation is usually associated with males, he-said-she-said occurred only among females, and the males studied had no structure for extended debate of comparable complexity. Thus, although the speech of the Maple Street

girls does not conform to many of our current stereotypes about female speech, it does show clear differences from that of their male agemates. What these results suggest is that if we are to describe accurately the organization of male and female language, we shall have to go beyond global generalizations that contrast all men with all women in all situations and instead describe in detail the organization of talk within specific activity systems. Such an approach permits study of the similarities as well as differences in female and male language usage and relates specific utterance forms to both ongoing practical activities and the cultures that underlie them.

**Appendix A: Ages of the children who appear in transcripts**

<i>Boys</i>		<i>Girls</i>	
Cameron	6	Damey	7
Joey	7	Priscilla	7
Stephen	7	Dishunta	8
Robby	9	Aisha	10
Raymond	10	Darlene	10
Vincent	10	Naynay	10
Earl	11	Deniece	10
Chuckie	11	Deniecey	10
Lee	11	Nettie	11
Chopper	12	Maria	12
Eddie	12	Pam	12
Sheridan	12	Sharon	12
Johnny	13	Terri	12
Juju	13	Florence	13
Michael	13		
Poochie	13		
Tokay	13		
Huey	14		

**Appendix B: Ritual-insult sequence**

**Example 36: 6-3-71-4**

- 1 Michael: Shoes all messed up.
- 2 (1.0)
- 3 Nettie: You say somp'm? I- come on let me have
- 4 it.
- 5 Michael: You been che(hh)win' o(hh)n e(hh)//m.

- 6 Nettie: Eh heh heh heh heh!  
 7 •h I *know* you been. *You* all me://ssed  
 8 up.  
 9 Michael: •h You bee(h)n chewin' o(h)n e//(h)m.  
 10 Nettie: Eh heh!  
 11 No I *haven't*.  
 12 Michael: Yes you ha://ve.  
 13 Nettie: You took a(h)n got your dog your dog 'd  
 14 chew 'em up cuz he ain't have nothin'  
 15 ta // eat.  
 16 Michael: If he pick up a piece of wood and I say  
 17 no ( ) then it's in the- in the // ( )  
 18 Nettie: Ah you shu:t up.  
 19 You can't even kees // a  
 20 Michael: You slap  
 21 You just slappin' on wood!  
 22 Nettie: You can't even *keep* a (0.2) a decent  
 23 (0.2) pair a shoe://s.  
 24 Michael: Don't swag.  
 25 (0.3)  
 26 Nettie: I'm not *swa:ggin*.  
 27 Michael: You // are too cuz you go to the (0.2)  
 28 you go to the John  
 29 Nettie: Mole mole cheek cheek. Psychedelic  
 30 (0.2) that'//s all.  
 31 Michael: You go to the John Baldwin's store and  
 32 get them five dollar shoes.  
 33 (0.8)  
 34 Michael: Eh // heh!  
 35 Nettie: What?  
 36 Michael: Cuz the closest thing is the Thrifty  
 37 Sto(heh-heh // heh)re!  
 38 Nettie: You go and get them *one* dollar. Okay?  
 39 One day- (0.2) *my* brother was spendin'  
 40 the night with *you*, •h And // the next  
 41 mornin' he got up,  
 42 Michael: I don't wanna hear about it. Your  
 43 brother // ain't *never* been in *my*  
 44 house.  
 45 Nettie: THE NEXT TIME HE GOT UP, •heh He was  
 46 gonna brush his teeth so the roach  
 47 tri(h)ed ta(h) bru(h)sh hi(h)s!  
 48 Michael: Don't // swag.  
 49 Nettie: •h *Ha ha ha ha ha* •hh!  
 50 •h Eh heh heh // *heh* he he he he  
 51 Michael: An if he was up there If the roach was  
 52 tryin' ta *brush* it // he musta brought  
 53 it up it up there *with* him.  
 54 Nettie: •heh!  
 55 •h *Eh* // he heh heh heh he he he he  
 56 Michael: •h eh heh!

