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

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Sexless animates? Gender agreement with fixed-gender nouns in German and French
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1. Introduction
Sexless animates?
(1) 1) le sentinelle ‘the guard’ = le génie ‘the genius’
(2) 2) des Opfer ‘the victim’ = die Waise ‘the orphan’ – der Bruder M ‘the brother’
➢ Can refer to females and males
➢ Grammatical or semantic gender agreement?
Gender agreement in superlative partitive constructions (1-ii):
➢ For French: Sleeman & Ihssane (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?

3. Research questions
Gender agreement in superlative partitives 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
(i) Das/Der/Die älteste 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) Le/la plus jeune de ces sentinelles est Paul. the.F/M most young of these guard.F.PL is Paul

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

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, specifi cation through v aluation of semantic gender feature

How does this approach account for our results?
➢ Grammatical agreement with German neuter (and) French class D nouns

(10) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP sentinelle [PP de ces [GendP F [NP sentinelles]]]]]
(11) [DP Das [DEGP jüngste [GendP N [FP Kind [PP der [GendP N [NP Kinder]]]]]]

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

(12) 70er/70er jüngste der Personen ist Helmut. the.N/F oldest of the person.F.PL is Heinz

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?
➢ Would be difficult to interpret in a formal sense...

4. Methodology: Grimmatical Judgment Task

Native speakers of German (n = 20) and French (n = 70)
➢ Sentences with and without gender mismatch, including control sentences
➢ Sentences judged on a 5-point scale

Interim conclusion:
➢ Sleeman & Ihssane’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

5.2. Sleeman & Ihssane’s analysis for French
Sleeman & Ihssane (2016) distinguish grammatical and semantic gender:

- Grammatical gender
  - Mental lexicon (in principle)
  - Only present for animate nouns

- Semantic gender
  - Functional projection Gender Phrase [GendP] with class B/C: yes
  - With class D: no

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

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

(6) 4) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministre [PP des [GendP C [NP nouveaux ministres]]]]]]
(7) 5) [DP Le [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministe [PP de ces [GendP C [NP sentinels]]]]]]

(8) 6) gender

(9) 7) gender

(10) 8) gender

(11) 9) gender

(12) 10) gender

(13) 11) gender

1) Class D nouns marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon
2) Class B/C nouns: only grammatical agreement not verified by them!
3) Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

References: