

**Regulatory comments as tools of family socialization:  
A comparison of Estonian, Swedish  
and Finnish mealtime interaction**

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ABSTRACT

The present study's aim is to pinpoint the characteristics of verbal socialization in family interaction in five different sociocultural contexts. Families with early adolescent children ( $M = 11.5$  years) were compared with regard to regulatory comments issued during family mealtimes. Three monocultural groups consisted of 20 Estonian, 20 Swedish, and 20 Finnish families living in their countries of origin; two bicultural and bilingual groups consisted of 20 Estonian and 20 Finnish families residing in Sweden. Regulatory comments were defined as utterances aimed at influencing the conversational partner to behave according to social and conversational rules. Contrary to expectations, cultural differences were not found in discussions dealing with table manners and conversational rules, but the number of comments on perceived violations of moral rules was much greater in the Swedish material. Swedish early adolescents commented significantly more than their Estonian and Finnish counterparts, indicating more asymmetrical communication in Estonian and Finnish families. (Family socialization, mealtime conversation, metapragmatic and metalinguistic comments, moral talk; Estonian, Finnish and Swedish cultural comparison.)\*

INTRODUCTION

The present study compares verbal socialization in Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish monolingual and bilingual families at mealtime, focusing on family discussion of different types of social and conversational norms. Previous research has demonstrated that intergenerational dinner conversations are important arenas for socialization of children into culturally specific ways of talking, and for so-

cializing them as well-adjusted and responsible members of family and society in general (see Aukrust & Snow 1998 for a review; also Ochs et al. 1996, Tannen 1984). Blum-Kulka (1997:264) describes middle-class family dinners as “an intergenerational, language-rich activity type, in which both the direct and indirect participation of children in family discourse serves as a primary mode of mediation in the developmental passage to the adult discourse world.” Similarly, Ochs & Taylor 1992 claim that children are socialized into the surrounding culture through their participation in family dinnertime conversations. The notion of dinnertime as an OPPORTUNITY SPACE providing for the possibility of joint activity among family members (Ochs, Smith & Taylor 1989) was also confirmed by reports given by the teenagers in our interviews. They repeatedly mentioned dinner as one of the few activity settings where they are together with their parents and other family members and participate in intergenerational conversations. The notion that much socialization occurs at Swedish mealtimes was also offered by Ekstrand & Ekstrand 1987 in a comparative study on norms and expectations for children’s behavior: Swedish children perceived table manners as important, contrary to a sample from India. Several previous studies have revealed subtle cultural differences in mealtime conversation. For example, Aukrust & Snow 1998 report more narrative talk in Norwegian families, and more explanatory talk in American families. Ochs et al. 1996 demonstrate that middle-class Italian families talk more about food as a source of pleasure and White American families about food as nutrition, a material good, and a reward. Tulviste 2000 revealed Estonian mothers to be less talkative at meals and more concerned with controlling teenagers’ behavior than were American mothers. In all this research, cultural similarities and differences in dinner-table conversations have been interpreted as reflecting values and beliefs of the family and of the society, as well as the place the child occupies in family and society.

Earlier cross-cultural studies paid attention to METAPRAGMATIC discourse, or discourse about language use. For example, cross-national comparative analyses by Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997 and Blum-Kulka & Sheffer 1993 found cultural differences in the frequency of making metapragmatic comments: American mothers at the dinner table paid considerably more attention to following conversational norms and turn-taking than did mothers from Israel. The latter, however, made more comments about language – METALINGUISTIC comments – and about behavior. Tulviste 2000, using an elaborated version of Blum-Kulka’s coding system, found that Estonian mothers and teenagers were significantly more active in making regulatory comments on behavior than were their American counterparts. Because these studies of family interaction have been interested mainly in pragmatic development in children, much attention has been paid to the different conversational norms discussed in families, and possible cultural differences in kinds of behaviors discussed at family meals have not yet received adequate research attention. The work reported in this paper focuses not only on families’ discussions of CONVERSATIONAL rules but also on what kind of SOCIAL rules were discussed. We used a more elab-

orate coding system of behavior-related regulatory comments with reference to different social rule system (see Turiel 1975, 1983; Tisak & Turiel 1984).

Thus, the present study focuses on analyzing a normative aspect of verbal interaction among family members; regulatory comments as tools of socialization. The term REGULATORY COMMENTS refers to utterances aimed at influencing a conversational partner to behave or talk according to social and conversational rules. The category, as defined here, includes explicit comments about transgression or about following some social or conversational rule, as well as implicit references to the standards of acceptable, preferable, or absolutely forbidden behavior or language use (Tulviste 2000). We concentrated on cultural similarities and differences in regulatory comments issued during mealtimes in families with early adolescent children, with various sociocultural backgrounds. Comments made during talk about transgressions of certain social and conversational rules should provide us with some insight into the meanings attached to such rules in these families. Furthermore, according to sociocultural theory, other-regulation is a source of self-regulation (Vygotsky 1978, Wertsch 1979). It is likely that variations in the frequency and kind of family discourses about social and conversational rules may be precursors of individual and cultural differences in the development of social understanding in children. Children exposed to certain types of regulatory comments are likely to start using them as regulative means themselves.

The need to study children's understanding of social and conversational rules in everyday family contexts has also been recognized in psychological research. According to Dunn & Brown 1991, participation in family discourse on the transgression of social rules is a prerequisite for developing knowledge about social rules and responsibilities. Developmental psychologists have given particular attention to the internalization of moral values by children who "discern the moral order as it is dramatized and made salient in everyday practices" (Shweder et al. 1990:195). In the same line, Emler 1998 points out that research on children's moral development should pay more attention to analyzing moral talk in the context of real social interactions. Although psychologists have stressed the importance of conducting studies in everyday contexts, so far more knowledge in the field has been obtained by presenting stories and asking children to make judgments about the seriousness, rule relativism, etc., of hypothetical social transgressions in the stories. Fewer studies have concentrated on investigating toddlers', preschoolers', and older children's understanding of social rules in naturally occurring social interactions at home (e.g., Dunn & Munn 1987, Smetana 1989) or in school (Much & Shweder 1978, Nucci & Nucci 1982, Smetana 1984).

