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

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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

(1) Le sentinelle *the guard* – le génie *the genius*
(2) Das Opfer *the victim* – die Weise *the orphan* – der Bruder *the brother*

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

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

➢ For French: Sleeman & Ihsane (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 Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Gender-agreement</th>
<th>Semantic-agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
<td>Suspelle; two distinct forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B/C</td>
<td>Related forms; suffix (B)/determiner (C) change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class D</td>
<td>Fixed gender nouns</td>
<td>das Kind <em>the child</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Sleeman & Ihsane’s analysis for French

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

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

Two-noun analysis of superpartitive partitives:

➢ Noun of inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset)
➢ Copied noun remains unpronounced
➢ If present, gender value copied together with noun
➢ Second Gender Phrase in outer DP

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

3. Research questions

Gender agreement in superlative partitives 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 älteste der Kinder ist Paul/Marie.

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

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

5. Results

(i) Dass/Der*Die älteste der Kinder ist Paul/Marie.
The N/M/F oldest of the children NPL is Paul/Mary.

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

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

Interim conclusion:

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

6. A slightly different approach

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

➢ 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 do 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

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

7. Conclusion & outlook

➢ Found agreement with adjectives in German and French
➢ Agree with Sleeman & Ihsane

References

List of references...

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