

# A DISCOURSE ANALYTIC LOOK AT HOW ADULT CHILDREN NEGOTIATE IDENTITY WITH THEIR PARENTS

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For applied linguists, looking at the moment-by-moment discursive practices used by a particular speech community can lend insight into the ways we use words to perform interactional accomplishments. One such speech community, the family, is something that we all have been a part of. The context of the family is one of the most important environments for individual identity development and for the learning of social and cultural practices. Thus, this study examines the discursive practices used by interactants to perform identity within the family context.

In the past decade, there has been a growing body of discourse analytic studies of family interaction, examining how socialization of morality, gender, political views, and general social practice is accomplished through family talk (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1994; Gordon, 2004; Kendall, 2008; Ochs & Taylor, 2001; Tannen, 2004). There has, however, been a lack of studies of families comprised of older adults and their adult children. Most studies have examined families with younger children who live at home. This study examines the discourse among members of one American family and the competing identities displayed in family talk among adult children and their parents.

For this study, data was collected in the form of digital video recordings of conversations among family members during holiday mealtimes when family members who typically live far apart came together. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed through the discourse analysis method of interactional sociolinguistics. The analysis focuses on discursive practices in which family members are co-constructing their own and one another's identities (i.e., "doing being a father," "doing being a son," "doing being an adult") and on linguistic strategies employed to accomplish identity work through specific pragmatic functions such as criticizing another person's choice, justifying a choice, showing appreciation, and showing resistance. The results show interesting tensions between the multiple identities each person has. The children struggle between "doing being children" and "doing being adults." In addition, generational and gender differences emerge. Patterns and dynamics of interaction are discussed, including ways of being supportive or of showing resistance. The data demonstrates, through sequence and organization, the ways family members co-tell a story, collaboratively attempt to persuade someone, or offer advice.

The exploration of family discourse not only adds to the existing literature showing the structure of identity work; the microanalysis of the pragmatic functions employed by family members are indicative of larger cultural practices.

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