

# Variations in fathers' discourse on fatherhood and in family alliances during infancy

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*The aim of this pilot study is to analyse the discourse of fathers of toddlers concerning fatherhood and the link between some particularities in the discourse and family alliance. The sample consists of 13 Swiss first time fathers (5 fathers of girls and 8 of boys). In order to evaluate the paternal discourse, the fathers were given a semi-structured interview, which was later analysed using the research package Alceste. The family alliance, i.e., the degree of coordination among the partners when executing a task together, was assessed through the Lausanne Trilogue Play (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999). The main results indicated an interesting link between classes of paternal discourse grouped around the following themes "affective relationship", "daily routine" and "educational goals", and the family alliance (defined in two major categories; functional and problematic alliances). Finally, clinical perspectives on links between paternal representations and family functioning at an interactive level are discussed.*

## Introduction

Our representations help us to orient ourselves in our lives, in relation to others as well as to the physical world. Many studies have shown the effects of parents' representations or ideas on the parental behavior toward the child (Goodnow, 1988; Vandenplas-Holper, 1987). From this it would be possible to imagine that the way a man perceives his role as a father, his perspective of the articulation between his and the mother's role, is linked to his way of being in the family; this would show through in his engagement in his daily care of the child. In this way, representations of oneself as someone who's capable of shouldering both typically masculine as well as feminine gender roles (i.e., androgyny) is linked to the father's engagement in the daily routine care. In fact, one finds significantly more androgyny in fathers who are very engaged compared to those who are only rarely engaged in the daily care of their children (Frascarolo, Chillier, & Robert-Tissot, 1996).

Future parents' (when expecting their first child) capacity to project themselves in the future as a triad with interactions as a threesome is linked to their real interactions with their child at the age of three months. Thus the threesome interactions in these families are more harmonious than those observed in families in which the parents to be had a tendency to project themselves into the future only as a dyad (two parent-child dyads placed side by side) than as a triad (Von Klitzing, Bürgin, Antusch, & Amsler, 1995). Besides, parents with positive expectations of their interactions with the child to be born do in fact have more harmonious interactions once the child is born (McHale, Kazali, Rotman, Talbot, Carleton, & Lieberman, 2004).

The link between representations and behaviours can be bidirectional. Thus, accounts of birth, given by fathers two or three days after their first child was born, witness of an upheaval similar to mothers' experiences; excitement to the point of feeling depersonalised, a description of a perfect baby, who carries traits which resembles to themselves a lot, etc. (Greenberg & Morris, 1974). These authors talk about man's "engrossment" (literally "absorption") during paternity. They suppose that this phenomenon is inherited and "brought into present" by the early contacts between father and infant. In fact, a comparison between a control group of fathers not having assisted to the birth shows that fathers who made immediate contact with their infant are more enthusiastic, take more active part in the care of their infant and play more with the child than fathers in the control group. This effect was replicated even when the experimenter introduced moments of private interaction (i.e., without the mother) between father and the infant during the two first days of life (Keller, Hildebrandt, & Richards, 1985). Thus, it seems that interactions (early contacts) are linked to representations of fatherhood which in return are linked to behaviour (paternal engagement).

The father's representations of himself and of his role are thus linked to his relationship with his child and also, they influence the quality of his interactions with her. Nevertheless, let's not forget that the father-child dyad is part of the total family system father-mother-child(ren).

According to the general systems theory, the total family system cannot be reduced to the sum of the sub-systems which compose it. Thus, every family member's characteristics and every sub-system which compose the whole system plays a role in the global functioning of the system. In other words, every sub-system is connected to the other sub-systems. For example, in a free play situation, when she's alone with her child aged 12 months, the mother is less controlling and more often simply observing in families where the father is very engaged in the daily care of the child than it is in those where he's less engaged (Frascarolo, 1997).

