

## Presenting a united front at the dinner table: The case of merged speakership and merged reciprocity

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of presenting a united front has long since been an integral part of parenting advice. Despite the wealth of productive research on parent-child interaction, we have very little knowledge of how such a united front is assembled in situ. In the meantime, although few would question the benefit of collaboration, we are still in the process of understanding how collaboration is carried out in the micro-moments of interaction. This article contributes to the growing literature on parent-child interaction as well as that on collaboration in interaction by detailing how two parents achieve collaboration through merged speakership and merged reciprocity. Findings may be applicable to a wide range of workspaces beyond the domestic sphere. (Family interaction, conversation analysis, collaboration)\*

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of presenting a united front (e.g. not conveying conflicting messages to the child) has long since been an integral part of parenting advice (e.g. Rimm 2008; Middle Earth 2020). Despite the wealth of productive research on parent-child interaction (Wootton 1997; Gardner & Forrester 2010; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik 2013; Keel 2016; Bateman & Church 2017; Goodwin & Cekaite 2018; Filipi 2019), we have very little knowledge of how such a united front is assembled in situ. In the meantime, although few would question the benefit and importance of collaboration, we are still in the process of understanding how collaboration is carried out in the micro-moments of interaction—beyond macro advice such as setting clearly defined guidelines and adapting continuously (Digital Workspace 2020). Further complicating the matter is our treatment of collaboration in its vernacular sense as a matter exclusively for the workplace despite its omnipresent relevance in the domestic sphere. The purpose of this article is to detail how two parents can collaboratively assemble a united front in the micro-seconds of family interaction.



## BACKGROUND

Two relevant bodies of literature that serve as a backdrop for this study are those on parent-child interaction and collaboration in interaction. Existing research on parent-child interaction has yielded useful information on parental practices to secure compliance and ensure proper conduct (e.g. Goodwin 2006; Fasulo, Loyd, & Padiglione 2007; Gordon 2008; Kent 2011; Tulbert & Goodwin 2011; Antaki & Kent 2015; Cekaite 2015, 2016). Antaki & Kent (2015:33), for example, analyzed how adults issue directives to children by offering what appears to be alternatives marked by *or*, for example, ‘turn around and eat your dinner or I’m going to switch it off’. Hepburn & Potter (2011) also show how parents use threats in the conditional format (e.g. ‘if you don’t eat your dinner, there will be no pudding’) in response to children’s problematic activities and how children respond to these threats. In response to non-compliance, adults can upgrade verbal directives with touch, gesture, and body reconfigurations (Goodwin & Cekaite 2013; Cekaite 2015), reframe and blend frames (Gordon 2008), or persist with directives while sustaining face-to-face access (Goodwin 2006). Tulbert & Goodwin (2011:90) also assert that assessment is ‘essential if children are to learn what is an expected demeanor and alignment toward the activity and what constitutes appropriate steps in the process of actualizing the competent completion of actions’.

Enforcing compliance and proper conduct is by no means a straightforward matter as it directly encroaches upon the child’s assertions for autonomy (Nguyen & Nguyen 2016; Waring & Yu 2017; Waring 2019). As Wingard (2006:573) notes, parent-child interaction often features some conflict between children’s desire to be autonomous and parents’ need for control, and she demonstrates how US dual-earner parents manage to ‘negotiate between retaining parent control and responsibility for the completion of homework and socializing child autonomy’. Sirota (2006:493) also describes how parents and children co-construct bedtime routines that ‘foster autonomous self-initiative’. Similarly, Aronsson & Cekaite (2011) show how, through extended negotiations of directive sequences, parents can position children as active agents. Aronsson & Gottzén (2011) illustrate how parents reshape some of the children’s dinnertime affects as both parties negotiate what constitutes proper and improper affective stances. Hepburn (2020:464) demonstrates how ‘more coercive and invasive behavior management practices can be systematically withheld’ to promote child autonomy. Indeed, as Fasulo and colleagues (2007) have demonstrated, different parenting practices to socialize children into cleaning practices can either promote or prohibit their agency and development of autonomy. Socialization, as Pontecorvo, Fasulo, & Sterponi (2001) have shown us, is mutual and bidirectional after all. In short, research on parent-child interaction has advanced our understanding of how socialization is enacted and managed in the dynamics of naturally occurring family interaction. This highly complex parenting work is undoubtedly, at least at times, a product of

joint endeavors of two parents although such joint endeavors have not been a focus of the research so far.

By contrast, a plethora of work exists on collaboration (e.g. how or why collaboration is useful, factors that promote or inhibit collaboration), a fraction of which is addressed to how collaboration is accomplished in interaction—the focus of the current project. Collaborative activities, for example, may be launched with ‘let’s X’ and ‘how about X’ during children’s play (Stivers & Sidnell 2016; also see Sokol 2019 on proposing joint actions at the computer). Maynard (1986) shows that during two-party argument in first-grade reading groups, the launching of collaboration may take the form of alignment being solicited from or offered by someone outside the argument, followed by either acceptance or rejection.

When it comes to doing being collaborative, establishing common ground appears to be one of its central ingredients. While co-creating an advertising banner in an Italian internet company, for example, the engineer describes what he is doing to the content producer to establish a common language that facilitates future interactions (Alby & Zucchermglio 2008). In the same company, collaborative diagnostic activities are also accomplished through detailed accounts of formulating and testing hypotheses that allow for the development of a common ground in an open space that facilitates such exchanges (Alby & Zucchermglio 2009). During an online synchronous collaborative math solving activity, intersubjectivity is achieved through constructing an indexical field as a common ground for group cognition, for example, linking chat messages to features of shared drawing with deictic references (Cakir, Zemel, & Stahl 2009). Similarly, maintaining a shared focus is found to be central to professional software developers’ collaborative activities at a whiteboard (Rooksby & Ikeya 2012). In collaboratively editing a documentary, interruption becomes an important resource for bringing the editor’s knowledge into dialog with the director’s vision (Laurier & Brown 2011). Common ground may also be established via more subtle means such as slowing down talk to match typing or mouse moments as two high school students work collaboratively at a computer (Gardner & Levy 2010).

Another ingredient of doing being collaborative entails the fine-tuning of one’s own work to the unfolding work of the other, for example, paying attention to each other (Rooksby & Ikeya 2012). In their study on the line control room where the line controller coordinates the running of the railway while the divisional information assistant (DIA) communicates information to passengers and station managers, Heath & Luff (1992) show how the line controller and the DIA tailor their own actions based on careful monitoring of each other’s work in producing highly coordinated responses to various situations. Similarly, in a share trading room of an international securities house, a dealer on the phone may alter his course of action based on peripheral monitoring of his colleagues’ concurrent activities and can, in fact, be held accountable if he fails to do so (Heath, Jirotko, Luff, & Hindmarsh 1995). In the anesthetic room as well, team members’ ability to ‘read’ and act on each other’s actions is integral to the collaborative work they

do (Hindmarsh & Pilnick 2002). Similar observations may be made of the management of emergency calls, where the dispatcher manages her own distinctly different task in such a way that allows her to closely monitor the call-taker's activity to (i) gain information about the case well before the official post-call debriefing, and to (ii) demonstrate her alignment with the call-taker's emotional stance (Fele 2012). This fine-tuned adaptation to co-participants' activities is also key to the students' collaborative planning in a second language classroom as they adjust to and build upon each other's prior actions (Lee & Burch 2017).

In addition to common ground and mutual awareness, many studies on collaboration (including those reviewed so far, e.g. Alby & Zucchermglio 2008) demonstrate how talk, gesture, and the material surround are carefully orchestrated in accomplishing collaboration. Such is the case for the architects in Murphy's (2005:113) study, who jointly produce 'collaborative imagining' as they create and manipulate objects of thought in the shared space of face-to-face interaction. The engagement of multimodal resources also proves to be crucial in accomplishing collaborative explanation in a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classroom, as students display problems through pauses, facial expression, pointing, and gesture, and their fellow students offer solutions through prompts and additional comments (Kupetz 2011). The coordination of talk, gesture, and the material surround becomes particularly salient in King's (2022) depiction of how co-teachers achieve what she calls synchronizing and amending as they carefully monitor and adapt to each other's unfolding activities. Work on collaboration in the domestic sphere has been rare to my knowledge, with the notable exception of Gordon (2003:395), who shows how family members align as a team through (a) sharing turns, (b) alternating turns parallel in function, and (c) situating contributions within a shared knowledge schema. The current project extends the existing body of research by further examining collaboration in the domestic sphere, in hopes of uncovering previously undocumented practices of doing being collaborative as two parents jointly produce a united front.

#### DATA AND METHOD

Data are drawn from nineteen hours of video-recorded mealtime conversations from fifty-one dinners that involve a three-year-old girl Zoe at the age of three and then eight and her parents (Dad and Mom—author of this article) who reside in New York City. Of the fifty-one dinners, thirty-five were recorded when Zoe was at the age of three (3: 7–9) and sixteen at the age of eight (8: 9–10). The recordings were transcribed over a two-year period (2015–2017) in their entirety using Jeffersonian notations (Hepburn & Bolden 2017) with some additional markings for visible conduct, and the analysis was conducted within a conversation analytic framework.

In addition to using the standard conversation analytic notations, a dash that connects the verbal and the nonverbal (or nonverbal and silence) represents co-occurrence between the two, and a tilde partial co-occurrence. For example,

'*nods*-yes. sure.' indicates that the participant utters "yes. sure." while nodding; '*nods*~yes, sure' means that the uttering of "yes" starts in the midst of the nodding; absence of the dash or tilde signals that "yes, sure" is produced after the nodding. When necessary, curly brackets are used to demarcate the beginning and ending of the simultaneous occurrence, as in '{*nods*-yes.} sure,' which means the nodding only co-occurs with "yes" but not "sure". Between two nonverbal activities, a comma indicates sequential (e.g. *nods*, *smiles*) and a slash simultaneous (e.g. *nods*/*smiles*) happenings.

