Sexless animates?
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Citation for published version (APA):

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1. Introduction

Sexless anatimes?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihriane & Sleeman 2016)

Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms e.g., the “sister” – le frère, “the brother”

Class B/C: Related forms: suffixes (determiner) (C) change to “chantier”, le “worker”

Class D: Fixed-gender nouns e.g., le “guard”, genit. “the genius”

⇒ Class D nouns can refer to both females and males!

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) [DP les sentinelles est Jean-Luc. the most young of the new. ministre].

⇒ Gender Phrase in outer DP

How do they explain these agreement patterns?

⇒ Distinction between grammatical and semantic gender

⇒ Valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on GenD

⇒ No semantic gender value = Failed Agree (Preminger 2011)

⇒ Spell-out of default masculine gender

Two-noun analysis of superlative partitives: noun of inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset), remains unpronounced

⇒ If present, gender value copied together with noun (F)

⇒ Second Gender Phrase in outer DP

⇒ If Failed Agree has taken place in inner DP, second chance to insert semantic gender value in outer DP (6)

2. Sleeman & Ihriane (2016)

Gender agreement in (superlativ) partitives in French:

⇒ 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)

How do they explain this agreement patterns?

⇒ Distinction between grammatical and semantic gender

⇒ Valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on GenD

⇒ No semantic gender value = Failed Agree (Preminger 2011)

⇒ Spell-out of default masculine gender

3. Aims and methods

Sleeman & Ihriane’s results only based on a limited number of informants’ judgements

⇒ Replicate Sleeman & Ihriane’s experiment on a larger scale and in a more systematic way

⇒ Provide a theoretical explanation for the agreement patterns we observe

Methodology:

⇒ Grammatical Judgement Task with 70 native speakers of French

⇒ Online task using Google Forms

⇒ NO 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

4. Results

Comparison noun classes

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:

1. The gender of the noun in the inner DP

2. The gender of the predicative

(7) [DP la plus jeune des nouveaux ministres est Hélène. the most young of the new. minister est Hélène]

Main theoretical assumptions:

⇒ A two-noun analysis of partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihriane 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: masculine feminine

⇒ Features marking the mental lexicon:

⇒ [m] masculine only

⇒ [f] feminine only

⇒ [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 noun ministre, professeur and sentimentale in different editions of the French Petit Robert dictionary:

⇒ Petiot Robert (1977) ministre > masculine noun

⇒ Petit Robert (2016) ministre > noun

⇒ professeur > masculine noun

⇒ professeur > noun

⇒ sentimentale > feminine noun

⇒ sentimentale > feminine noun

⇒ Westveer, Sleeman & Abol (2018): Class D noun sentimentale still marked as feminine: gender mismatches less acceptable

⇒ 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) [DP joke jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène. the most young of the new. ministers est Hélène]

⇒ Class C noun, no gender mismatch in partitive est Hélène.

⇒ Hélène

(9) [DP le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Jeann-Luc. the most young of the new. ministers est Jean-Luc].

⇒ Class D noun, gender mismatch in partitive est Hélène.

Hélène

Individual variation: difference in feature marking in the mental lexicon

(10) [DP le plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentimentale est Jean-Luc. the most young of the new. guard est Jean-Luc.]

⇒ Class D noun, no gender mismatch in partitive

(11) [DP le plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentimentale est Jean-Luc. the most young of the new. guard est Jean-Luc.]

⇒ Class D noun, gender mismatch in partitive

7. Conclusion

1. Replication of Sleeman & Ihriane’s experiment on a larger scale:

⇒ Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns

⇒ Grammatical agreement is preferred with class D nouns

2. We have proposed a theoretical analysis that explains the agreement patterns observed

Future research: (i) Investigate quantified partitives (one of the X) & (ii) Investigate same phenomena in German

References


