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

Westveer, T.J.T.; Sleeman, A.P.; Aboh, E.O.

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2. Sleeman & Ihse's analysis for French

Sleeman & Ihse (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] only present for animate nouns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sleeman & Ihse: class B/C nouns marked for grammatical gender in lexicon, valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on Gender Phrase (GendP)

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

If no semantic gender value is inserted (5), Failed Agree (Preminger 2011) takes place, resulting in spell-out of default masculine gender

In this case, a gender mismatch may arise (6)

(6) [class B/C masculine/F feminine] [uninterpretable] [DP la [u: f] [sentinelle [u: f] [class B/C ministre [u: f] [NP nouveaux ministres]]]

(7) [class B/C masculine/F feminine] [uninterpretable] [DP la [u: f] plus jeune [sentinelle [i: f] [class B/C ministre [i: _] [NP nouveaux ministres]]]

What about German?

Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French and German:

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

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

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

Interim conclusion:

- Sleeman & Ihse’s analysis can explain difference between class B/C and class D nouns in French
- Cannot explain difference between German neuter and masculine/feminine class D nouns
- Some animate nouns marked for gender in the lexicon (class D), others unmarked (class B/C)

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, in German) 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)

Gender feature hierarchy:

(8) gender

masculine feminine neuter

(9) gender

masculine common feminine

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?

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

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