From the fifty-one dinners, a collection of 129 of cases of 'collaboration' was built that comprise two broad sets of practices: cementing and complementing—73% of which fall into the category of 'cementing', and only 27% in the category of complementing. Cementing involves cases where one parent offers various sorts of reinforcements, when needed, to what the other is doing. Complementing, by contrast, entails rounding out what the other has just done or not done in various ways to achieve a whole of some sort (Figure 1). This idea of rounding out reminds me of a remark from a podcast, where the host comments on Ron Howard's account of growing up with his sibling: "Family is a band, so if you're already on trumpet and Dad's playing drums. I've got to play harmonica. What other instrument is left for me?"

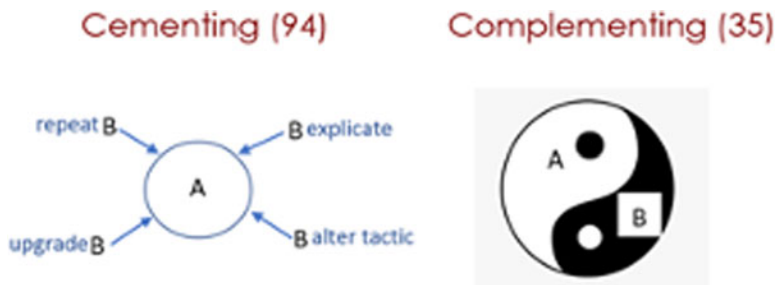


FIGURE 1. Cementing vs. complementing.

For the purpose of this article, my focus is on the smaller collection of complementing. Unlike cementing and its subcategories which appear to be somewhat straightforward to describe, complementing seem less so and more elusive—to me at least—and present a greater analytical challenge from the outset. I was drawn to the challenge.

## ANALYSIS

The larger practice of what I have glossed as 'complementing' is manifested in three specific ways as the co-parents merge their interactional roles by (i) merging speakership, (ii) merging reciprocity, and (iii) making adjustments to preserve the merged speakership and reciprocity (i.e. minimize division).

*Merge speakership*

In building merged speakership, one parent shows entitlement to finishing, modifying, or subtly diverging from what another as started. In the extract below, Mom and Dad are explaining ‘gotcha day’ to Zoe in response to her query in line 1, and our focus is on Dad’s turn in line 10.

- (1) ZD012712 and we got you 0650-0714  
 1 Zoe:           ↓gotcha ↑Da:[::y?       ]-gz down/BH hold spoon pointing down to bowl  
 2 Dad:                       [mhm?       ]  
 3 Mom:                               [>°wh’ we°<]-gz to Z  
 4                       GOT [chu.       [in China.  
 5 Zoe:                               [gz to M. [gz from M to bowl  
 6                               *starts slowly circling spoon in bowl*  
 7 Mom:       → we took the airplane and flew  
 8                       [a:ll the way to China. to get you.  
 9 Zoe:                       *[continues circling spoon in bowl with BH*



FIGURE 2. Extract 1 lines 08–09

- 10 Dad:       → and we Got you.  
 11 Mom:       and we GOT you. we were [so happy. ]  
 12 Dad:                                       [now you’re] here.  
 13 Mom:       °hh hh h°  
 14 Dad:                               gz to D->how’s that [sound.<]  
 15 Zoe:       gz on bowl/stops circling-[ can we ] go back to the hote:l?

Note that Mom’s initial explanation (line 4) briefly draws Zoe’s attention as the latter brings her gaze to and then away from Mom (line 5) and starts circling the spoon in her bowl (line 6), thus providing no uptake of Mom’s telling so far. Mom then expands her explication from “got you” (line 4) to “we took the airplane and flew all the way to China”, rendering the activity of “got you” hearably more action-packed. Still, at the completion points of Mom’s turn-constructural unit (TCU; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974) at “China” and then after the increment “to get you” (line 8), Zoe remains disengaged with the telling and engaged with her spoon-circling activity (line 9). It is at this juncture that Dad produces an increment “and we got you” (line 10).

With the *and*-preface, Dad frames what ensues as a continuation of what Mom has already brought to a completion, and that continuation takes the form of providing the outcome of the journey described by Mom. In particular, insofar as the upshot of

Mom's telling in line 8 may not be crystal clear for Zoe as it does not contain any reference back to 'gotcha'—the focus of the explication, Dad's continuation connects Mom's telling back to that focus and does so in an amplified way, as seen in the delivery of "got" with both stress and louder volume. Thus, Dad's attempt may be heard as continuing Mom's project of pursuing a response from Zoe (see also his explicit solicitation in line 14). As such, Dad treats himself as entitled to pursuing a response on Mom's behalf, which is endorsed by Mom via her repetition of Dad's version in line 11. She then reasserts her primary speakership through the addition of "we were so happy", offering an emotional climax to her story to further render recognizable the point of the story (Mandelbaum 2013). The collaborative work then is not without some subtle contestation of primary speakership rights. Despite both her parents' work, Zoe never provides the uptake repeatedly sought (line 15).