### *Moral rules and conventional rules*

Turiel and his colleagues have introduced a distinction between CONVENTIONAL (arbitrary, alterable) and MORAL (universal, obligatory, and unalterable) social rules (Turiel 1975, 1983; Tisak & Turiel 1984). It has been shown that even very

young children differentiate these two types of social rules (e.g., Turiel 1983, Smetana & Braeges 1990), and that they treat moral violations – i.e., acts that violate other people’s rights or welfare and may harm them either physically or psychologically – as considerably more serious offenses than social-conventional violations, i.e. acts that involve failure to comply with externally driven rules about social order that regulate social interactions in various social contexts (Smetana 1981, 1993; Tisak 1986). Observational studies have also reported that adults and parents respond differently to different domains of social transgression. However, a number of recent cross-cultural studies provide evidence that the distinction between morals and conventions is not as clear as suggested by Turiel and his colleagues (Nisan 1987, Shweder et al. 1990). Differentiation between morality and convention seems to be culturally dependent; behaviors classified as “conventions” in one culture may be perceived as “moral” in another. For example, Nisan 1987 found that traditional Israeli Arab villagers differed from urban and kibbutz Jews in their judgments in regard to all breaches of moral and conventional norms.

In our study, MORAL RULES (i.e., rules related to protecting others’ rights or welfare) have been distinguished from PRUDENTIAL RULES (rules designed to protect oneself from harm and loss). The other subgroups of behavioral norms addressed in the study are PERSONAL ISSUES (issues that entail personal choice and preferences regarding clothes, friends, activities, etc.), and TABLE MANNERS.

It seems probable that in different sociocultural contexts, different rules are emphasized. For instance, Blum-Kulka & Sheffer 1993 found significant cultural differences among American, Israeli, and immigrant parents and children in the frequency of using metapragmatic (on language use) and metalinguistic (on language) comments. Based on that, we expected more variation in “conventions” such as table manners, personal issues, and rules on language and language use. Also, we hypothesized that more metalinguistic comments would be made in bilingual families than in monolingual families, since several studies on metalinguistic abilities have found that bilingual children outperform monolingual children in this respect (see Cromdal 1999). Although we might not expect to find very striking differences in family discussions on moral and prudential rules across countries, since it has been claimed that moral transgressions are perceived as universally wrong, a recent cross-cultural study (Keltikangas-Järvinen et al. 1999) has demonstrated the existence of some such differences. Estonian adolescents’ moral reasoning was found to constitute a less consistent cognitive pattern than was exhibited by their Finnish counterparts; the Estonians had one set of universal standards for what people “ought” to do, and a different set for personal applications.

It has been widely recognized that socialization is multidirectional rather than unidirectional (e.g., Pontecorvo 1998). In our study, the composition of families and the number of family members participating at meals varied considerably in every sample, because we wanted the recorded meal to be as “ordinary” as pos-

sible. As a result, the family was used as a unit of analysis, and all comments issued by all family members at the dinner table were identified and analyzed.

### *Children's contribution to family discussions*

Next, the study focused on cross-cultural comparison of the children's participation in family discussions. Early adolescence, the age group of the focus children in the present study, has been identified as a crucial period of value acquisition (Brim 1966), and of major developmental growth in pragmatic competence, the ability to use language in various contexts in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Cooper & Anderson-Inman 1988). In addition, current concepts of socialization in the family context emphasize its multidirectional nature and argue that an important parental task is to facilitate the child's exploration of values, rather than demanding rigid conformity to parental values (see Grusec & Goodnow 1994, Grusec & Kuczynski 1997). It has been noted that the acceptable form and amount of children's participation in family conversations varies considerably among cultural settings. In a comparative study on dinner-table narratives in American middle- and working-class and Israeli middle-class families, Blum-Kulka & Snow 1992 found remarkable group differences in child participation: the middle-class American children were active initiators, while their working-class counterparts were more responsive to adult elicitation; the Israeli children's input was the lowest of all groups. Taking into account the long tradition of "equality ideology" in Sweden, where even small children are treated as persons equal to their parents (cf. Welles-Nyström 1996) and independence is emphasized from an early age (cf. Daun 1991), and the contrasting fact that the Estonian mothers participating in the study were brought up during the Soviet occupation, when conforming and obeying authorities was greatly stressed, we hypothesized that more asymmetrical interaction would occur in families living in Estonia than in Sweden. This hypothesis is also in accordance with a previous finding about the centrality of the maternal role in family structure in the former Soviet Union (see Narusk & Pulkkinen 1994).

Thus, the following hypotheses were made. First, greater cultural differences would be found in discourse about violation of social conventions (table manners, personal issues, metapragmatic and metalinguistic rules) than about moral and prudential transgressions. Second, more metalinguistic comments would be made in bilingual families than in monolingual families. Third, adolescents living in Estonia would be less active in commenting than their counterparts from other samples.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The present study was carried out in monocultural and bicultural families living in three neighboring countries around the Baltic Sea: Estonia, Finland, and Sweden. The samples consisted of 20 Estonian families living in Estonia

(designated EstEst); 20 Finnish families living in Finland (FinFin); and 20 Swedish (SweSwe), 20 Finnish (SweFin), and 20 Estonian (SweEst) families living in Sweden. The main focus of the study was on early adolescent children (9 to 13 years old,  $M = 11.5$ ,  $SD = 0.9$ ) and their mothers (31 to 52 years old,  $M = 39.10$ ,  $SD = 5.12$ ). The mean age of the Estonian teenagers living in Estonia was  $M = 10.80$  ( $SD = 0.95$ ); of the Estonian teenagers living in Sweden,  $M = 11.75$  ( $SD = 1.02$ ); of the Swedish teenagers,  $10.90$  ( $SD = 1.12$ ); of the Finnish teenagers living in Sweden,  $M = 10.11$  ( $0.94$ ); and of the Finnish teenagers living in Finland,  $M = 10.80$  ( $SD = 0.83$ ).

The focus children's gender distribution was rather even in all samples: 8 boys and 12 girls in EstEst, 10 boys and 10 girls in SweEst, 7 boys and 13 girls in FinFin, 9 boys and 11 girls in SweFin, and 10 boys and 10 girls in SweSwe. A focus child's gender did not exhibit a significant effect in later analyses.

All families were middle-class, as defined by the mother's educational level and/or profession. The mothers' education ranged from secondary school to university degrees. All mothers but two had more than secondary school education, and most had completed a university degree. Not surprisingly, the mothers' education did not have a significant effect in later analyses.

In most families there was more than one child. Only one of the Swedish families consisted of children and a single parent (mother), and in two the fathers were not present at the time of recording owing to illness or travel. In the Finnish families, both in Sweden and in Finland, fathers were absent in 9 and 12 families, respectively. In the Estonian families, many fathers were also missing: 15 of the families in Estonia and 13 of the Estonian families in Sweden had no father present during recording. Although there were only four single-parent families in the EstEst group and two in the SweEst group, the fathers and stepfathers were mostly at work or, in a few cases, at home but reluctant to participate.