- 57 Robby: ((falsetto)) Ha // he! he  
 58 Nettie: He he he he ha // ha ha // ha  
 59 Johnny: •heh!  
 60 Johnny: •H!  
 61 Nettie: •h and I // saw- I sawed you on (0.2)  
 62 Ni: nth Street tryin' ta catch a *knit* on  
 63 *sale* for a dollar!  
 64 Johnny: •H heh.  
 65 Michael: Don't swag.  
 66 Nettie: Ah: shut up. ((singsong)) Poor liddle  
 67 Michael  
 68 Michael: •What? Do you have a knit?  
 69 Nettie: [[ Sittin' onna fence.  
 70 Michael: [[ Do you have a knit?  
 71 Nettie: Troyina make a dollar outa ninety noine  
 72 cents. He heh!  
 73 (0.3)  
 74 Ah ha:. (0.2) And one *more* thing! One  
 75 day (0.2) *I* went in your hou- *I* was  
 76 gonna walk in the door for *two* sets  
 77 a roaches.  
 78 Michael: [[ For what.  
 79 For what.  
 80 Nettie: One roach here (0.2) and one roach here.  
 81 THE ONE RIGHT HERE,  
 82 Michael: Oh you tryin' ta *sell* // em for him.  
 83 Nettie: THE ONE RIGHT HERE W-  
 84 Michael: You tryin' to se(hh)ll e(hh)m.  
 85 Nettie: THE ONE RIGHT HERE // WAS UP HERE SAYIN'-  
 86 Michael: *Somebody* gonna buy your // damn roach.  
 87 Nettie: THE ONE RIGHT here was up here sayin'-  
 88 (0.2) "People movin' *ou:t?* (0.2) And  
 89 the one right here was sayin' (0.2)  
 90 "People movin' in-"  
 91 Why? Because of the odor of their // ski(hh)n.  
 92 Michael: [[ You understand their language. You  
 93 must be one of 'em.  
 94 Johnny: ((falsetto)) Eh *heh!* Heh he heh!  
 95 Nettie: What'd he s(hhhh)ay? Wha(h)d he(h)  
 96 say(h)y? •H What he(h) sa(hh)y? What  
 97 he sa(heh heh)y? What you say? Whad's  
 98 he // say Candy?  
 99 Michael: You understand their language cuz you  
 100 *one* of 'em.  
 101 Nettie: I(h) *know(h)* you(h) ar(hh)re! You was  
 102 *born* from the roach fam//ily.  
 103 Michael: Don't swag.  
 104 (1.2)  
 105 Nettie: Don't *you* swa::g.  
 106 (1.2)  
 107 You know one thing ((tch!)) uh when

- 108                   you was *little*, All you did every roach  
 109                   you see crawl on the floor you get it  
 110                   and save it for a souvenir. =  
 111 Michael:       Don't swag. You used to go out there  
 112                   and put the roaches in the— in the— in  
 113                   the jar at night. (0.2) And put 'em and  
 114                   let 'em out in the mornin.'