In the next extract, rather than engage in a telling, Mom and Dad enact merged speakership in collectively addressing Zoe's whiny protest (line 1) that she too wanted some miso soup (after it has been offered to Mom; data not shown). In response, Mom points out, after a brief insert expansion (lines 2–3), that Zoe has already been offered the soup ("you have it"), which is followed by the account that it's just "too hot right now" (line 4), characterizing the soup as "waiting" rather than not being on offer at all (line 5). The sequence is potentially complete at this point.

(2) ZD120911 blow on it 1735-1838

- 1 Zoe: Hey. ↑I was gonna have so:me.  
 2 Mom: you mean soup?  
 3 Zoe: *nods*  
 4 Mom: → you have it. *brings soup closer*-it's to- too hot right now.



FIGURE 3. Extract 2 line 04

- 5 't's waiting,  
 6 Dad: → y'want blow on it?



FIGURE 4. Extract 2 line 06

- 7 Zoe: *brings bowl closer*

Meanwhile, one might argue that Mom's account can itself constitute a first pair-part (Sacks 1992) that makes conditionally relevant Zoe's acceptance or rejection. Rather than wait for Zoe's response, however, Dad proceeds to suggest a solution to solve the 'hot' problem, that is, how Zoe can expedite the waiting period by blowing on it (line 6), thus transforming the next relevant action for Zoe into something much simpler to perform without, crucially, undermining Mom's explanation. Dad's turn is recognizable as a continuation (rather than a new beginning) of Mom's prior talk in this exercise of merged speakership in at least two ways. First, it is addressed to Zoe, rather than the immediately prior speaker Mom. Second, the pronoun "it" in "you wanna blow on it" ties back to the "it" in Mom's prior turn. While the problem statement in Mom's turn serves as an account for undermining the grounds for Zoe's complaint, it is transformed by Dad into the first part of a problem-solution sequence to be completed with his subsequent solution.

The final extract in this section demonstrates how merged speakership is enacted as the two parents target the child's problematic behavior even as they diverge in what specific aspects of the behavior they consider to be problematic. Prior to the following segment, Mom and Dad have repeatedly asked Zoe to turn off the DVD in preparation for dinner. As the segment begins, we see Zoe insist on "watching half of it" (line 1) and yell "stop talking like that" (lines 5–6) in response to Dad's unmitigated rejection (line 2), which she reiterates in line 13. This admonition (line 13) for Dad not to repeat his behavior in the future after she has given up the DVD player (line 7), along with Dad tidying away the DVD and the plate (line 14), may be produced by Zoe to mark the end of the sequence but clearly not treated as such by Mom and Dad. After all, an admonition makes conditionally relevant acceptance or rejection. My focus is on how Mom and Dad proceed thereafter.

- (3) ZD012612 and you should not 0116-0202
- 1 Zoe: I'm watching half of it.
- 2 Dad: *starts walking back to kitchen*-no you're not.
- 3 Zoe: [*releases arms from DVD player*]
- 4 Dad: [it's d- over for now. [s' you can watch af- ]
- 5 Zoe: *starts turning it off* -[ STOP TALKING ]
- 6 LIKE THA:T.
- 7 *pushes DVD slightly around and away*
- 8 Dad: Zoe?
- 9 Zoe: *pushes button, closes DVD player, tosses it on table away from self.*
- 10 Dad: °thank you,°
- 11 Mom: *reaches mat in front of Zoe*
- 12 Zoe: *yanks mat from M, slides it to the right away from M/gz on mat~*
- 13 [*remember don't talk like that.*]
- 14 Dad: [ *puts away DVD player* ] *moves plate out of way*
- 15 → *continues to clean up table-Zoe? if you would do*
- 16 [*what Daddy ↓asked n' Mommy*]





20, 22). Observe that Mom designs her turn as a tight continuation rather than either a new beginning or a competitive course of action (where a competitive rendering would be something like “but more importantly”), thus transforming Dad’s account as only a part, not the entirety, of the response to Zoe’s admonishing remark. This ‘continuing’ towards completion as opposed to ‘new’ hearing is also carried out in the decreasing volume of Mom’s turn (line 22). By supplanting the response-mobilizing potential of Dad’s turn to some extent, Mom displays an orientation to her merged speakership with Dad—one in which she is entitled to inserting her own distinct complaint in a way that complements, or at least does not overtly compete with, what Dad has just produced.

In this section, I have shown how Mom and Dad exercise merged speakership in a range of activities as they take up complementary positions in constructing a telling, addressing a complaint, and targeting problematic behaviors. One might note that what gets proffered by the co-parent in this merged speakership can deviate to various degrees from what the other has produced and is not always unproblematically accepted by the other. Regardless, it is in this achievement of merged speakership that the parents maintain at least the appearance of a united front for the child.