Suitable participants were identified through elementary schools, including the Estonian School in Stockholm and the Finnish School in Stockholm. Letters briefly describing the study were sent to the early adolescents' families, asking them to indicate their willingness to participate. The Swedish families' data were collected in Stockholm, the Estonian data in Tallinn and Tartu, and the Finnish data in Oulu. These families were monocultural and spoke, respectively, Swedish, Estonian, or Finnish as their first language. Estonian and Finnish belong to the Finno-Ugric language family and have many similarities: for example, both are agglutinating languages, have a large number of cases (14 in Estonian and 15 in Finnish), and lack grammatical future and grammatical gender. Swedish is an Indo-European language of the Germanic subgroup.

The Estonian families in Sweden were the most heterogeneous sample, including two larger groups of bilingual families. The first group consisted of families whose ancestors had fled to Sweden during World War II, and the second group of families who had moved to Sweden in the early 1990s. All families were bilingual or multilingual, and the mothers were Estonian.

In the Finnish bicultural families, the mothers were Finns who had lived in Sweden some twenty years. All families were bilingual.

### *Procedure*

Video recordings were made during family mealtimes in the homes of the participants. The participants were told that the mother and the early adolescent must be present, although all other family members were encouraged to participate for the meal to be as “ordinary” as possible. Because of that, the number of family members participating at meals varied considerably both within and across samples: 3.15 (SD = 1.18) in EstEst, 3.45 (SD = 1.05) in SweEst, 4.15 (SD = 1.04) in SweSwe, 3.50 (SD = 1.10) in SweFin, and 3.65 (SD = 1.39) in FinFin families. The participants were asked to behave as they “normally” would, and they were asked to ignore the fact that they were being recorded. The researcher interacted minimally with the participants once the videotaping began. The whole mealtime was recorded. In EstEst families, the mean duration of a meal was 15.48 minutes, in EstSwe families 21.18 minutes, in SweSwe families 20.38 minutes, in SweFin families 19.34 minutes, and in FinFin families 19.24 minutes.

All video recordings were transcribed using the CHAT transcription system (MacWhinney 1991).

### *Coding*

All regulatory comments were identified in the transcripts and were analyzed according to a category system developed on the basis of the system used by Blum-Kulka 1990. The modified system was more elaborated with reference to different social rules, distinguishing among moral rules, prudential rules, personal issues, and table manners. To identify the regulatory comments made at the dinner table, we used the complete transcripts and context notes. In some cases, the video recordings were also used, and tone, intonation, gestures, and facial expressions were taken into consideration to decide whether an utterance was indeed a regulatory comment.

Thus, the following types of regulatory comments were identified.

*Comments on behavior.* Four categories were distinguished:

(a) Table manners: Directions and prompts such as *Use both knife and fork now!*, *But what does a good child say when the stomach is full?*

(b) Moral rules: rules regarding issues of justice, rights, or welfare, and related to protecting others from harm and loss, such as stealing, lying, bullying, teasing, not sharing, unequal opportunities, not knowing one’s responsibilities; e.g., *No, I definitely don’t think you should hit him*, *This is true, naturally [one] cannot tell secrets*.

(c) Prudential rules: rules designed to protect oneself from harm and loss, e.g., *But still, I think that if you just had 39 degrees [of temperature] then ... [you should not go swimming]*.



(d) Personal issues: rules that involve aspects of behavior about which each person should have a right to decide what is or is not appropriate, such as strange behavior, strange clothes or haircuts, not having certain common knowledge, or certain psychological capacities, e.g., *I saw this Karl when he had red hair [= ! shakes head]*.

*Metapragmatic comments.* These fall into two categories, maxim regulation and turn regulation.

MAXIM REGULATION comments on any pragmatic aspect of speech. These comments concern violations of Grice's (1975) conversational principles of relation, quantity, quality, and manner.

The Quantity maxim requires that the contribution to conversation be as informative as necessary, as in ex. (1).

- (1) Mother: *Gu va du snackar!* 'God [how much] you can talk!'

The Quality maxim requires that the contribution is factually correct:

- (2) Child: *Se ei maistu hyvältä.* 'It does not taste good.'  
 Father: *Ei.* 'No.'  
 Mother: *Mutta sä sanoit sä sanoit se oli hyvä.* 'But you said you said it was good.'  
 Father: *En.* 'No.'  
 Mother: *Niin että sä valehtelit?* 'So you lied?'  
 Father: *Kyllä.* 'Yes.'

The Relevance maxim requires that the contribution be relevant to the current topic of conversation. This includes also the restriction of undesirable topics (e.g., *We have already dropped that subject now*).

Comments with regard to Manner sanction the use of slang and vulgar language, correct ungrammatical language, and prompt the use of politeness formulas, as in (3) from Swedish monolingual material and (4) from Estonian bilingual material:

- (3) Child talks about food served at school that day.  
 Child: *Men de va inge gott.* 'But it didn't taste good.'  
 Father: *De säger du alltid, Anna.* 'You always say that, Anna.'  
 Child: *Men de e så äcklia köttbullar.* 'But the meatballs are so disgusting.'  
 Father: *Säj inte de e äcklit!* 'Don't say it's disgusting!'  
 Child: *Men okej de smaka inte bra da.* 'But OK it tasted no good then.'  
 Father: *Jaa.* 'Yes.'
- (4) Mother: *Aga see uus poiss Kalev ... kuidas temaga on?* 'But this new boy Kalev ... how is he?'  
 Child: *Ta räägib nagu tüdruk.* 'He talks like a girl.'  
 Mother: *Räägib nagu tüdruk?* 'Talks like a girl?'  
 Mother: *Mismoodi see siis on et räägib nagu tüdruk?* 'How is it then that he talks like a girl?'  
 Child: *Hele heleda ...* 'In a high ...'  
 Mother: *Heleda häälega ahah.* 'In a high voice [pitch] a-ha.'

The category of turn regulation includes comments that regulate turn-taking:

- (5) Mother: *No eikö sulla oo mitään sanomista, Kaisa?* 'Well don't you have anything to say, Kaisa?'



*Metalinguistic comments.* These are comments on language, as in (6) (the speaker, an Estonian boy living in Sweden, asks in Swedish about the meaning of an Estonian phrase):

- (6) Child: *Vad betyder det "tüdrukutega sõjajalal olema"?* 'What does it mean "to be on a war-path with girls"?'

*Interrater reliability.* Regulatory comments were judged by two independent judges with more than 92% cases of agreement for all protocols. Disagreements were resolved through discussion after scrutinizing the video recordings.

## FINDINGS

In total, in EstEst families 218 comments were made; in SweEst families, 208; in SweSwe families, 310; in SweFin families, 239; and in FinFin families, 195. The mean amounts and standard deviations of all types of regulatory comments per family for all samples are presented in Table 1.

Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were used to control whether the dependent variables (types of regulatory comments) are affected by the Culture variable (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin). One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to identify the specific dependent variables that contributed to the significant overall effect.

To estimate differences between the means of using different types of regulatory comments in different cultural groups, post hoc comparisons with the LSD Test (planned comparison) were performed. The results of the LSD Test for the regulatory comments' variables are reported in Table 1.

### *Frequency of regulatory comments*

A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was no effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin) on the total number of regulatory comments issued at meals.

### *Type of regulatory comments*

The MANOVA revealed that the types of regulatory comments (table manners, moral rules, prudential rules, personal issues, maxim regulation, turn regulation, or metalinguistics) varied significantly as a function of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin), Wilks' Lambda (40,327) = .29,  $p < .0001$ .

A significant effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin) was revealed in the ANOVAs for the comments on moral rules,  $F(4,95) = 11.61$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; personal issues,  $F(4,95) = 8.21$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; the Gricean maxim of Quality,  $F(4,95) = 3.81$ ,  $p = .01$ ; and metalinguistics,  $F(4,95) = 2.64$ ,  $p = .04$ . Other types of comments had no significant effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin).

Although the study revealed no significant cultural differences in the total amount of regulatory comments issued by families at meals, the frequency of

TABLE 1. *Descriptive statistics of all types of comments across samples.*

Type of comment	EstEst		SweEst		SweSwe		SweFin		FinFin		All	
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)
All comments	10.90	(9.00)	10.40	(6.17)	15.50 <sup>5</sup>	(9.17)	11.95	(9.36)	9.75 <sup>3</sup>	(7.49)	11.70	(8.42)
1. Table manners	4.30	(5.33)	1.65	(2.32)	4.60	(4.39)	4.90	(6.84)	5.00	(7.25)	4.09	(5.55)
2. Morals	0.95 <sup>3</sup>	(1.14)	1.55 <sup>3</sup>	(1.88)	6.20 <sup>1245</sup>	(4.92)	1.55 <sup>3</sup>	(3.22)	1.15 <sup>3</sup>	(1.60)	2.28	(3.46)
3. Prudential rules	0.50 <sup>3</sup>	(0.95)	0.50 <sup>3</sup>	(0.69)	1.05 <sup>125</sup>	(0.94)	0.55	(1.05)	0.30 <sup>3</sup>	(0.57)	0.58	(0.88)
4. Other behavior	2.20 <sup>35</sup>	(1.67)	3.15 <sup>345</sup>	(3.08)	0.80 <sup>12</sup>	(1.11)	1.35 <sup>2</sup>	(1.35)	0.30 <sup>12</sup>	(0.57)	1.56	(2.01)
5. Quantity	0.35	(0.81)	0.45	(0.69)	0.35	(0.99)	0.35	(0.59)	0.60	(0.99)	0.42	(0.82)
6. Quality	1.35 <sup>5</sup>	(1.66)	1.60 <sup>45</sup>	(1.31)	1.25 <sup>5</sup>	(1.37)	0.65 <sup>2</sup>	(0.93)	0.30 <sup>123</sup>	(0.57)	1.03	(1.30)
7. Relevance	0.20	(0.62)	0.25	(0.44)	0.75	(1.65)	0.45	(1.05)	0.50	(0.89)	0.43	(1.02)
8. Manner	0.25	(0.72)	0.30	(0.73)	0.25	(0.64)	0.25	(0.72)	0.20	(0.41)	0.25	(0.64)
9. Turn regulation	0.50	(0.83)	0.30	(0.66)	0.30	(0.98)	0.45	(0.76)	0.75	(0.97)	0.46	(0.85)
10. Metalinguistics	0.45 <sup>4</sup>	(0.94)	0.55 <sup>4</sup>	(0.83)	0.40 <sup>4</sup>	(0.88)	1.45 <sup>1235</sup>	(2.01)	0.60 <sup>4</sup>	(0.82)	0.69	(1.23)

*Note:* All = All respondents (N = 100). Superscripts show significant differences among groups according to the LSD test at  $p < .05$ ; the groups are marked as follows: 1 = EstEst (n = 20); 2 = SweEst (n = 20); 3 = SweSwe (n = 20); 4 = SweFin (n = 20); 5 = FinFin (n = 20).

paying attention to the various types of social and cultural rules differed significantly across cultures. The Swedish families differed from all other families in having very frequent moral discussions. This kind of talk was initiated both by mothers and their children. Very serious cases of violating moral rules, such as stealing, bullying, and hitting, were seldom discussed. Most talk concerned less serious cases, like the teasing of an Estonian monolingual boy by his father (7), lack of fairness in some schoolmate's or teacher's behavior, or not knowing one's responsibilities (8).

## (7) Estonian monolingual family.

Father: [Nii et] noorhärä soostus ka tulema. ' [So the] young master [the target child] agreed to join us.'

Mother: Ära kiusa! 'Don't tease [him]!'

Sister: Mis ta häbeneb siis? 'Why is he [so] shy then?'

Father: Ta on sellises eas . . . kui häbenetakse. 'He's at the age . . . of being shy.'

## (8) Swedish family.

Child: Lärarna ser alltid fel på mina mattetester. 'The teachers always misinterpret my math exams.'

Mother: Det kan bero på att du skriver rätt slarvigt. 'It might be because you write rather sloppily.'

Child: Näe det var en helt annan anledning. 'There is a totally different reason.'

Child: Hon kollar inte noga var svaret står. 'She never checks carefully where the answer is.'

Mother: Ja fast det var lite rörigt tycker ja det du hade skrivit. 'Yes but what you had written was a bit messy, I think.'

Child: Näe det var det inte alls! 'No it wasn't!'

Mother: Nähä? 'No?'

Mother: Ja tyckte det verkade de. 'I thought it seemed so.'

Child: Var det inte. 'It was not.'

A lot of attention was also paid to equal opportunities (e.g., 'He is not good at it, he simply got [the maximum in the physics test], I don't know why'), and to not sharing. The fact that Swedish families favor such discussions seems to reflect the "egalitarian ideology" typical of Swedish society (see Welles-Nyström 1996).

Estonian families living in Estonia and Sweden differed from other samples in producing a significantly greater amount of comments on personal issues such as homework, bedtime, appropriate friends, or dress code:

## (9) Child: Juhan ja Koit ütlesid et nende huvid on skateboard ja snowboard. 'Juhan and Koit said their hobbies are skateboard and snowboard.'

Mother: Oeh ainult . . . midagi muud ei ole ainult see? 'Oh only . . . and nothing else but this?'

Child: Jaa, huvid. 'Yes, hobbies.'

Mother: Mhmh. 'Mm.'

Mother: Oota kes see on nüüd Juhan ja . . . ? 'Wait who's now this Juhan and . . . ?'

