Sexless animates?
Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French
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We have proposed a theoretical analysis that explains the agreement patterns observed in French. The phase boundary between inner and outer DP is crucial in determining whether the agreement is grammatical or semantic. The valuations through insertion of semantic gender value on GendP, if present, gender value copied together with noun (5). A Grammatical gender system identifies the agreement patterns observed in French, whereas a Semantic gender system uses functional projection. Gender Phrase (GendP) in the mental lexicon determines the agreement patterns.

Two noun analysis of superlative partitives: noun of inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset), remains unpronounced. If Failed Agree (Preminger 2011) or Second Gender Phrase in outer DP, the noun is in the outer DP. The Gender Phrase (GendP) in the mental lexicon determines the agreement patterns.

Future research will investigate quantified partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane 2016). The online task using Google Forms has been compared to the background questionnaire. Comparing the entries for the nouns and provide a theoretical explanation for the agreement patterns we observe.

5. Towards an analysis
The theoretical analysis also explains:
- General differences between the noun classes
- Variation within the results

Gender agreement competition, the outer DP can agree with:
1. The gender of the noun in the inner DP
2. The gender of the predicate

(7) [f] feminine only
[m] masculine only
[c, f] feminine + masculine
[c, m] masculine + common

Features marked in the mental lexicon:
- [m] masculine only
- [f] feminine only
- [c] common
- [c, m] masculine + common
- [c, f] feminine + common
- [c, f, m] masculine + feminine + common

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:

ministre > masculine noun ministre > noun
professeur > masculine noun professeur > noun
sentinelle > feminine noun sentinelle > feminine noun


In this way, we can account for variation:
- If gender mismatches are not accepted with a noun, this noun is marked as either [f] or [m] in the mental lexicon.
- If gender mismatches are accepted with a noun, this noun is marked as either [c, f] or [c, m] in the mental lexicon.

6. An analysis that seems to work...

(8) La plus jeune des (nouvelles) ministres est Hélène.
(9) Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Jean-Luc.
Hélène. est Hélène.
Jean-Luc. is Jean-Luc.

Individual variation: difference in feature marking in the mental lexicon.

(10) La plus jeune des (nouvelles) sentinelle est Jean-Luc.
(11) Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelle est Jean-Luc.

Sentinelle est Jean-Luc.

7. Conclusion
1. Replication of Sleeman & Ihsane’s experiment on a larger scale.
2. Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns.
3. Grammatical agreement is preferred with class D nouns.
4. We have proposed a theoretical analysis that explains the agreement patterns observed in French.
5. Future research: (i) investigate quantified partitives (one of the X) & (ii) investigate same phenomena in German.