Consequently, it could be interesting to see whether there is a link between fathers' representations and family interactions without limiting our observation to father-infant interactions. Thus, the analysis of the whole family system instead of only father-child or mother-child (Minuchin, 1985; Parke, 1990), is even more justified considering the fact that it is usually within a multi-person system that the child's development takes place (Dunn, 1991).

However, family interactions, like a triadic family play between father, mother and child, have a much higher degree of complexity than a dyadic parent-infant play in the sense that there are several threesomes implied, whereas the dyad only contains two possible

configurations; a dyad or two single persons. From this follows that the triad can interact according to four configurations: the active mother-infant dyad in front of father in a third party position, the inverse with the active father-infant dyad in front of mother in a third party position, the parents as an active dyad in front of the infant in a third party position and finally a configuration in which the three partners are active together.

To apprehend the complexity of triangular interactions, Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery (1999) elaborated a model based on the study of triangular father-mother-infant interactions in the different configurations described above. According to these authors, it is necessary to decompose the interactions in order to evaluate them and they suggest that this should be done by considering four functions: participation, organisation, focalisation and affective contact, which correspond to the following questions:

- 1) participation: is everyone included or is anybody excluded or does he/she exclude him/herself? Thus, participation concerns availability to interact with the others (Stern, 1981). This function is fulfilled if all the members are included and available to the interaction;
- 2) organisation: does everyone respect his/her role, attributed to him/her according to the scenario, as an active member (engaged in playing) or as a participant-observer? The question here is to see whether those who should be active are and if those who should be third-party observers don't interfere. In a certain way, it would be possible to claim that this is linked to the concept of respecting turn-taking in verbal exchanges (Duncan & Fiske, 1985; Fogel, 1977);
- 3) focalisation: do they all share the same centre of interest? This third function concerns a common focus (Bruner, 1978; Singer, Wynne & Toohey, 1978). This comes down to see if everyone takes part in the co-construction of the game that is played (if he/she is an active member) or follows the play (if he/she is in a participant-observer position);
- 4) affective contact: do they share affects, are they on the same wavelengths? Thus, the fourth and last function concerns sharing emotions. Here one observes if the members are attuned on an affective level.

The family's way of fulfilling these four functions makes it possible to distinguish their level of family alliance, defined as the degree of coordination developed by the family members as they make an effort to work together in order to complete a task. Four kinds of alliances, from the most dysfunctional to the most functional, have been defined and developed (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999): (1) disorganised alliance, characterised by a very low degree of coordination between the members is usually observed in families with a severe psychopathology (Gertsch Bettens, Favez, Corboz-Warnery, & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 1992); (2) collusive alliance, defined by a kind of competition between the parents, often observed in families with an unnegotiable conflict between the parents who divert their marital tensions onto their relationship with the child (Vogel & Bell, 1960); (3) stressed alliance indicates families whose difficulties in coordination are linked to stress; and finally, (4) cooperative alliance is observed in families who succeed in sharing pleasure independently of the configuration in which they happen to interact.

Up till now there has been a lot of research on mothers' representations as well as on dyadic relationships between mother-infant and father-infant and their influence on the child's development (Lamb, 1997; Parke, 1996; Pleck, 1997; Zaouche-Gaudron, 2001a,b). Furthermore, studies of the couple and of its influence on parent-child relationship (Frascarolo & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2003) and on the child development have become abundant (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Rouyer, 2001; Rouyer & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2000; Zaouche-Gaudron, 2002). Studies on the family system also begin to emerge (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). However, the link between the individual parental level, especially paternal, and the family level is still rarely studied, and this is one of the main interests of the pilot study presented here.

The general aim of this pilot study is thus to analyse the discourse of fathers of 18-months-old toddlers, to try to grasp their experiences and representations of fatherhood and finally to investigate the existence of any relationship between certain characteristics in this discourse and family alliances. Thus, the study investigates the link between fathers' representations as they appear in words chosen by fathers as they talk about fatherhood and their roles as fathers, and the family's threesome mother-father-child interaction in which they take part, translated in terms of family alliance (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999).

