Sexless animates? Gender agreement with fixed-gender nouns in German and French
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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

(1) [1] le sentinelle "f the guard" – le genie M "the genius"
(2) des Opfer N "the victim" – die Waise F "orphan" – der Bruder M "the brother"

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

Gender agreement in superlative partitive constructions (i-iii):

➤ For French: Sleeman & Ihnsane (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 gender agreement in German?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihnsane & Sleeman 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
<th>Gender agreement</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
<td>Suppletive forms: two distinct forms</td>
<td>die Schwester F &quot;the sister&quot; – der Bruder M &quot;the brother&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B/C</td>
<td>Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change</td>
<td>die Studentin F &quot;the student&quot; – die Fächer M &quot;the subject&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class D</td>
<td>Fixed-gender nouns</td>
<td>das Kind N &quot;the child&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Sleeman & Ihnsane’s analysis for French

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encoded where?</th>
<th>Interpretable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical gender</td>
<td>Mental lexicon (in principle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic gender</td>
<td>Functional projection Gender Phrase (GendP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

➤ Class D: marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon
➤ Gender agreement in superlative partitives (i-iii):

(i) Das/Der *Die älteste der Kinder ist Paul/Marie.

(ii) ??Die/Der jüngste der Waisen ist Paul.

(iii) *La/Le plus jeune de ces sentinelles est Paul.

3. Research questions

Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French and German:

(i) Do we observe the same patterns as Sleeman & Ihnsane (2016) in both German and French?
(ii) Can Sleeman & Ihnsane’s analysis also account for German?

5. Results

(i) Das/Der *Die älteste der Kinder ist Paul/Marie.

(ii) ??Die/Der jüngste der Waisen ist Paul.

(iii) *La/Le plus jeune de ces sentinelles est Paul.

Interim conclusion:

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

➤ Comparison with Dutch gender system:

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

Comparison with Dutch gender system:

➤ Originally three genders: masculine/feminine & neuter

➤ Now two genders: common & neuter

7. Conclusion & outlook

➤ Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

Supporting evidence:

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

(i) "Das N/Die F/Der M jüngste der Lehrer C.Pl. …

(ii) "The youngest of the teachers…”

(iii) "Das N jüngste der anwesenden Personen F.Pl. …

The youngest of the persons present…”

8. References

(1) Adapted from Hanson, Harley & Ritter (2002)


