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 the mental lexicon: gender feature hierarchy (based on Harley & Ritter 2002).

Main theoretical assumptions:
- If gender mismatches are accepted with a noun, this noun is marked as either [f] or [m] in the mental lexicon.
- If gender mismatches are not accepted with a noun, this noun is marked as either [f] or [m] in the mental lexicon.

Gender agreement in (superlative) partitives in French:
- Class D nouns: only grammatical agreement (not verified by them!)
- Class B/C nouns: agreement with inner DP
- Gender agreement in superlative partitives: noun of inner DP (ext) copied onto outer DP (subset), remains untranslated
- If present, gender value copied together with noun (E)
- Gender Phrase in outer DP
- If Failed Agree has taken place in inner DP, second chance to insert semantic gender value in outer DP

Variation within the results:
- General differences between the noun classes
- Class B/C Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change marked as either [f] or [m] in the mental lexicon

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
- Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns
- Semantic agreement is not preferred with class D nouns

4. Results

Comparison noun classes

5. An analysis that seems to work...

Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène. (9)

La plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Jean-Luc. (10)

Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles est Jean-Luc. (11)

6. Conclusion

1. Replication of Sleeman & Ihsane’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 in French

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

References
- Sleeman, Petra & Enoch O. Aboh – Universiteit van Amsterdam