Coproduction in Romance languages: a study of structural resources, interactional procedures and pragmatic functions of collaboratively built utterances in the C-ORAL-ROM-Corpus

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The term coproduction is best known from the film industry where it refers to a film-project in whose production more than one producer is involved. But also in the history of literature the phenomenon of co-authorship can be found in numerous cases, as seen for example, in collaborative fiction or in the writing games of the Dada movement. And in the new media, collaborative writing is a common practice as in Wikipedia. In all these instances a common text product is created in coproduction that on the surface does not show any distinction from a text that would have been produced by a single author. The same phenomenon exists in spoken language. Here the joint production of (oral) texts can perhaps even be considered as the normal way. A text is created through alternating contributions of the participating speakers, whereby the roles of producers and recipients cannot be strictly separated from each other. It is for example common practice in oral storytelling that those, whose original role assignment is that of listener, also participate – quite independent of whether they know of or were involved in the event being talked about. This joint text production goes so far that a single oral utterance is created by several speakers together. This is the case in the example cited below, in which the clause beginning with perché of the speaker SRB is continued by speaker SMN whose contribution is subsequently ratified by the original speaker SRB:

[Example: Interview with a butcher]
*SRB: […] questo problema c' è sempre esistito / e esiste / e su tanti altri settori / tut-tora // però / &he / su tante cose / cioè nessuno le prende en considerazione // perché no [/] fa audience / non fa interesse della gente / per cui cioè / ma-gari si mangia un qualcosa che [/] che può far male / che fa schifo / però / cioè / nessuno se ne rende conto / e nessuno lo prende in considerazione / perché +
*SMN: non fa notizia //
*SRB: non fa notizia //
(C-ORAL-ROM: ifamdl 06)

The joint creation of conversation is not to be understood as a linear linking of separate monologue-like produced contributions to conversation. Rather, every single utterance should be regarded as interactively controlled terrain. This oral presentation focuses on the collective production of single utterances, that is, utterances that are begun by one speaker and, before syntactically, semantically or pragmatically completed, are continued by one or more different speakers.

When regarding a such-defined coproduction initially as a product, one notices that in general these coproductions show syntactically coherent entities that satisfy the criteria of grammatical well-formedness that, when the changing of speakers is disregarded, hardly differ from monologically given utterances (cf. Loufrani 1981, 1984; Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1990). However, once the process is also considered, it becomes clear that coproducing is an ordered conversational process where the interaction partners place their spoken activities in relation to, and coordinate with each other. Previously published studies show, that speakers utilize structural resources, such as syntactic or prosodic projections, that allow the communication partners to anticipate the continuation of the utterance as well as the moment, when they can place their own contribution to the production (i. e. Lerner 1991; Jeanneret 1999; Gaston Hilgert 2003; Thörle 2010, 2011). In addition, the speakers command a repertoire of means of sequential organization of coproduced utterances (Lerner 1996; Ono/Thompson 1996; Mondada 1999; Schmale 2008; Müller/Klaeger 2010). At the prosodic level the adjusting of

speed and volume of speech is important, at the segmental level, discourse markers, word repetitions, and such are of significance.

The goal of this contribution is to describe the process of local organization of collaborative utterances focusing on the specific case of Romance languages. The corpus used is the collection of approximately 200 coproductions found in C-ORAL-COM that is examined from an interaction-analytic perspective. It will be shown, that different types of coproductions that at times have different functions in the interaction, can be differentiated on the basis of organizational characteristics (cf. Szczepek 2000). Finally, this presentation will touch upon the question of the universality or language specificy of the described procedures and types. It is expected that many of the characteristics of coproductions can be found in various languages. However, works like the one published by Hayashi (1999) suggest that at least language-specific preferences may exist in the collaborative production of utterances. These will be discussed using French, Spanish and Italian data as a basis for comparison.

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