#### *Merge reciprocity*

There is also an orientation to merged reciprocity in response to, for example, Zoe’s requests, where one parent steps in when the other is unavailable, unable, or unwilling. In this first case below, Zoe is sitting at the table asking Dad, who is in the kitchen preparing dinner, to play gift-giving with her (lines 2–6).

- (4) ZD120611 here you go 0300-0420
- 1 Dad: *places bowl of bread on table and returns to kitchen*
- 2 Zoe: *lifts top of box, takes deep inbreath, puts top back on*  
 3 gi↑mme my thank you giving m- thank you (.) giving-  
 4 starts lifting box, turns to D-thank you- special giving  
 5 prese:nt.=daddy,  
 6 waves p in LH/body turned to kitchen-gimme it daddy:.
- 7 Dad: → *voice from kitchen-give you what:t?*
- 8 Zoe: *turns back to table/places down box-my thank you special- giving*  
 9 *thank you present.*
- 10 Mom: *brings fork from kitchen ~°>here you go?<°*  
 11 *[fork approaches and [reaches Z’s bowl*
- 12 Zoe: *[g follows fork [gimme my places box in front of M-special*  
 13 *thank you [giving present.*
- 14 Mom: → *[picks up box with RH and gives to Z/sits down-here you go.*
- 15 Zoe: *LH quick points to and retrieves from M-no.*
- 16 Mom: *what-still holds p*
- 17 Zoe: *[now give it to me.]*
- 18 Mom: *[ gives p to Z with BH ]*

19 Zoe: .HH-takes/widened eyes//open mouth  
20 you wanna see it?

Note that Zoe's first pair-part request is specifically addressed to Dad both with the latched "daddy" and with the turning of her body towards the kitchen where Dad is. We hear no uptake upon the possible completion of Zoe's TCU in line 5. It is only after she continues with a new TCU that repeats her request in line 6 that Dad launches an insert expansion that initiates repair (line 7). Most notably, upon Zoe's completion of the insert expansion in line 9, it is not Dad, but Mom who produces, without waiting for Dad to respond, the base second pair-part that grants Zoe's request, thus prioritizing progressivity (Stivers & Robinson 2006). By intervening as such without any delay, mitigation, or account, Mom claims her entitlement to merged reciprocity with Dad, and that claim remains unchallenged by either Dad or Zoe, who starts instructing Mom to hand over the gift properly (lines 14, 16). This merged reciprocity, however, is not always accepted by Zoe whose talk is being received. In another very similar example (data not shown) where Zoe at the dinner table with Mom turns to ask Dad in the kitchen to open her drink, Mom's offer is immediately rejected with "No I want my dada to".

In the next example, Dad's verbal response leaves Zoe's request yet to be fulfilled, and merged reciprocity is enacted by Mom in the form of a gestural completion (Olsher 2005; Keevallik 2018). The segment begins with Zoe summoning Dad's attention (line 1) and asking for "some water" (line 3).

(5) ZD010712 fetch water 0129-0202  
1 Zoe: Dada?-gz down  
2 Dad: mhm?- gz down  
3 Zoe: can I have some [↓wa:ter,  
4 Dad: [picks up broccoli with fork  
5 (0.8)-D shifts gz to Z/chews/LH holds fork with broccoli  
6 → mhm?-continues gesture from line 5

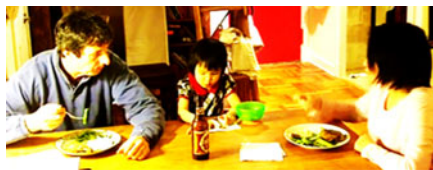


FIGURE 7. Extract 5 line 05

7 Dad: [continues gesture from line 05 with head slightly turning more to Z]  
8 Zoe: =[ wa:::::ter.-gz down/singsongy enunciation of 'water' ]  
9 Mom: → [ puts down fork, ]



FIGURE 8. Extract 5 lines 07-09

10 Mom: *turn to stands up, goes to kitchen to fetch water*



FIGURE 9. Extract 5 line 10

11 Dad: *gz back to food*  
 12 Zoe: *to D w:oof. turns head woof.*

Note that Zoe's request, which makes conditionally relevant a granting or rejection, is directed to Dad specifically, and there are some indications that Dad is not about to suspend his business of eating at the moment to attend to Zoe's request. In line 4, upon hearing Zoe's "Can I have some", he does not halt to gear up for any activity that Zoe's emerging request might require. Upon the completion of Zoe's request, he simply shifts his gaze to her as he continues chewing during that (0.8) second gap of silence (line 5), a feature of a dispreferred response that makes evident the absence of "yes" (Pomerantz 1984). What he ends up producing in line 6 as he continues chewing is a minimal "mhm" in rising intonation (not a "hm?" or "huh?" that would serve as a repair initiation) hearable as a proforma granting, tantamount to saying "yes" to "Can you pass the salt?" without actually passing the salt. This "mhm?", of course, especially during parent-child interaction, can also be heard as a granting of permission, except that at the age of three Zoe is not yet capable of getting the water herself. In other words, by line 8, Zoe's request remains unfulfilled. It is at this juncture that she enunciates "water" in a stretched-out singsongy intonation, thus initiating what can be heard as a post-expansion that reiterates the core element of her original first pair-part request while Dad remains literally 'unmoved' as he continues chewing and gazing at Zoe with the broccoli-laden fork in hand (line 7). It is also at this point that Mom, immediately after Dad's "mhm", puts down her fork (line 9) and stand up to get the water (line 10), thus transforming Dad's "mhm" from a nominal granting to merely the

