Sexless animates? Gender agreement with fixed gender nouns in German and French

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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

Sexless animates?

(1) C la sentinelle ‘The guard’ – le gendre ‘the genius’
(2) D Das Opfer ‘The victim’ – die Waise ‘the orphan’ – der Stamm ‘the star’

Can refer to females and males

Grammaral or semantic gender agreement?

Gender agreement in superpartitive constructions (i–iii):

For French: Sleeman & Ihmsane (2016)

Class D nouns: only grammatical agreement (not verified by them)

Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

What about German?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihmsane & Sleeman 2016)

Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms

Class B/C: Related forms:

Class D: Fixed-gender nouns
das Kind ‘the child’

2. Sleeman & Ihmsane’s analysis for French

Sleeman & Ihmsane (2016) distinguish grammatical and semantic gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical gender</th>
<th>Semantic gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentale lexikon (in principle)</td>
<td>Functional projection Gender Phrase (GendP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only present for animate nouns</td>
<td>With class B/C: yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With class D: no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sleeman & Ihmsane: class B/C nouns unmarked for grammatical gender in lexicon, valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on GendP.

(3) Class D sentinelle
(4) Class B/C ministre
(5) Class B/C ministre

Failed Agree

6. A slightly different approach

Assumption: all nouns are marked for grammatical gender, but not all to the same degree of specification

Class D nouns marked for specific grammatical gender (M, F, (N)) in the lexicon

Class B/C nouns marked for hybrid grammatical gender (M/F), not specified as either masculine or feminine yet

Comparison with Dutch gender system:

- Originally three genders: masculine-feminine & neuter
- Coherence of masculine and feminine: M = F = common
- Now two genders: common & neuter

HYBRID GENDER = COMMON GENDER

Adapted from Hansson, Harley & Ritter (2002)

Gender feature hierarchy:

(8) [DP Das [DEGP jüngste [GendP N [FP Kind [PP der [GendP N [NP Kinder]]]]])

(11) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministre [PP des [GendP _ [NP nouveaux ministres]]]]])

If we apply this system to French and German:

- Class D: marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon
- Class B/C: marked for common grammatical gender in the lexicon, specification through valuation of semantic gender feature

How does this approach account for our results?

Grammatical agreement with German neutral (and French) class D nouns:

(10) [DP Das [DEGP jüngste [GendP N [KIND [PP der [GendP N [NP Kinder]]]]])

Semantic agreement with German (and French) class B/C nouns:

(11) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministre [PP des [GendP _ [NP nouveaux ministres]]]]])

But what about semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns?

Comparison is not possible with German neuter class D nouns!

Gender feature hierarchy:

(13) [DP Das [DEGP jüngste [GendP N [FP Kind [PP der [GendP N [NP Kinder]]]]])

(12) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministre [PP des [GendP _ [NP nouveaux ministres]]]]])

What is the difference between German neuter and other marked (class B/C)?

If we apply this system to French and German:

- Grammaral agreement with German neutral (and French) class D nouns
- Semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns
- Semantic agreement with French and German class B/C nouns
- We propose a gender feature hierarchy to account for these patterns

Unsolved issue: Why is the agreement competition possible with German masculine/feminine class D nouns, but not/fals so with similar French nouns?

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

Would be difficult to interpret in a formal sense...