Child: Koit.

Mother: Koit.

- Mother: *Kuule aga ma ei ole neid kumbagi näinud ei Juhanit ega Koitu.* 'But listen I haven't seen either of them neither Juhani nor Koit.'
- Child: *Need on need kellel on püksid all.* 'They are the ones with loose pants.'
- act: [giggles.]
- Mother: *See ... rippuvad püksid?* 'These ... loosely hanging pants?'
- Child: [= ! nods].
- Mother: *Suured ... niisugused laiad ja rippuvad jah?* 'Big ... such large and hanging, eh?'
- act: [Mother shows big pants with gestures.]
- Child: [= ! nods].
- Child: *Nad jooksevad edasi-tagasi.* 'They move back and forth.'
- Child: *Ükspäev oli Koit unustanud oma vöö koju.* 'One day Koit had left his belt home.'
- act: [Child starts to laugh.]
- Child: *Ja siis kui ta jooksis seal seda ... tyska bricken* [language: Swedish] ... see ... tee ... 'And then he ran along this ... German bridge ... this ... road ...'
- Mother: *Tänaval seal?* 'There on the street?'
- Child: *Jaa mäest alla siis ta kaotas püksid.* 'Yes down the hill then he lost his pants.'
- Mother: [= ! shakes head].

The type of comment exemplified in (9) was seldom encountered in Swedish monolingual families or in Finnish families. According to Grusec & Kuczynski 1997, violating such types of rules is a personal matter, so it is a likely source of conflict between teenagers and their parents when parents maintain these rules. Comments of this type also included the cases in which somebody's lack of basic knowledge, strange behavior, or other characteristic was under discussion, as in (10).

(10) Estonian family.

- Mother: *Kui see isa oli esimene päev kaasas.* 'When this [the new classmate's] father was with him the first day [at school].'
- Mother: *Oli terve päev?* 'Did he stay the whole day?'
- Child: *Ei pool ainult.* 'No only half.'
- Mother: *Istus tundides ja ... ?* 'Sat in the classes and ... ?'
- Child: *Ei ta istus väljas.* 'No he sat outside.'
- Mother: *Istus koridoris* [= ! *naerab*]?' 'Sat in the corridor [= ! laughs]?'
- Mother: *Milleks ta seal koridoris* [*istus*], *see oli ju küll ilmaasjata.* 'Why did he sit in the corridor, that was really unnecessary.'
- /.../
- Mother: *No miks ... ta oleks pidanud ju, miks õpetaja ei kutsunud teda klassi siis?* 'But why ... he should have, why didn't the teacher invite him to the classroom then?'
- Child: *Tema ei tahtnud sisse tulla.* 'He did not want to come in.'
- Mother: *No aga mis mõte oli seal ukse taga istuda siis?* 'But what sense did it make to sit behind the door then?'
- Child: *Ma ei tea.* 'I do not know.'
- Mother: *Sama hästi oleks võinud ju siis kodus olla, või tööl või kusagil.* '[He] could have been at home or at work or someplace else just as well.'

Comments on the quality of talk, as in (11) and (12), were less frequently made in Finnish families.

(11) Swedish monolingual family.

- Mother: *Det tror ja inte!* 'I do not believe that!'

## (12) Estonian family living in Sweden.

- Child: *Tema on alles meie koolis aga ta käib teises koolis ta ainult ütleb.* 'He is still in our school, only he himself says that he goes to another school.'
- Mother: *Koolis on alles ja käib teises koolis?* 'Is still in your school, and goes to another one?'
- Mother: *Ma nüüd küll aru ei saa.* 'I don't really understand this now.'
- Child: *Ta nimi on alles.* 'His name is still there.'
- Mother: *Nimi on alles aga käib teises koolis?* 'The name is [listed] there but he goes to another school?'
- Child: *Jah.* 'Yes.'

The hypothesis that more comments on language – e.g., metalinguistic comments – occurred in bilingual families was supported by the Finnish but not by the Estonian families living in Sweden. In both monolingual and bilingual families, children frequently asked what a certain word meant, like the Swedish-Finnish girl in (13), and they were corrected for incorrect word use, like the 10-year-old Finnish girl living in Sweden (14).

## (13) Finnish family living in Sweden.

- Father: *Se yksi tyttö oli Puolasta.* 'This one girl was from Poland.'
- Child: *Tai joku venäjäläinen ... venäjäläinen ...* 'Or some Russia ... Russia ...'
- Child: *Sanotaankos se venäjäläinen vai ... ?* 'Do you say "venäjäläinen" ["Russia"] or ... ?'
- Father: *Venäläinen.* 'Russian.'
- Child: *Venäläinen ... venäjäläinen ... en mä vaan tiedä.* 'Russian ... Russia ... I just don't know.'
- act: [Child laughs.]
- Father: *Venäjä on maa venäläinen on kansalainen.* 'Russia is the country, Russian is the citizen.'
- Child: *Mm.* 'Oh.'

## (14) Finnish family living in Sweden.

- Mother: *Just niin siihen pannaan jäätelöä, omenamehua, kanelia, vaniljasokeria, piimää, maitoa hm.* 'Exactly so, you put into it ice cream, apple juice, vanilla, sugar, sour milk, milk hm.'
- Mother: *Miten piimää ja jäätelöä voi laittaa yhteen?* 'How can you put sour milk and ice cream together?'
- Sibling: *Piimää ja jäätelöä?* 'Sour milk and ice cream?'
- Mother: *Niin.* 'Yes.'
- Child: *Mä sanoin että se on hirveen ihmeellinen resepti.* 'I said that it is a tremendously weird recipe.'
- Mother: *Niin onkin kyllä se on tosissaan.* 'Yes it is really.'
- Sibling: *Piimää ja jäätelöä.* 'Sour milk and ice cream.'
- Mother: *Väärin, hahah haa.* 'Wrong, hahah haa.'
- Mother: *Eipäs ollutkaan, se oli "yksi lasi" mitä siihen tarvitaan.* 'It was not so, it was "one glass" that goes into it.'
- Mother: *Joo mä ajattelinkin.* 'Yes I thought [so].'
- Mother: *Lasissa on nimittäin vain yksi "s" ja jäätelössä on kaksi "s".* 'There is only one letter "s" in glass [glas in Swedish], and two letters "s" in ice cream [glass in Swedish].'
- Mother: *Niin tähän on laitettu yksi lasi.* 'So this [recipe] says one glass is needed.'

