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

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

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

(1) la sentinelle ‘the guard’ – le génie ‘the genius’
(2) des Olfen ‘the victim’ – die Waise ‘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 & Ihnsane (2016)
  - Class D nouns: only grammatical gender agreement (not verified by them)
  - Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

What about German?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun classes (adapted from Ihnsane &amp; Sleeman 2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B/C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Results

([... simplified representation, results show a lot of variation])

5.1 Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French and German:

- Class D nouns: marked for grammatical gender in the lexicon
- Class B/C nouns: marked for common grammatical gender in the lexicon, specification through insertion of semantic gender value

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 functional grammatical gender (M/F/N) in the lexicon

Comparison with Dutch gender system:

- Originally three genders: masculine/feminine & neuter
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common
- Now two genders: common & neuter

Comparison with French gender:

- General agreement with animates in French
- Semantic agreement with feminine
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common

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

- Competition in agreement, caused by interfering common gender feature

7. Conclusion & outlook

- Gender agreement with fixed-gender nouns in German and French
- Semantic agreement with feminine
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common
- Gender agreement with feminine
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common

Supporting evidence:

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

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

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

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

References:

- Ihnsane, Nafa; and Sleeman, 2016. Gender agreement with animates in French. Selected Proceedings of the 45th Annual Conference on Romance Languages and Literatures. ed. by Christine Tortora, Marcel de Ginder, Ignazia Mongiello, & Tanya D’Noli. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins

2. Sleeman & Ihnsane’s analysis for French

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encoded values</th>
<th>Interpretative features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical</td>
<td>Mental lexicon (in principle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic</td>
<td>Functional projection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

4. Methodology:

Grammar variety 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

(i) Das/ * Der * Die älteste der Kinder ist Paul/ Marie.
   the n/M/F oldest of the child N/PL is Paul/ Mary.
   - German neuter
   - Grammatical agreement

(ii) ??Die/ Der jüngste der Waisen ist Paul.
    the F/M youngest of the orphan F/PL is Paul.
    - German feminine
    - Semantic agreement

(iii) La/ * Le plus jeune de ces sentinelles est Paul.
     the F/M most young of these guard F/PL is Paul
     - French feminine
     - Grammatical agreement

Interim conclusion:

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

BUT

- Cannot explain difference between German neuter and masculine/feminine class D nouns!

Some animate nouns marked for gender in the lexicon (class D), others

Comparing gender agreement in superlative partitives:

- How does this approach account for our results?
- Can we observe the same patterns as German masculine/feminine class D nouns?

7. Conclusion and outlook

- Gender agreement with fixed-gender nouns in German and French
- Semantic agreement with feminine
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common
- Gender agreement with feminine
- Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common

Supporting evidence:

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

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

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

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

3. Research questions

Gender agreement in superlative partitives 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?