## Notes

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- 1 For reviews of the literature on these issues, see Brown (1980); Kramarae (1981); McConnell-Ginet (1980, 1983); Philips (1980); Thorne and Henley (1975), Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley (1983); West and Zimmerman (1985).
- 2 See for example McLaughlin's (1984:180) description of argument as a "troublesome" conversational event.
- 3 Various definitions have been proposed for arguing. Eisenberg and Garvey (1981:150) describe the "adversative episode" as "the interaction which grows out of an opposition to a request for action, an assertion, or an action. . . . An adversative episode is a sequence which begins with an opposition and ends with a resolution or dissipation of conflict." For a critique of this definition, see Maynard (1985a:4-5). Brenneis and Lein (1977:61-62) define an argument sequence as an arrangement of content and/or stylistic categories according to one of three different patterns: (1) repetition, (2) inversion, or (3) escalation. Boggs (1978) uses the term "contradicting routine" in describing the patterning of arguing among part-Hawaiian children. Genishi and Di Paolo's definitions (1982) are built on those of Boggs (1978) and Eisenberg and Garvey (1981).
- 4 Analysts of conversation (see, for example, Schegloff, in press) have noted that there are serious problems with using categories such as gender to classify participants for purposes of analysis without demonstrating that the participants themselves are attending to such categories as a constitutive feature of the activities they are engaged in. We are in complete agreement, and have used such a perspective to organize much of our other research. For purposes of exposition in this chapter, however, we frequently talk about participants as "girls" and "boys." Despite such terminology, most of the findings presented here buttress rather than refute the position taken by such conversation analysts as Schegloff. For example, despite many previous claims about strong gender differences in the ways that men and women disagree and argue, we find that girls and boys make extensive use of the same resources for building argumentative exchanges. Beginning analysis from a perspective that assumes the relevance of gender differences and focusing study on how the sexes might differ from each other grossly

distort the data being examined and hide many crucial phenomena (for example organizing structures used by both sexes) from detailed investigation. Such an approach also leads to the reification of stereotypes that may be quite inaccurate. Finally, an exclusive focus on gender differences shifts investigation away from analysis of the procedures utilized by participants to construct the activities they are engaged in. In our opinion the explication of such structures should be the primary object of study. Thus we consider the analysis of how the gossip activity that the children called *he-said-she-said* was constructed and organized to be more basic and more important than the finding that on Maple Street only the girls engaged in this activity, and indeed we should not be surprised if future research revealed that use of these structures was not restricted to women (which would not of course invalidate the underlying analysis of the activity). Detailed investigation of the procedures used to build appropriate events makes it possible to study in detail how alternative choices from these resources can be used to build different types of social organization, some of which may be more appropriate to the interests of one group (the girls' group on Maple Street, for example) than another (such as the boys' group), while leaving open the possibility that in other circumstances the same participants might make quite different choices.

- 5 Since both authors contributed to the analysis, the pronoun "we" is used throughout the analytic sections of the chapter. But, since only Marjorie Harness Goodwin actually worked with the Maple Street group, the pronoun "I" is used when describing fieldwork.
- 6 This example has been constructed to contain a variety of relevant transcription devices for a brief example. It is not an accurate record of an actual exchange.
- 7 A listing of the names and ages of children who are cited in this chapter appears in Appendix A for researchers interested in competencies displayed by differing age groups.
- 8 A similar type of social organization has also been observed by Thorne (1986) in a study of primary-school children in California and Michigan.
- 9 Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan in their analysis of role-playing activity of black American preadolescent children (1977:201) have made similar analyses regarding the use of directives and their responses, which "were constantly used to define, reaffirm, challenge, manipulate, and redefine status and rank." See also Ervin-Tripp (1982:31).
- 10 See also Sacks (in press) regarding preferences for agreement.
- 11 Such procedures share the principle of opposition observable in the "contradicting routines" of part-Hawaiian children described by Boggs (1978:328). For review of child-language literature dealing with the development of children's "discourse negation" see Maynard (in press).
- 12 This same pattern was found in Pomerantz's (1984:83-84) examples of disagreements with prior speakers' self-deprecations. Indeed, in such circumstances the disagreements are opposing what prior speaker said in an environment in which prior speaker would not be expected to modify his or her initial position on his or her own.
- 13 Corsaro and Rizzo (in press) note that initial opposition prefaces of this sort occurred rarely in their data of middle-class children's talk; only the black children in their data sample made use of such structures.