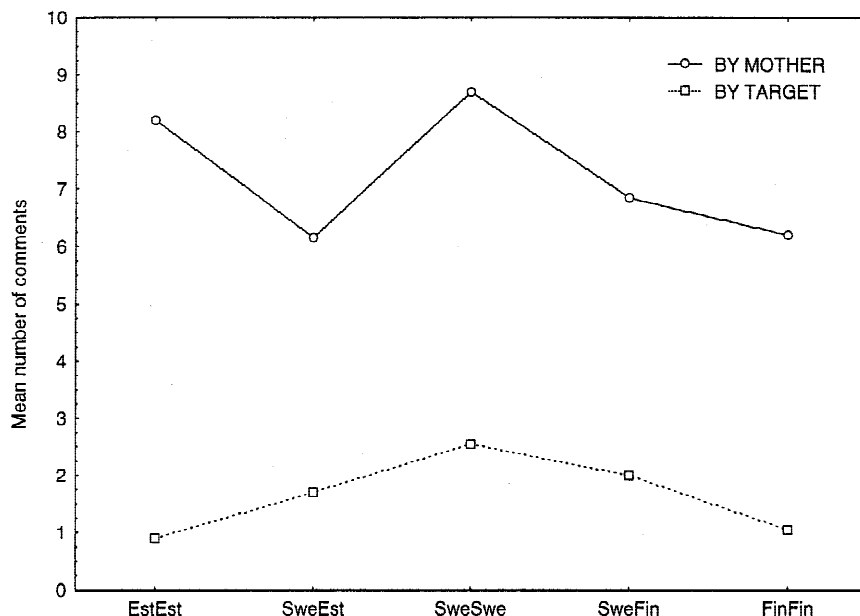


FIGURE 1: Mean number of comments made by mothers and early adolescents per sample.

#### *Comments issued by mothers and early adolescents*

Figure 1 shows the mean values per sample of comments made by mothers and early adolescents. A one-way ANOVA for the comments made by mothers showed no effect of culture; the mothers made a lot of comments, regardless of the cultural group. An ANOVA for the comments made by early adolescents indicated a significant effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin),  $F(4,95) = 11.61$ ,  $p < .0001$ , owing to the fact that early adolescents from Swedish monocultural families made significantly more comments than did adolescents in Estonian and Finnish monocultural families.

#### *Comments directed to mothers and early adolescents*

Figure 2 illustrates the mean number of comments per meal directed to mothers and target children. An ANOVA for comments directed to target children indicated a trend of the influence of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin),  $F(4,95) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .06$ . Significantly more comments were directed to Estonian monocultural target children than to target children in both Finnish samples. Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin) had no significant effect on the amount of comments directed towards mothers.

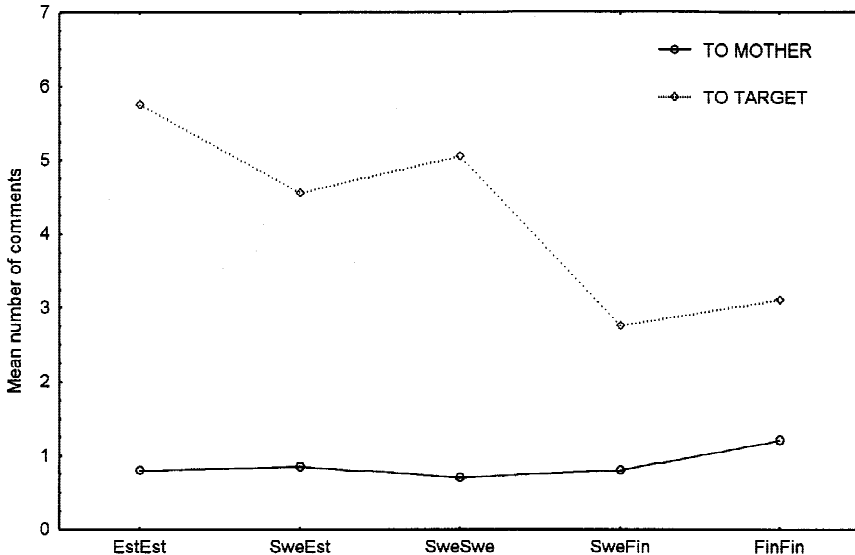


FIGURE 2: Mean number of comments directed to mothers and early adolescents.

Thus, the study revealed that, in making comments, the mothers were the most active family members in all participating samples, and the focus children, in turn, were the most frequent addressees of the comments. (It should be mentioned that all family members made comments.) This supports the view of current researchers that family socialization is a process that is multidirectional rather than unidirectional. Ex. (15) demonstrates how several family members try to make a two-year-old boy, Riho, behave properly at the table:

(15) Estonian family.

Father: *Riho ole nüüd inimene!* 'Riho, be a human [= behave like a civilized person] now!'

Mother: *Söö nüüd ilusti ära tee rumalusi!* 'Eat nicely now, do not fool around!'

Father: *Söö!* 'Eat!'

act: [Riho whispers something to his mother.]

Mother: *Mh?* 'Eh [= what]?'

Mother: *Ma ei kuule ... söögilaua ääres süüakse.* 'I cannot hear [you] ... one must eat at the table.'

Child: *Riho käitu ilusti!* 'Riho behave well!'

Mother: *xx võib ümber minna niimoodi ... siis on terve laud täis ja ...* 'xx might spill like that ... then the whole table is flooded and ...'

Mother: *Riho ... sa lähed söögilaua äärest ära kui sa teed rumalusi!* 'Riho ... you will leave the table if you keep fooling around!'

Mother: *Rumalusi ei tehta lauas.* 'You do not fool around at the table.'

Because our aim was to compare "average" mealtime socialization in different sociocultural contexts, we conducted the analyses reported above on the basis of



raw scores. To control for the possibility that the results of our analyses are artifacts of the number of family members participating at meals or of the amount of talk at meals (the total amount of utterances by a family), the results with total amount of comments per meal were also double-checked using proportion scores for (i) comments per participant, and (ii) comments per total amount of utterances by each family.

#### *Influence of number of participants*

Pearson's correlational analysis revealed a significant ( $p < .05$ ) and positive correlation between the number of participants and of regulatory comments made per meal,  $r = .31$ . An ANOVA revealed that the number of participants did not differ significantly among different sociocultural groups ( $p > .05$ ); therefore, it is not surprising that the pattern of significant results proved fully analogical to that with raw scores presented above. The ANOVA revealed the influence of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin) for moral comments per participant,  $F(4,95) = 5.51$ ,  $p = .005$ ; for comments on personal issues per participant,  $F(4,95) = 5.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for comments on the Gricean maxim of Quality per participant,  $F(4,95) = 3.82$ ,  $p = .006$ ; and a trend for metalinguistic comments per participant,  $F(4,95) = 2.03$ ,  $p = .09$ . Other types of comments per participant revealed no significant effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin).