beginning of one that precedes the actual fulfillment of Zoe's request. As such, Mom asserts herself as a de facto co-recipient of Zoe's original request even though that request is directed specifically to Dad. As can be seen, this merged reciprocity is also treated by Dad and Zoe as natural and not warranting any accounts. Dad returns to eating without, for example, thanking Mom (line 11), and Zoe returns to playing (line 12) without objecting to Mom's stepping in.

The final case of this section is slightly different, where it is Zoe who invokes her parents' merged reciprocity in a request sequence. As can be seen, her initial request to open the door is directed to Dad (lines 2–3).

- (6) ZD121911 gets up to open door 1240-1345
- 1 Dad:           *feeds-°there. alright.°*
- 2 Zoe:           *gets off chair, to D-↓now can you*
- 3                *open the d[oo:r?]*
- 4 Dad:    →                *[you o]pen the door.*
- 5 Zoe:           *runs to door, tries to open, runs back to M~ c↑a:n't.*
- 6 Mom:    →           *gets up to go with Zoe to open door*
- 7                *comes back to table with food, shakes head*

In response to Zoe's request, Dad produces a counter which reverses the directionality of the adjacency pair and makes conditionally relevant Zoe's acceptance or rejection: "you open the door" (line 4). Zoe complies by running to the door and tries to open it—unsuccessfully. She then runs back from the door with the account "can't" (line 5). Insofar as this is an account for failure to complete a directive issued by Dad, one would assume that it would be produced for the benefit of Dad and directed to Dad, who might then recalibrate his initial response to Zoe's request based on this new development. By bringing her account to Mom instead, Zoe positions Mom as entitled to merged reciprocity, despite Dad being the addressed recipient, of not just this account but also, by extension, her original request. Indeed, Zoe's "can't" is treated by Mom as an implicit request, which she proceeds to fulfill without any delay, mitigation, or account (line 6), thus confirming Zoe's positioning, which Dad does not take issue with either.

In sum, the parents' merged reciprocity is often (although not always) treated by the participants as a given as evidenced in the un-accounted-for switching of characters in any unfolding scene. In these request sequences, enacting such merged reciprocity involves fulfilling the child's request on behalf of another when it has become clear that the latter is unable or unwilling, and it can be initiated by the parent or invoked by the child. In sequential terms, this means producing the conditionally relevant base second pair-part after an insert expansion initiated by the first parent, transforming the first parent's nominal granting into the beginning of an actual granting in the second pair-part position, and accepting and fulfilling the child's implicit request after her failure to carry out the counter directive initiated by the first parent. Put otherwise, one parent steps in the sequential slot

prepared for the other as a co-recipient of the child's request—unapologetically and without hesitation.

*Make adjustments to minimize division*

It is perhaps not surprising that in exercising their merged speakership and merged reciprocity, the parents can sometimes risk producing redundant or more overtly diverging actions. In such cases, we would observe one parent making adjustments to minimize that redundancy or divergence, thus preserving their merged interactional roles. In the first example below, Mom abandons her gesturing for speaking. As can be seen, Zoe drops her dumpling and recruits help (Drew & Kendrick 2018), without directing her gaze to any specific parent, to clean up the mess (lines 1, 4). In response, both Mom and Dad reach out to her with napkins (line 6), with Mom being positioned slightly farther away from Zoe.

- (7) ZD120611 on her arm 1402-1421  
 1 Zoe: *drops dumpling from fork*  
 2 Dad: >oh-<  
 3 Zoe: *quick look at right arm*  
 4 *tries to pick up dumpling on table with fork °can you- (c'you)°*  
 5 [(syl)  
 6 [*D & M both reach with napkin*



FIGURE 10. Extract 7 line 06

- 7 Dad: → [*wipes table*  
 8 Mom: → [*retracts-on her arm.*



FIGURE 11. Extract 7 lines 07-08

- 9 *both D and Z shift gz to Z right arm*  
 10 Dad: *what.*  
 11 Mom: *points-inside arm.*

Note that at the same time Dad proceeds to wipe the table, Mom retracts her gesture and switches to a verbal instruction, directing Dad to a spot that needs wiping which Dad is missing (lines 7–8). In other words, Mom repositions herself in this merged reciprocity to render her participation complementary to, rather than competitive with, that of Dad's.

