1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

(1) le sentinelle ‘the guard’ – le génie ‘the genius’
(2) der Opfer ‘the victim’ – die Waise ‘the orphan’ – der Bruder ‘the brother’

- Can refer to females and males
- Grammatical or semantic gender agreement?

Gender agreement in superpartitive constructions (i-iii):

- For French: Sleeman & Ihsane (2016)
- Class D nouns: only grammatical gender agreement (verified by them)
- Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

What about German?

Class D nouns marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon

Semantic agreement with French and German class B/C nouns

Competition in agreement, caused by semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns

2. Sleeman & Ihsane’s analysis for French

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

- Encoded where?
- Interpretable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical gender</th>
<th>Semantic gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental lexicon (in principle)</td>
<td>Functional projection Gender Phrase (genderP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Only present for animate nouns

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

> Sleeman & Ihsane: class B/C nouns unmarked for grammatical gender in the lexicon, valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on GenP:

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

What 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 neuter (and French) class D nouns:

(10) [u: m] das jüngste [u: m, k] Kind [u: f] der [u: s, d, d] Kinder

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

(11) [u: s, c] das plus jeune [u: f, s] ministre [u: f, s] des [u: s, f] [u: s, c] nouveaux ministres

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

- Competition in agreement, caused by interfering common gender feature:

(12) die jüngste der Personen ist Heinz.

- The youngest of the persons is Heinz

- This competition is not possible with German neuter class D nouns!

- Neuter is not headed by common in (13), whereas masculine and feminine are headed by common

3. Research questions

Gender agreement in superpartitives in French and German:

1) Do we observe the same patterns as Sleeman & Ihsane (2016) in both German and French?

2) Can Sleeman & Ihsane’s analysis also account for German?

5. Results

(i) Das/Der?Die alteste der Kinder ist Paul/Marie.
the.N/.M/F oldest of the child.N.PL is Paul/Mary

(ii) ??Die/Der jüngste der Waisen ist Paul.
the.F/.M youngest of the orphan.F.PL is Paul

(iii) La/Le plus jeune de ces sentinelles est Paul.
the.F/.M most young of these guard.F.PL is Paul

Interim conclusion:

- Sleeman & Ihsane’s analysis can explain difference between class B/C and class D nouns in French

Supporting evidence:

- The use of neuter in the outer DP is ungrammatical when the inner DP is masculine/feminine

(14) *Der/Die jüngste der Lehrer.C.PL ist Paul/Marie.
‘The youngest of the teachers’...

(15) *Das.N def. der anwesenden Personen.F.PL ist Paul/Marie.
‘The youngest of the persons present’...

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
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common
- Now two genders: common & neuter

HYBRID GENDER = COMMON GENDER

Adapted from Hanson, Harley & Ritter (2002)

But what about German masculine/feminine class D nouns?

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the.M/F youngest of the person.F.PL is Heinz

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7. Conclusion & outlook

- Grammatical 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/feasible with similar French nouns?

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

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

References

- Fongheang, Guen 2011: Agreement or Allomorph Operation: Ph.D. dissertation, MIT.
- Sleeman, Heide & Blake, Joshua 2006: Gender microstructure in partitive constructions with superlatives in French. Gliese 2 (13) 1-25.