- 14 Lein and Brenneis note similar patterns of stress in the arguments of black American migrant children they studied. The Fijian Indian children in their sample also used contrastive stress, though far less frequently than did blacks, and “white children did not use stress for contrast in the way which the other two groups did” (Lein and Brenneis 1978:305).
- 15 For detailed analysis of how correction can be formulated either as a salient or as a nonexplicit event see Jefferson (in press).
- 16 See Pomerantz (1975:26) for an analysis of how return assessments maintain the relationship between referent and speaker.
- 17 It has been noted that such types of disputes are less complex in structure than disputes with justifications by such researchers as Eisenberg and Garvey (1981:167), Genishi and Di Paolo (1982:55), Keller-Cohen, Chalmers, and Remler (1979), and Piaget (1926:68). Genishi and Di Paolo (1982:55) argue that more complex arguments include “an acceptance, appeal to authority, compromise or supporting argument.”
- 18 Boggs (1978:341) found that “arguments (statements that attempt to prove other statements, explanations, and explications) are more frequent in the older boys’ disputes than in those of younger boys and girls.” Similarly in my data younger children more frequently constructed their arguments out of exchange and return moves than out of positions buttressed with accounts. Nevertheless, the linguistic skill of embedding displayed in format tying in return and exchange moves is highly developed, and we do not consider providing accounts “a move beyond inversion or the assertion/counterassertion format of opposition,” as does Maynard (in press).
- 19 Here line numbers are used to mark talk, though clearly the argument originates before the talk, with Raymond’s bumping into Terri while skating.
- 20 For a more recent statement of this position see Maynard’s (1985b:213) distinction between “surface level” characterizations of an utterance and deeper analysis of what that talk presumes and presupposes.
- 21 Although the present data were drawn from the arguments of children, format tying is not restricted to either children or argumentative exchanges. Consider, for example, the following, which is taken from an adult male joke-telling session (simplified transcript):

Mike: She said— You better hurry on up. For I get outta the *mood*. She says.  
 He says. I gotta get outta the *mood* before I can get outta the car.

Here second speaker not only repeats the exact words of prior speaker (“get outta the mood”) but also uses the structure provided by that talk as a framework for his subsequent talk (“before I can get outta the car”). The following (reported in the *New York Times*, August 8, 1985, p. 10) occurred at the White House between presidential spokesman Larry Speakes and reporter Helen Thomas:

Speakes: Do you want to say that I did not tell the truth?  
 → Thomas: Aw, come on, get off of that.  
 → Speakes: No, you come on. You’ve accused me of something.

- 22 Keenan (Ochs) (1974b) and Keenan and Kelin (1975) describe conversations of 2- and 3-year-olds, in which replication of form in terms of phonological shape occurred between paired utterances. Keenan (1974b:179) states, “It is often acceptable to reply to a comment, command, question

or song with an utterance which attends only to the form of that talk." In the data being examined in this chapter, although the children attend closely to the form of the prior talk, that in itself is not adequate for the construction of a proper return move; it must also provide an appropriate next action to the action being countered. The work of Ochs (see, in particular, the collection of articles in Ochs and Schieffelin 1983) on substitution, sound-play, focus operations, and repetition, though dealing with children younger than those being studied here, is relevant to a range of phenomena that we are discussing as format tying.