Even if the family alliance, that is, the degree of coordination in the triangular family interactions, is quite stable (Favez, Frascarolo, Carneiro, Montfort, Corboz-Warnery, & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2002), the age of 18 months is especially interesting since the "crises" of birth is over and the transition to parenthood is more or less achieved. In other words, at that age, the young child enters a new developmental stage and begins to use symbols and linguistic tools. It seems clear then, that to study family interactions and father's discourse makes a lot of sense, since the child will use his parents as a model to develop his linguistic capacities, in particular to construct his vocabulary but also to develop his non-verbal communication skills.

Finally, in a clinical perspective, to show any possible link between fathers' values and concerns and the quality of family interactions could provide some guidance for supporting young parents, as well as to nourish political preventive measures.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample was composed by 13 first-time fathers (5 with daughters and 8 with sons). Among them, 5 came from a low or middle level socioeconomic environment (i.e., both parents were uneducated or at least one of the parents went to a professional school or made an apprenticeship). The fathers' mean age was 32 years old (the standard deviation for fathers was 4; 6 years and 2; 6 years for mothers).

All families were non-patients, that is, they volunteered for the study. They were randomly chosen from a bigger sample among 50 Swiss families, who participated in a longitudinal study on the transition to parenthood, and they were seen at the 6th months of pregnancy, and at 3, 9 and 18 months after birth (Frascarolo & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2003). Data collected at 18 months were used for the present study.

### *Situations and technical apparatus*

In order to evaluate fathers' discourses, they were invited into our office where they participated in a semi-structured interview, which lasted for about one hour. The main subjects touched upon in the interview were (the questions which were used as a thread in the interviews can be found in the Appendix):

- differences between father and mother (love, instinct, role, behaviour);
- educational principles and goals (before and after the child's birth, in relation to the ones the fathers received themselves);
- changes in the father's life (in particular in his family, marriage, with friends and professional relationships) since he became a father;

Each interview was recorded on video and transcribed in its integrity.

The "Lausanne Trilogue Play", the LTP (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Frascarolo, & Corboz-Warnery, 1998) was used to evaluate the family alliance. This semi-standardised situation is a

tool which is used for the analysis of triadic father-mother-infant interactions. The parents and their toddler are installed in a triangle around a small circular table. The toddler is seated in a high chair adapted to the table. Diverse toys (animals, lego, cups and plates in plastic, a small hair brush, a vehicle) are put on the table at the family disposal. The situation is recorded by two cameras: one, which films the parents and the other films the toddler. The two pictures are also joined together in one screen with a chronometer.

After a moment of contact making, the family is invited to play, for about fifteen minutes, according to the following scenario:

- 1) one of the parents plays with the child, the other is simply present;
- 2) the parents reverse their roles;
- 3) they play together as a threesome;
- 4) and finally the child is in a third-party position in front of the parents who discuss with each other.

The parent who started to play was defined by the researchers in advance in order to avoid any possible effect of order.

### *Coding and analysis*

The data collected from the interviews represented about a 200 pages corpus which has been analysed by the help of a software called "Alceste" (version 3.2; Reinert, 1996<sup>1</sup>). This statistic tool, which has the advantage of not demanding any prior knowledge of the analysed text, allowed to classify the different statements according to the vocabulary that the persons who were interviewed produced. It also has the advantage of establishing "a spatial organisation of sense" (Reinert, 1992) in order to "determine how the elements which constitute the text are organised" (op. cit.).