#### *Influence of total number of utterances per family*

An ANOVA for utterances used by a family revealed the effect of culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin),  $F(4,95) = 3.97$ ,  $p = .005$ . The monocultural Swedes talked significantly more than all other samples; the remaining samples did not differ significantly from one another.

Pearson's correlational analysis revealed a significant ( $p < .05$ ) and positive correlation between the number of utterances used by a family per meal and the number of regulatory comments issued per meal,  $r = .48$ . An ANOVA revealed the effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin) for moral comments per total number of utterances by a family,  $F(4,95) = 6.34$ ,  $p = .0001$ ; for comments on personal issues per total number of utterances by a family,  $F(4,95) = 8.72$ ,  $p = .00001$ ; for comments on the Gricean maxim of Quality per total number of utterances by a family,  $F(4,95) = 5.72$ ,  $p = .0004$ ; and for metalinguistic comments per total number of utterances by a family,  $F(4,95) = 2.57$ ,  $p = .04$ . Other types of comments per total number of utterances by a family revealed no significant effect of Culture (EstEst  $\times$  SweEst  $\times$  SweSwe  $\times$  SweFin  $\times$  FinFin).

In summary, the pattern of significant results proved quite analogical to that with raw scores presented above. The result revealed that, although the average family discussion was significantly shorter in Estonian and Finnish monocultural and bicultural samples than in Swedish monocultural sample, the total number of

comments did not differ among the five samples. This is rather surprising. We assume that it might be caused by wider inequality in the Estonian and Finnish families, which was also reflected in the length of the discussions that followed some regulatory comments. Although in many cases the outcome of regulatory comments consisted of only one utterance following the comment (or its absence), in Swedish families there were more NEGOTIATIONS – that is, longer discussions of the issue raised by the speaker, as exemplified in (16):

(16) Swedish monolingual family.

- Mother: *Fast du vet vad vi har sagt om det här med å komma överens om saker.* ‘But you know what we have said about agreeing about things.’  
 Child: *Men det var bara lite . . .* ‘But it was only little . . .’  
 Mother: *Ja “det var bara lite”.* ‘Yes “it was only little”.’  
 Mother: *Det spelar ingen roll.* ‘It doesn’t matter at all.’  
 Mother: *Vi hade ju sagt att du skulle gå till fritids och äta mellanmål.* ‘We had agreed that you would go to daycare and have a snack.’  
 Mother: *Och sen skulle du gå hem och göra dina läxor.* ‘And then you would go home and do your homework.’  
 Mother: *Var det inte det vi hade kommit överens om?* ‘Wasn’t that what we had agreed on?’  
 Child: *Ja men jag blev bara så himla sur på dom när dom inte gör som jag . . .* ‘Yes but I just got so very mad at them when they don’t do as I . . .’  
 Mother: *Du går ju till fritids själv andra gånger så det kunde du ha gjort idag också.* ‘You go to daycare alone other times so you could have done that today, too.’  
 Child: *Ja men jag kände inte för det.* ‘Yes but I didn’t feel like it.’  
 Mother: *Nä.* ‘No.’  
 Mother: *Men de är ju en helt annan sak och då kan man ju säga det i stället för att det beror på nån annan.* ‘But that’s a completely different thing and then you can say so instead of saying that it is because of someone else.’  
 Child: *Varför då?* ‘Why?’  
 Mother: *Joo därför att jag tycker att det är mer ärligt.* ‘Yes because I think it is more honest.’

## DISCUSSION

The study showed that, in every family’s meals, at least a few regulatory comments were issued. In this respect, the current study supported the findings of previous research (Aukrust & Snow 1998; Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997; Blum-Kulka & Sheffer 1993; Ochs et al. 1996; Tannen 1984), according to which meals are important arenas for socializing children to use culture-specific language practices and to behave according to social expectations.

### *Moral and conventional rules*

Although the total number of comments issued at meals in families with different sociocultural backgrounds did not differ significantly, the study found that different social and conversational norms were emphasized during Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish meals. The frequency of making different types of comments (see Table 1) suggests that the Estonian monocultural sample and both Finnish samples stressed the observance of table manners, but the Swedish monocultural families paid more attention to morality. More precisely, the results of statistical analyses indicate that significantly more “moral” talk occurred in Swedish mono-

cultural families than in all the others – a finding that is not consistent with our initial hypothesis that greater cultural differences would be found in discourse about violation of social conventions (such as table manners, personal issues, metapragmatic, and metalinguistic rules), but not in that about moral transgressions. It seems that for Swedish families, it is the home environment where moral issues are discussed. Researchers (e.g., Daun 1989, 1991) have pointed out that for Swedes, it is of utmost importance not to stand out in public situations to avoid getting into open conflicts and voicing an opinion different from that of the conversational partner. This notion seems to be reflected in our finding that all three samples of families living in Sweden frequently discussed the appropriateness of the behavior or language use of a person who did not belong to the family. In contrast, Estonian and Finnish monolingual families chiefly discussed the behavior or language use of family members who participated at dinner. These data could mean that in Sweden, moral stands are taken and discussed primarily in private rather than public contexts. The considerable attention paid to moral rules – including the importance of sharing (e.g., ‘You do share the bowl, don’t you?’), equal opportunities (‘Anyway it would be quite strange if you could not [go skiing with your class], I think’), and fairness – may also express a more general cultural belief system, the Swedish “equality ideology” (see Welles-Nyström 1996). Following rules to a fault, the Swedes sometimes refer to themselves as *regelryttare* ‘rule rider’ or *man av ordning* ‘man of order’.

The study showed that both Estonian samples made significantly more comments on personal issues (strange behavior, strange clothes or haircuts, strange friends, not having certain common knowledge, some psychological capacities, etc.). Thus, many comments in this subgroup were made about rules that involve aspects of behavior about which each person should have a right to decide what is or is not appropriate. In the Estonian bicultural families, these comments were made chiefly about people not participating at the dinner.

In pragmatic socialization – the ways in which children are socialized to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Blum-Kulka 1997:3) – several cultural similarities were found. Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish families commented equally frequently on the usage of pragmatic forms of language of which they disapproved. The only significant difference found was that in FinFin and SweFin families, less importance was given to the conversational partner’s adherence to the facts. Thus, in spite of real differences (such as the differential use of silence), members of all communities did comment on conversational practices related to Grice’s (1975) maxims. Although Ochs Keenan 1976 has suggested that the maxims are not universal, this finding lends support to the notion that attention to the maxims may not be closely correlated with cultural difference. It was also found that the members of Estonian and Swedish families were concerned mainly with following the Gricean maxim of Quality; other comments on language use occurred less frequently.