- 23 Such a procedure is also used in part-Hawaiian children's arguments. Boggs (1978:332-333) states, "One way of contradicting is by grammatically incorporating and negating another speaker's clause."
- 24 Semantic shifts with minimal changes in form are observable in verbal duelling of the Chamula (Gossen 1974) and of Turkish boys (Glazer 1976) and provide a key structural feature of ritual-insult events (Labov 1972a:349).
- 25 Such a type of counter is also characteristic in arguments of part-Hawaiian children (Boggs 1978:329) and among white middle-class children (Lein and Brenneis 1978:305). Note also the strict attention to turn taking observable in these data. Such a patterning is similar to that observed by Lein and Brenneis for the black migrant and white middle-class children they studied (p. 306) while contrasting with that for Fijian Indian children (pp. 306-308).
- 26 We use the term "embedding" here in a way slightly different from the way it is usually used in linguistic analysis. However, we know of no other term that captures as aptly the way in which specific material from prior talk is implanted within the current talk. We are indebted to Don Brenneis for bringing this issue to our attention.
- 27 On the principle of escalation see Lein and Brenneis (1978:301).
- 28 For more extensive analysis of what happens to the talk of another when it is repeated by someone else see Vološinov (1973).
- 29 Ladd is careful to state that, on the other hand, "contrastive stress" may not be signaling explicit contrast but rather "narrow focus"; that is, it may be doing nothing more than "focusing on the points of difference in otherwise identical phrases" (1978:79).
- 30 Cook-Gumperz (1981:45) notes the importance of stylistic contrast in children's "persuasive talk" and argues that "prosody carries a very significant part of the signalling load as does rhythm." See also Schrifin (1984:318) for a discussion of such features in adult arguments.
- 31 Lein and Brenneis (1978:302) note that "among the black migrant children and the Indian children insults are repeated or improved on by each succeeding speaker."
- 32 The entire sequence from which this is taken appears in Appendix B.
- 33 Ritual insult of this type was not observed in the younger children's group. The younger child, however, generally constructs his or her extended arguments in rounds of moves attempting to outmaneuver the other (as contrasted to moves that attempt to validate a particular point, which will be discussed later). The content of these moves generally refers to comparisons of ascribed rather than achieved attributes - for example, ages of children and their relatives - reflecting the idea "more is better" (Genishi and Di Paolo 1982:57-58).



- 34 For a critique of such a position, see Adger (1984:50, 104), M. H. Goodwin (1982b:87), and Maynard (1985a).
- 35 Vuchinich (1984, in press) has made similar findings for American families of various classes and ethnic types.
- 36 Goffman (1981:27) argues that it is children rather than adults who are "the mature practitioners" of comebacks or "inversionary interchanges."
- 37 For other analysis of how apparently disruptive events in spontaneous conversation might contribute to a child's ability to master the underlying structure of his or her language see C. Goodwin (1981:170-172).
- 38 Also relevant to this issue is the observation by Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan (1977:7) that "Many of the speech events in which children engage typically occur among children apart from adults, and they are explicitly taught, in many cases by children."
- 39 Such a situation contrasts with male peer groups studied by Keiser (1969), Savin-Williams (1976), Sherif and Sherif (1953), Suttles (1968), and Whyte (1943).
- 40 For more extensive analysis of this dispute, including the way in which movement to talk with a different type of social organization, a story, is consequential for participation in the dispute, see M. H. Goodwin (1982b).
- 41 For more extended analysis of he-said-she-said, see M. H. Goodwin (1980b, 1982a).
- 42 Generally the arguments of children analyzed by previous researchers (e.g. Eisenberg and Garvey 1981) have been dyadic in structure. This may be in large part due to the fact that characteristically such researchers have themselves set up or created the situation to be observed. Looking at argumentative phenomena from another perspective, the structure of argumentation itself seems to bias the interaction so that it becomes focused upon two opposing positions (see M. H. Goodwin 1982b). Even in such cases, however, participants other than the principals may align themselves with one of the positions on the floor, so that although the arguments are bipolar in terms of position, they are not intrinsically dyadic with respect to numbers of participants. Moreover, as the present data demonstrate, within he-said-she-said children may operate on several positions concurrently. In brief, a dyadic model does not adequately conceptualize the richness of organization that children bring to their spontaneous arguments.
- 43 Note that Nettie aligns herself with Pam against Darlene; she delivers actions similar to those of Pam, yet as actions that are fragmented rather than complete and as actions that echo other actions rather than direct the confrontation.
- 44 Hughes (1985) and von Glascoe (1980:229-230) describe similar forms of legalistic debate by girls in the context of games.