The aim is to construct "elementary context in unit classes (E.C.U.)" put together on the basis of the distribution and the co-occurrence of the words implied. In this analysis, 1528 E.C.U.s were classified (or 49.21% of the E.C.U.). Then "these fragments are statistically classified according to a hierarchical downward procedure, in a algorithimique way" (Castro, Blanchet, Santiago-Delefosse, & Hasse, 2003). This method, Downward Hierarchical Classification (D.H.C.) localizes the strongest oppositions in the words from the text and then it extracts classes with stable statements. The classes which are obtained have no meaning nor can they be interpreted in other ways than in their position of opposition, in a system with antithetical relations. The Alceste method aims to grasp the dynamics in the verbal production through its "conflictual" nature, an important principle for the interpretation of the lexical classes obtained (Kalampalikis, 2003). The standard analysis of the Alceste software implies two classifications in order to avoid all influence from interruptions in the text and to assure stability.

Note that the persons who worked on the interview data ignored to which family alliance the families coming from the sample belonged to.

In order to establish the degree of family alliance, the triangular interactions between father-mother-infant were coded according to a coding system: Centre for Family Studies' Evaluation Scale of Triadic Interaction, specific for families with 18-months-old children (Sylvén, Weber, & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2002).

According to this scale, four dimensions, linked to the four communication functions described in the introduction, are evaluated for each and every one of the four parts in the LTP:

- Body and gaze participation: the members, by their body's position and the direction of their gaze, are included in the triangle that they form and are available for each other.
- Body and gaze organisation: by the way their body and their gaze are directed, the parents clearly show their roles (as active partners or participant-observers).

- The child adapts to the parents' organisation and remains oriented towards the active parent(s). On the gestural level, one can easily distinguish the different roles between the parents by the fact that only one parent uses gestures to invite the child to play and that the parent in the third party position doesn't interfere. In other words, the child only plays with the active parent or with both when they are both active.
- Focalisation: the three members share a common interest and co-construct a shared game, or, in the twosome situations, the third follows what the other two are doing.
- Finally, affective contact, on an expressive level: warmth and complicity are observed between all members in the family. Affects circulate among them all. The aim of the game, that is, playful shared pleasure, is obtained.

Every dimension receives a score between 0 (inappropriate), 1 (partially inappropriate) and 2 (appropriate). All scores are added together in order to obtain a score for each part of the LTP as well as a global score, determining the alliance, which is obtained by the sum of the scores in the 4 parts (see Frascarolo, Favez, Carneiro, & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2004, for a validation study).

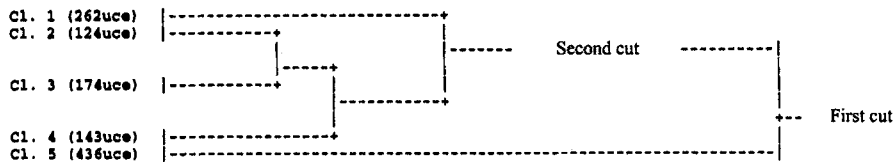
Since the sample only consists of 13 families, two categories of families were defined based on the alliance scores, on the one hand functional alliances and, on the other hand, dysfunctional or problematic alliances.

The coders were completely unaware of the aim of the present study. The inter-judge agreement was evaluated on 30% of the sample by the Kappa de Cohen index. They are situated between .64 and .73, which signifies a satisfactory agreement according to Fleiss' criteria (1981).

## Results

### *Paternal discourse*

The analysis of the corpus, conducted by the help of the software "Alceste", made it possible to establish 5 categories characterised by the vocabulary's specificity, presented in Figure 1. The first class constituted 18.46% of the total corpus, the second 12.37%, the third 17.87%, the fourth 10.27%, and finally, the fifth class, which was the most important, included 41% of the total corpus. The designation of the classes (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) was arbitrarily given by the software.



*Figure 1. Hierarchical downward procedure*

*Note.* The first cut splits the corpus into two parts. The first is composed by class 5 and the second of class 1, 2, 3 and 4. The second algorithm's iteration of classification will separate class 1 into the first branch. The second branch puts class 4 in a unique position and also, in turn, splits into two where you find class 2 and 3 coming from the other branch. Classe 1 represents 18,46% of the whole corpus, classe 2 represents 12,37%, classe 3 represents 17,87%, classe 4 represents 10,27% and classe 5 represents 41% of the whole corpus.

