Sexless animates?
"Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French"
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Sexless animates? Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French
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1. Introduction
Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

- Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms for le/ne [sister] – le/ne frère [the brother]
- Class B/C: Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change (chanteuse – the singer)
- Class D: Fixed-gender nouns – le/ne garçon [the boy], le/ne fille [the girl]

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) ?

Aims & methods

Sleeman & Ihsane's results only based on a limited number of informants' judgements

- Replicate Sleeman & Ihsane's experiment on a larger scale and in a more systematic way
- Provide a theoretical explanation for the agreement patterns we observe

Methodology:

- Grammaticality Judgement Task with 70 native speakers of French
- Online task using Google Forms
- 80 sentences judged on a 5-point scale, presented in random order
- 13 different nouns of noun classes B, C and D included
- Sentences with semantic and grammatical agreement
- Control sentences
- Background questionnaire

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5. Towards an analysis

The theoretical analysis should explain:

- General differences between the noun classes
- Variation within the results

Gender agreement competition, the outer DP can agree with:

- The gender of the noun in the inner DP
- The gender of the predicate

Main theoretical assumptions:

- A two-noun analysis of partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)
- Inner DP's noun copied onto outer DP, but remains unpronounced
- There is a phase boundary between inner and outer DP

Gender feature hierarchy (based on Harley & Ritter 2002):

- gender:
  - common = underspecified gender
  - masculine feminine
- feminine masculine
- masculine feminine

Features marking in the mental lexicon:

- [m] masculine only
- [f] feminine only
- [c, m] masculine + common
- [c, f] feminine + common
- Some nouns marked as either feminine [f] or masculine [m]
- Some nouns marked with a hybrid feature [c, f] or [c, m]

This follows the ongoing process of feminisation in French

- Compare the entries for the nouns ministre, professeur and sentinelle in different editions of the French Petit Robert dictionary:

  - Petit Robert (1977)
  - Petit Robert (2016)

References