In the next example, Mom adjusts from starting a gesture to dropping that gesture. Note that Zoe's "now can you open the door" is directed specifically to Mom (line 2). In response, Mom puts down her spoon and turns to get up to open the door (line 4).

- (8) ZD121911 sits back 1240-1345
- 1 Zoe: woof woof, *M picks up spoonful for Z, Z takes bite, chews to M*-↓now can you open the doo:r?
- 2
- 3 [turns to get off chair ][halts
- 4 Mom: → puts down spoon, [turns to get up ][halts
- 5 Dad: → [points, checks bowl ][takes bowl->°alright.°<

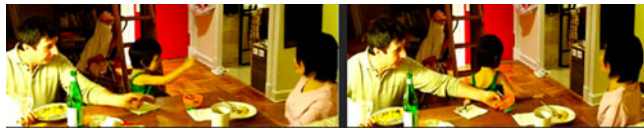


FIGURE 12. Extract 8 line 05

- 6 one more >Zo[e, then I'll open the door.<
- 7 Mom: → [sits back



FIGURE 13. Extract 8 Lines 06-07

- 8 Zoe: [turns to D
- 9 [away from D [back to D
- 10 Dad: [stirs with spoon oka[y? scoops, feeds oh finish that one.
- 11 Zoe: singing voice

At the exact same time as Mom turns to rise from the chair, Dad points to Zoe's bowl in a checking gesture (line 5), thereby incurring two diverging actions: Mom about to grant Zoe's request, and Dad searching for an account to potentially reject that request, or at least postponing the granting contingent upon whether Zoe has

finished eating. We then see Mom halt her movement as Dad takes the bowl and proceeds to get Zoe to take one more bite (lines 3, 5). This is followed by Dad's conditional granting (Waring 2020): "One more Zoe, then I'll open the door". Around the possible completion of Dad's "one more Zoe", we see Mom sit back, now fully abandoning her trajectory of granting, leaving Zoe the space to comply with Dad's directive of "one more". In other words, Mom makes the adjustment to abandon her incipient gestural granting, allowing for Dad's request to proceed, and in so doing, minimizes any confusion or mixed message for the child and maximizes the appearance of a united front.

In this final case of this section, we observe an instance of adjustment made preemptively. The segment begins with the parents' talk about daycare cost and schedule (lines 2–3, 5–7, 11), in the midst of which Zoe starts to grab the DVD (line 4). Although Dad's address term in lines 9 and 13 appear to project a directive of some sort to divert Zoe's attention away from the ongoing activity of grabbing the DVD player (Kent 2011), our focus is on Dad's response to Zoe's explicit request "can I watch TV?" (line 14).

- (9) ZD012612 mommy says okay 1610-1635
- 1 Zoe: can we watch TV? plea:se,-tries to climb on D's lap
- 2 Dad: °so expensive.°-places Z on lap
- 3 Mom: >w- it's< the sa:me.
- 4 Zoe: tries to stand up to reach DVD
- 5 Dad: I guess you're right. it'll [be the same. right.]
- 6 Mom: [exactly the same. ]
- 7 but it's a pain to go to school [°syl°
- 8 Zoe: [RH reaches/grabs dvd player
- 9 Dad: [ZOE,
- 10 Zoe: [retrieves RH
- 11 Mom: °four days a week.°
- 12 Zoe: LH reaches for dvd player
- 13 Dad: ~ZOE:,
- 14 Zoe: grabs dvd player and moves it closer to self-can I watch T:V:?
- 15 Dad: → nu- u:m, sighs/gz to M



FIGURE 14. Extract 9 line 15

- 16 Mom: → one nod
- 17 Dad: → gz to Z -↓alright. °mommy says gz to M-okay.°





FIGURE 15. Extract 9 line 17

18                                    could you not sit on my lap cuz I wanna get up and go.

Although Zoe's request (lines 1, 14) is not directed towards any specific parent with her gaze, given that Dad is the one she is climbing over (line 1) and the one who reacts to her ongoing activity of reaching the DVD (line 13)—the core object for her request, we may perhaps safely assume that Dad is the primary recipient—at least at this moment. As the primary recipient, Dad starts responding with an incipient rejection, in line with the overall trajectory of the action sequence here, where Zoe is doing something sanctionable at the dinner table, in part evidenced in the chastising-intoned “Zoe” earlier (lines 9, 13). In other words, a rejection appears to be the most ‘natural’ response at this juncture, and to deviate from that response, which Dad seems to be doing with the cut-off, would require some sort of account—one he seems to be having some difficulty finding, as seen in the hesitation-marker “um” (Lerner 2013) and the subsequent sigh (line 15). Given the ‘naturalness’ of rejection at this juncture, deviating from the rejection could also potentially incur objection from the other parent. With the gaze check-in then, Dad orients to Mom, in this moment of indecision, as a shared recipient of Zoe's request, and by extension, one equally responsible for the ultimate decision of acceptance or rejection—a positioning quickly accepted and acted upon by Mom although she has not made any explicit claim to merged reciprocity up to this point. As shown, Mom produces a single, quick nod (line 16), which allows Dad to deliver his granting as a decision not just made by him but endorsed by “mommy” (line 17). What we have witnessed here then is some explicit orientation to upholding merged reciprocity as Dad makes adjustment to minimize, not actual, but potential divergence, and as Mom aligns with that adjustment without any delay or questioning.