The words and specific verbs in each class are presented in Table 1. The order of the words and verbs is linked to the specificity of the class that they belong to.

Table 1

*Lexical worlds for each category*

	Affective relationship	Daily	Differences in parents' roles	Health concerns	Education
	Class 1 18,46%	Class 2 12,37%	Class 3 17,87%	Class 4 10,27%	Class 5 41%
	Socio-professional levels				
Classes	Privileged		Middle-low		
Substantives	Father Pregnancy Birth First Mother Father Role Evolution Strong New Impression Relationship	Morning Week Evening Time Week-end Great Day-care center Child Night Chance Courage	Love Woman Man Instinct Different Maternal Paternal Parental Spouse Game Sex Physical Character Boy	Hospital Hand Minute Bread Meal Ill Pasta Table Bad Water Food	Curious Principle Education Absolutely People Idea Quality Good Concrete
Verbs	Feel Give birth Construct Become Breastfeed Experience	Take Come home Go out Change Prefer Leave Sleep Take up	Bring Exist	Eat Fall (ill) Wake up Arrive	Try Do Say Love Pass by
Useful words	Believe Be obliged "I believe"	Seem Want I, me, My, mine	"I think"	We You Can	Say Have to
Tenses used for the auxiliaries "be" and "have"	Present			Past	Future

The five classes represent different "semantic worlds", which means groups of words with associations structuring the discourse (Reinert, 1992).

The first class, called "Affective relationship", is based on three interviews. It is correlated with parents coming from a privileged socio-economic level. This semantic universe is characterised by elements revolving around the establishment of a relationship with the baby. Thus, the words used here show that these fathers refer to their spouses pregnancy, to the child's birth, to breastfeeding, in short to the successive evolutions which came about after the birth. They underline the relationship between the mother and the child, and the place of the father in the role that he has in relation to the child. Adjectives used here express a positive relationship: "strong", "new", "pleasant", ... They also express that the presence of the first child brings about something new in the father's life. The tempus used is the present, even if some of the events that are mentioned belong to the past. The present relationship has become well established during the 18 months which have gone by.

The second class, "daily routines", is structured around interviews made with four fathers and is not correlated to the child's gender, nor to the parents' socio-professional environment. These terms are in a homogeneous way based on managing time ("week, weekend, evening, to come home and to leave home"...), and on rhythm ("to get up, to sleep, to change the infant"...). However, the adjectives used here indicate positive dynamics in relation to the daily routines "brilliant, luck" even if the fathers tell of hard work and that one needs "courage". We found a very important use of the personal pronouns "I" or "me" and the

possessive pronoun “my”, based on a strong engagement by the fathers as persons in the daily life with their child.

In these two classes, we also find the use of modal verbs; in the first “believe, shall”, and in the second: “appear, want”, and these are “characteristics often associated to action statements” (Reinert, 1993). The significant use of many verbs further strengthens the interpretation of “action statements” that are present in the discourse.

The third class, called “difference between parents’ roles”, is based on an interview with only one father. The distinction between parents’ roles is clearly established, especially through words in couples, “man-woman”, “maternal-paternal”. This father talks about “parental gender” and expresses that the instinct may differ between the father and the mother. The playing is more physical with his son (often more characteristic for fathers than for mothers (Yogman, 1981), but the father is also there to give his child love and to protect him. In this “lexical world”, one can to a lesser extent find the use of verbs, which illustrates a more descriptive style, different to the classes preceding this one. The use of the expression “I think” reinforces this interpretation.

The fourth class “Health concerns”, was also constructed out of only one interview and reflects a special set of problems. Indeed, the discourse is organised around a universe linked to food (“bread, pasta, food, eat, table, meal, time”) and to the child’s health (“hospital”). Thus, it seems that this father concealed the different dimensions proposed to him during the interview (differences mother-father, changes, educational goals, etc.), since he probably was overwhelmed by worries raised in relation to his daughter’s food problems<sup>2</sup>.

