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

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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?
(1) la sentinelle ‘the guard’ – le génie ‘the genius’
(2) des Opfer ‘the victims’ – die Waisen ‘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-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 semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns?

Semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns

Neuter is not headed by common in (13), whereas masculine and feminine are headed by common

Class D nouns marked for specific grammatical gender (M, F, (N)) in the lexicon

Sleeman Semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns

Neuter is not headed by common in (13), whereas masculine and feminine are headed by common

Class B/C nouns marked for semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns?

Hanson, Rebecca; Heidi Harley & Elizabeth Ritter. 2002.
Can we observe the same patterns as for French?

Cannot explain difference between German neuter and masculine/feminine class D nouns
Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

Now two genders: common & neuter

This competition is not possible with German neuter class D nouns!

Competition in agreement, caused by
Conflation of masculine and feminine: M + F = common

2. Sleeman & Ihnsane’s analysis for French

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

Encoded where? Interpretable?

Mental lexicon (in principle) No

Functional projection Gender Phrase [GenD] With class B/C: yes With class D: no

If no semantic gender value is inserted (5), Failed Agree
In this case, a gender mismatch may arise (6)

![Gender feature hierarchy:](image)

![Supporting evidence:](image)

![7. Conclusion & outlook](image)

![References](image)