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

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**1. Introduction**

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

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**2. Sleeman & Ihssane’s analysis for French**

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

- **Grammarial gender**
  - Mental lexicon (in principle)
  - No interpretation

- **Semantic gender**
  - Functional projection Grammar Phrase (GendP)
    - Only present for animate nouns

- Results:
  - With class B/C: yes
  - With class D: no

**3. Research questions**

Gender agreement in superlative participles in French and German:

1. Do we observe the same patterns as Sleeman & Ihssane (2016) in both German and French?
2. Can Sleeman & Ihssane’s analysis also account for German?

**5. Results**

... simplified representation, results show a lot of variation...

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

**Supporting evidence:**
- The use of neuter in the outer DP is grammatical when the inner DP is masculine/feminine

**7. Conclusion & outlook**

- Gender agreement with German neuter 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/less so with French masculine/feminine class D nouns?

**Is gender to be understood as a continuum?**

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

**References**