The final class, called “Education”, is structured around interviews with four fathers. Here, the educational principles are clearly highlighted: “obtain rules”, “not to go beyond the limits”, “to be confronted to people”, “to value the child’s curiosity”. In this class, the verb “to love” is present. Another significant finding here are modal verbs like “must, can”, and the important use of verbs concerned with obligation, duty, as well as capacity and perhaps doubt which may belong here. Fathers in this class privilege the future in their discourse and it seems that they already project themselves into the future.

The important use of verbs in action oriented discourses can be found in the three classes which contains most of the fathers. Thus, eleven fathers (of the thirteen in the sample) present this characteristic.

### *Family alliance*

The families are distributed into two big categories of alliances in the following way: 7 had functional family interactions and 6 had problematic family interactions. This distribution corresponds quite well to the total sample from which this small sample was taken. One possible explanation for the relatively high degree of problematic alliances could be that this study started already during pregnancy, which implies that the families contacted the researchers after having seen adds, and not the contrary. This way of recruiting may carry a certain bias by an increase in the number of families coming with a hidden demand or at least not a formulated one.

### *Relations between the paternal discourse and the family alliance*

However interesting and important it was to register and describe all the classes described by Alceste, the classes that contained only one subject were omitted from the exploration of the links between class, as defined by Alceste, and type of alliance, in order to avoid any incorrect generalisation. Table 2 presents the discourse classes and the type of family alliance. According to table 2, all fathers belonging to the class “Affective relationship” are characterised by family interactions which are functional (3 of 3), and, for the “Daily routines” class, a majority is functional (3 of 4). However, as far as the final class, “Education” is concerned, we find 3 fathers out of 4 who belong to families with problematic interactions<sup>3</sup>.



Table 2

*Distribution of participants according to the paternal discourse class and family alliance*

Family alliance	Class of paternal discourse		
	Affective relationship	Daily routine	Educational goals
Functional	3	3	1
Dysfunctional	0	1	3

## Discussion

The interview's semi-directive structure implies that it is the fathers themselves who give more or less importance to one question or the other, and who develops on their answers or not. This is clearly illustrated by the case of the father whose discourse showed his concern of his child's health (child allergic to gluten). Furthermore, Alceste's locating this underlines the pertinence as well as the effectiveness of this method of discourse analysis.

Almost all the fathers, that is, eleven out of thirteen in the sample, use verbs which express an action oriented discourse. Still, these fathers are less engaged than the mothers in the daily care and in a different way (McBride & Mills, 1993). A sociological approach tries to show that in the area of basic care, fathers' participation remains dependent on the type of task even if their participation has become more significant (Kellerhals & Montandon, 1991). These two authors distinguish several areas of engagement in children' education: (I) maintenance, which implies daily care, school home work, etc.; (II) normativity, i.e., to allow and forbid, as well as to comment on the child's behaviour; (III) emotional support, encouragement and valorisation of the child. Their study shows that fathers are more invested in the "normative" tasks. One of "new fathers" claims is their participation in the maintenance; however, sociological studies from France done in 1982 show that out of almost 50% of the fathers who express their wish to share these tasks, when asked what they were doing last evening, only 20% participated in household tasks and usually they were then accompanied by their wives. At present, even if this proportion seems to increase (Le Camus, Beaumatin, Galou, & Rabbe, 1987), it is nevertheless important to note the difference between accomplishing maintenance tasks and to be responsible of them, which means to organise them. Most of the time, this falls to mothers, even if they are invested in a professional activity outside of the home (Stern & Bruschiweiler-Stern, 1998). From this one could ask oneself if the fathers' use of verbs denoting action specifies their idealised representations of fatherhood? Let us point out that popular imagery tend to attribute more action and theories to men and dealing with emotions to women. Is this the idea that we find in fathers' discourse?