It is worth noting that these cases of adjusting appear to exhibit what Deppermann & Schmidt (2021:372) refer to as ‘micro-sequential coordination’, where in directive and instruction sequences, the second pair-part adjusts incrementally in response to the emerging first pair-part. Such micro-adjustments are evident in all my cases as well, except that these adjustments unfold within the space of a single turn rather than a sequence, and more importantly, they embody another iteration of the complementing work done by the parents on the family ‘band’.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I hope to have shown that the work of collaboration, and in particular, the work of complementing, is nuanced and complex. The co-parents take up myriad complementary positions on the family ‘band’ to project the appearance of maintaining a united front—by assembling merged speakership and merged reciprocity and by making adjustments to minimize division, all of which appear to be designed to maximize progressivity (Stivers & Robinson 2006). One may, for example, build merged speakership by adjusting the response relevance of the co-parent’s first pair-part and enact merged reciprocity by fulfilling a request addressed to another. In the case of any emerging threat to the integrity of the unified front in the form of redundant or divergent courses of action, one may make adjustment to sidestep or minimize that threat (e.g. mutual checking before committing to a response). As such, while *merge speakership* and *merge reciprocity* are addressed to achieving a ‘whole’ of some sort, *make adjustment to minimize division* is invoked specifically to maintain the integrity of that ‘whole’. In other words, parents can design their talk in myriad ways that display at times (i) elevated rights to sequentially interfere with and modify each other’s turns at talk without causing any interactional friction, and (ii) heightened sensitivity to each other’s unfolding actions by engaging micro-adjustments that curtail any compromise to their merged speakership or reciprocity.

Insofar as complementing to a large extent involves responding to first pair-parts that call for immediate responses in the physical environment (e.g. open the door, get the water), one might surmise that it might be the specific nature of these responses that incurs and facilitates the work of complementing. The vocal and visible resources often deployed to accomplish the activity of granting, for example, would naturally afford the possibility of a division of labor. One might also have noticed that even within these cases where the two parents largely converge in their endeavors, there remains various degrees of divergence, and the work of complementing in part entails managing such divergence, which is, of course, most pronounced in the case of making adjustments. But even in the case of merged reciprocity where one steps in because the other is simply unwilling as Dad rejects Zoe’s request to open the door with a counter directive (“you open the door”), and in the case of Mom’s gestural completion where Dad produces a minimal “mhm” without getting up to fetch the water, the two diverge in their readiness to give what Zoe asks. To some extent then, we are witnessing the work of complementing as one offloads, and the other picks up the slack, so to speak. A still subtler form of divergence may be observed in the case where Dad targets Zoe’s behavior and Mom her tone of voice in their joint admonition. And again, it is the work of complementing that renders the however subtle divergence virtually or at least somewhat invisible.

Findings contribute to the growing literature on parent-child interaction that has yet to spotlight the practices of co-parenting as well as the literature on collaboration in interaction by detailing what that collaboration may look like in the domestic

workspace of co-parenting. At the same time, such ‘homegrown’ practices as *merge speakership*, *merge reciprocity*, and *make adjustment to minimize division* are not by any means, or not in principle, bound to the home territory. One can easily imagine their deployment in a wide range of workspaces beyond the domestic sphere. From the perspective of language socialization, one might also wonder about what the child is absorbing from these encounters. She is clearly being exposed to the ways in which two adults work together when they are not always, and not fully, on the same page. To what extent she is attuning to these ways of work or learning about matters such as division of labor or decision making remains an empirical question. So does the issue of whether the parental practices change over time, whether the child learns, for example, to request differently over time, and whether the parents adjust their responses accordingly over time.

## APPENDIX : TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	continuing intonation
-	abrupt cut-off
::	prolonging of sound
<u>word</u>	stress; the more underlining, the greater the stress
<b>WORD</b>	loud speech
°word°	quiet or even quieter speech
↑word	raised pitch
↓word	lowered pitch
> word <	quicker speech
<	jump start or rushed start
hh	aspiration or laughter
.hh	inhalation
[ ]	beginning and ending of simultaneous conduct
=	latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker
(2.4)	length of a silence in tenths of a second
(.)	micro-pause, 0.2 second or less
words	nonverbal conduct
words, words	consecutive occurrence of nonverbal conduct
words/words	co-occurrence of nonverbal conduct
words-words	co-occurrence of nonverbal and verbal conduct
words ~ words/words	onset of verbal or nonverbal in the midst of nonverbal
gz	gaze
LH	left hand
RH	right hand
BH	both hands

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