Our second hypothesis, that more metalinguistic comments would be made in bilingual families than in monolingual ones, found support, although in the Swe-Est case the differences did not reach statistical significance. In multilingual families, the exact meaning of expressions in one of their two languages was discussed; for example, ‘this is *koor* [shows a packet of sour cream] but *koor* is also a choir. It is rather interesting that it is the same word.’ The monolingual families discussed foreign words, how to translate a certain word into some foreign language, and old expressions.

### *Children’s contribution to family discussions*

In all samples, the mothers were the most active commenters, and the target children received a lot of comments. This finding demonstrates that the socialization process is still very salient in early adolescence. A great deal of discussion on social and conversational rules may be caused partly by the fact (pointed out by Collins et al. 1997) that adolescence is the period when children are more competent and more able to make contributions to decision-making about acceptable standards of behavior. It is possible that this prompts other family members to discuss social and conversational rules with them. The frequent discussions about values in early adolescents’ families may also be caused by the altered expectations of parents about the adolescents’ behavior: they have an intensified concern about how well their children have adopted the moral standards and conventional values of the adult world. However, we found some sociocultural differences in the number of comments directed to target children: Estonian children received significantly more comments than did Finnish adolescents from both samples. In this sense, we can argue that other family members treated the latter more like equals.

Our third hypothesis, according to which early adolescents in Estonia were expected to be the least active in commenting on other people’s behavior or language use, was supported in comparison with the Swedish monocultural adolescents. Contrary to our expectation, the target children in Estonian and Finnish monocultural families did not differ significantly in this respect.

One can argue that the American (and generally Western) ideal of social equality – in other words, egalitarianism – which, in its most extreme forms, is “taken as a major point of social development to eliminate any and all suggestions of hierarchy in any interpersonal or social relationships” as described by Scollon & Scollon (1995: 114), is to some extent reflected in the discourse pattern of our sample families residing in Sweden. The common understanding that all family members have equal rights to participate in family discourse and to speak their mind is a likely cause of the differences we found.

The fact that Estonian adolescents are less equal conversational partners than their Swedish counterparts may be due partly to the Estonian parents’ upbringing. Throughout the Soviet occupation, conforming and adjusting to the communist

system and uniform socialization ideology was greatly stressed. Because the system depended upon maintaining the sociopolitical hierarchy, obeying authorities (superiors, teachers, parents) was one of its most important tools, and this could still be influencing the lopsided conversational contribution in our data. However, while acknowledging the period of Soviet authoritarianism in Estonia (1945–1990), social scientists advise us to keep in mind that, under these circumstances, the gaps between openly proclaimed and private norms and rules, as well as between norms and rules and actual behavior, were dramatically wider than in democratic societies such as Sweden (e.g., Rosengren 1997). Therefore, one must be cautious in ascribing such findings to the characteristics of an authoritarian society.

A longitudinal comparative study on value orientations from 1991 to 1995 found Swedish value priorities to remain almost the same from year to year, while Estonian values underwent a noticeable change during this period (Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997). The question of whether a decade of exposure to Western values and norms in Estonia has brought about a shift in socialization patterns and changed relationships in the family needs to be addressed further. In this respect, the finding that Finnish families in Finland did not differ from Estonian families living in Estonia complicates the picture: Could it be that the pattern of family discourse found here is characteristic of Finno-Ugric cultures? Interestingly, Finland has been noted to differ from Sweden (and other Scandinavian countries) in marked social stratification. Daun, Matllar, & Alanen (1999) found the Finnish communication pattern considerably more hierarchical and less democratic than the Swedish one, and Finns in general are much less concerned about equality.

Could this similarity be attributed to the characteristics of Finno-Ugric speech communities more generally? Several articles have been written about the “silent Finns” (e.g., Lehtonen & Sajavaara 1985, Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997). Similarly, a smaller amount of talk directed to their children has also been found among Estonian teenagers’ mothers, compared with mothers from the U.S. (Tulviste 2000). In the same line, Junefelt & Tulviste 1997 revealed that less verbalization is expected from two-year-old Estonian children than from American and Swedish children of the same age. Wide sociocultural differences in the amount of talk between Finno-Ugric people and others were also found in the study reported here, as the Swedish monocultural families talked at meals significantly more than all other samples. Thus, the results of this study may point toward the fact that Finno-Ugric people are simply not great talkers, including commenting on transgressions of social and conversational rules. The differences in talkativeness seemed to emerge mainly in the length of negotiations that followed regulatory comments, and not in the number of regulatory comments made. At the same time, the samples were found to differ mainly in the preferred types of regulatory comments and in the person issuing the comment. In Swedish monolingual families, children were much more active than in other families. However, other explanations are also possible. For example, it is well known that

changes in child-rearing attitudes – from parental emphasis on obedience to emphasis on autonomy and self-direction – occurred rather recently even in countries like the U.S. (Alwin 1988). It may be argued that similar trends toward more democratic socialization styles have not yet emerged in Estonia and Finland.

The Estonian families were in many respects strikingly similar, regardless of their country of residence. The same applied to the Finnish families in different countries. The FinFin families differed from the SweFin families only in the number of comments about language. The scarceness of such differences could also be partly attributable to the way in which the bicultural families were recruited. Because the SweEst and the SweFin families were found through the Estonian and Finnish schools in Stockholm, the participating families had, in a way, already indicated their wish to maintain their original culture and language.

Curiously, it was only the target children's contribution to the commenting that clearly revealed the expected pattern, in which the bicultural results fell between the monocultural results. The monocultural early adolescents in Estonia and Finland were commenting significantly less than their Swedish counterparts, whereas the bicultural early adolescents' contributions did not differ significantly from those of any other group. The Swedish early adolescents' active participation is not at all surprising, as it has been shown in previous research that Swedish mothers place high value on their children's independent and assertive behavior (e.g., Ekstrand & Ekstrand 1985).

Along with their parents, the target children and their siblings were often not only contributing to but also initiating discourse concerning social and conversational rules (i.e., what is normative and desirable behavior or language use and what is not), illustrating the multidirectional nature of family socialization.

It should be noted that most of the comments made at meals were about perceived violations (that is, transgressions) of certain social or conversational rules. More infrequently, a behavior that was expected was under discussion. Chiefly, actual events at the dinner table were commented upon. Sometimes the person whose unacceptable or strange speech or behavior was commented upon was not a family member but a teacher, schoolmate, or friend whose actual moral or conventional transgression some family member had witnessed at school or in the workplace.

All these comments give early adolescents the opportunity to practice social rules and regulations. They are mediators for learning what kind of behavior, or how much and what kind of talk, is expected from people in certain situations. Meal-time socialization does not limit itself to only one setting – the meal – but also teaches social and conversational rules that are important to follow in other contexts.

## NOTE

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