The three fathers with a discourse touching on "Affective relationship" belong to families with functional family alliances, and more to the point, cooperative alliances, meaning optimal alliances. The triangular play in functional alliances are characterised by an adaptation to the others which allows for affect sharing. Yet, in the lexical world of the "Affective relationship" class, words like "feel", "experience" and "impression" do appear. The LTP is also a kind of story that the partners tell along with the four configurations. In families with functional alliances, the story makes a unity, it isn't interrupted nor is it curtailed. From this perspective, it is interesting to show that fathers from the "Affective relationship" class also seem to include their fatherhood as it is unfolding in time in their discourse, with words like "pregnancy", "birth" and "evolution".

Three of four fathers with a discourse in the "Daily routine" class, belong to families with functional alliances. They don't use any special time for the verbs "have" and "be" but an important anchorage in time is shown by words like "morning", "week", "evening", "time" and "weekend", without doubt reflecting that their role is part of experiences from one day to the other, that seem well anchored in reality. As an appropriate interaction in the LTP

demands more than theories about relationships, i.e., a deep-rooted connection with the others' experience, the link between the paternal discourse and the quality of family interactions is clearly revealed.

Finally, three fathers out of four who highlight education are from families with dysfunctional alliances, which are generally characterised by on the one hand an underlying conflict between the parents (weak co-parental alliance) and, on the other hand, by a certain rigidity linked to a difficulty to be present and receptive to others. One could make the hypothesis that if their educational goals take up such an important place in their discourse, this is nevertheless on a theoretical level (see the words "principle" and "idea" which belong to their lexical world) which is rarely translated into concrete intentions to be realised in everyday life interactions. Again, in order to execute the LTP well, since it's an interactive task it is essential to be in the present and in what is shared, to experience it in the here and now. This may represent a difficulty to certain fathers who, let this be underlined, use the future for the auxiliary verbs "to be" and "to have". Another hypothesis could be that education constitutes an important concern for them and maybe also a (possible) root for underlying conflicts with their spouse, conflicts that are detectable in the interactions in the LTP. Finally, another hypothesis could be that these fathers have difficulties to engage themselves with others on an emotional level, which reduces the quality of family alliance, with them taking refuge in their education role as a consequence. However, other data would be necessary in order to sustain one or the other among these hypothesis.

In the perspective of these results, though remaining cautious given the size of our sample, it is important to highlight the considerable connection between fathers' discourse and the family alliance. But this connection is not strict. The family alliance is actually an emerging quality of the family system which, even if every member's contribution is important, cannot simply be deduced from the individual contribution. Nevertheless, as we have claimed earlier, it seems pertinent to examine the link which may exist between the parental level and the total family system, in order to discover the resources and the difficulty in each and everyone of these systems.

The results of this pilot study are in fact promising for apprehending this recent set of problems. The following improvements should then be added. First of all, since social class has such an important impact on the interviews, it is important to control the socio-economic environment variable. Secondly, it would be good to be able to evaluate fathers' engagement in daily care in order to evaluate the part of idealisation that fathers may have concerning their participation. This may be done by creating two groups of fathers, one containing very engaged fathers and the other fathers who are little or not engaged. Then it would be possible to see if the verbs which highlight action are used more often by those who really are engaged or not.

As a conclusion, it is important to underline that fathers' representations anchored either in daily experience or in emotional experience are linked to functional family interactions. According to the hypothesis of a father with a good-enough presence (Zaouche-Gaudron, 1997), in terms of quantity (participation in daily routine care), or in terms of quality (attentive presence, or at least availability), could then be confirmed. Fatherhood is an integral part of a relationship experienced in daily life. Thus the existence of a link between fathers' discourse and family interactions underlines fathers' impact on family dynamics. This brings us to underline the importance of fathers' presence in therapeutic actions concerning the child by inviting him to take his role not only as a parent to his child, but also as a member of the family system. This position could also be developed in family policies, which may favour fathers' engagement in family life. This would be done in a preventive perspective underlining the importance of living fatherhood one day after the other. These policies, highlighting the role of the father, could aim to reinforce fathers' and families resources by bringing to the core the importance for the father to anchor his educational principles with flexibility to his emotional relationship to his child.

