

Co-creation of contrastive versions in child custody disputes: Courtroom audio recordings and the invisible child

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This presentation builds on audios from high stakes practices, courtroom examinations of parents in disputes about child custody. In this institutional context, neither the court, nor the researcher has access to the child's own view, merely to courtroom reconstructions. The child is not heard or seen during the proceedings, but is recurrently made "visible" in contrastive narratives from which the court has to decide about what is in the child's best interest. One conversational resource for *animating* courtroom storytelling is *reported speech*, as in talk about crying, shouting and protesting. Another resource is *reported affects*, as in reported expressions of fear or anger. Such reports are related to embodied descriptions of the other party's actions, e.g. when actions are explicitly attributed to someone or cast as impersonal ('stepfather spanked the child' versus 'the child got a spanking'). This involves *contested vision* (Goodwin, 1994; 2006) when different professionals contest each other's version.

Information technology may amplify hostility. Children's access to mobile phones recurrently involves *contested connectedness*, as in parental surveillance of the child (and other parent). In some cases, this technology might legitimize problematic childcare arrangements. In courtroom blame accounts (Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1995), information technology recurrently becomes a tool where children are to monitor conflicts that neither their parents, nor the court have been able to handle.

Hostility in courtroom talk is co-construed by attorneys and parents in orderly ways. One conversational resource, deployed by opponent side attorneys is the *negative interrogative* format (Heritage, 2002; e.g. 'So you don't care about the children's own views?').

In brief, the recordings reveal a number of ways in which courtroom participants invoke affects and embodied actions, fuelled by and fuelling ongoing disputes. It can be noted that some of the analysts' problems in documenting social action are similar to those of the participants themselves.