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) das Oppen ‘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 superpartitive constructions (i-ii):

For French: Sleeman & Ihnsane (2016)

Class D: marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon

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

Class B/C: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch Neuter is not headed by common in (13), whereas masculine and feminine are headed by common)

Sleeman

Preminger, Omer. 2011.

Class B/C nouns marked for

Now two genders: common & neuter

Can

Grammatical agreement with German neuter and French class D nouns

Grammatical agreement with German neuter (and French) class D nouns:

Sleeman

Gender feature hierarchy:

Do we observe the same patterns as

Noun of inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset)

Class D nouns: only grammatical agreement (not verified by them!)

Class D: marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon

(6) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministre [PP des [GendP _ [NP nouveaux ministres]]]]]]

(7) [DP La [DEGP plus jeune [GendP F [FP ministre [PP des [GendP _ [NP nouveaux ministres]]]]]]

3. Research questions

Gender agreement in superpartitive constructions in French and German:

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

2) Can Sleeman & Ihnsane’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) La/Le plus jeune de ces sentinelles est Paul.

the.F/M most young of these guard.F.PL is Paul

Interim conclusion:

> Sleeman & Ihnsane’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 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 & neutral

> Coefficient of masculine and feminine: M = F = common

> Now two genders: common & neutral

HYBRID GENDER = COMMON GENDER

Adapted from Hanson, Harley & Ritter (2002)

7. Conclusion & outlook

Supporting evidence:

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

(14) *Das N/Die/F Der/M jüngste der Lehrer.C.PL ...

‘The youngest of the teachers’...

(15) *Das N jüngste der anwesenden Personen.F.PL ...

‘The youngest of the persons present’...

Unresolved issue: Why is the agreement competition possible with German masculine/feminine class D nouns, but not/less so with similar French nouns?

Some animate nouns marked for gender in the lexicon (class D), others unmarked (class B/C)?

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

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

References