## Appendix

### *Interview questions on fatherhood*

- 1 How do you feel as you become a father?
- 2 According to you, is a father's love different from a mother's love?
- 3 Do you think that men and women differ in what they give and pass on to a child? If yes, how?
- 4 Do you think that there is a father's instinct? And a mother's instinct?
- 5 According to you, in what ways should a father be engaged with the child in order to fulfil his role as a father? What should he do? What are his tasks? What should he be like?
- 6 From your point of view, is the father's role different from the mother's role? If yes, in what way?
- 7 In what way has fatherhood changed your way of being? In what way has fatherhood changed your relationship with your spouse? With your colleagues, your family?
- 8 How do you deal with your different roles; as a parent, husband, socially, professionally?
- 9 Do you remember any important educational principles that you had before the birth of your child?
- 10 If yes, what were they like?
- 11 Did these principles remain the same? If not, what modifications did they undergo?
- 12 Which are your main goals in terms of education?
- 13 In other words, what qualities would you like your child to develop?
- 14 Do you think that you pass on to your child what you yourself received (in terms of education, care, love, relating)?
- 15 How do you place yourself in relation to your own father?
- 16 In a sort of conclusion, what does "being a father" represent to you?

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The software Alceste has several applications in linguistics, history, sociology and used to an extending degree by social sciences (Castro et al., 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> It turned out that this little girl presented an allergy to gluten.
- <sup>3</sup> A chi squared cannot be calculated; all boxes would count less than 5 cases.

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*L'objectif général de cette étude pilote est d'analyser le discours des pères de jeunes enfants de 18 mois sur leur vécu et leur représentation de la paternité, et le lien qui peut exister entre certaines particularités de ce discours et les alliances familiales. L'échantillon, de nationalité suisse, est composé de 13 primipères (5 pères de filles et 8 pères de garçons). Pour permettre l'évaluation du discours paternel, les pères ont participé à des entretiens semi-structurés, analysés à l'aide d'un logiciel d'analyse des données discursives (Alceste). Le "Lausanne Trilogue Play", LTP (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999), a été utilisé pour évaluer le type d'alliance familiale, définie comme le degré de coordination atteint par la famille dans la réalisation d'une tâche. Les principaux résultats indiquent un lien intéressant entre les trois classes des discours paternels regroupée en*

*termes de "Relation affective", "quotidien", "objectifs éducatifs", et l'alliance familiale (définie selon deux grandes catégories: les alliances fonctionnelles versus les alliances problématiques). Les liens entre les représentations paternelles et le fonctionnement de la famille au niveau des interactions sont discutés dans une perspective clinique.*

**Key words:** Discourse analysis, Family alliance, Family interactions, Father.

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Father-mother-infant interactions. Father's role. Child's socio-emotional development.

*Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:*

Frascarolo, F. (2004). Paternal involvement in child caregiving and infant sociability. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 25(6), 509-521.

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The main works report the socialization, sexuation and subjectivation process of the young child within the family environment and the outside family life style. Its current research relates on, the one hand, to the underprivileged living conditions and the development of the young children, and on the other hand, on the conciliation between family life and professional life and the development of the children.

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The main works report socialization and sexuation processes of the young child within the family environment, in particular with the parental couple.

*Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:*

Rouyer, V. (2003). Concordance éducative du couple parental et construction de l'identité sexuée des filles et des garçons de 4 ans. *Pratiques Psychologiques*, 2, 23-32.

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*Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:*

Favez, N. (2001). La régulation par la mère des émotions narrées par les petits. *Enfance*, 53(4), 349-362.

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