Sexless animates?
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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms
- la sœur = le frère = "the sister" = "the brother"

Class B: Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change
- le chanteur = le chanteur "the singer"

Class D: Fixed-gender nouns
- le père = "the father"

Class D nouns can refer to both males and females!

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) [DP la plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc.]
- la plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc.
- [f] most young of the [f] new [m] minister

(5) [F MEN (M) most young of the new.M.PL minister.M.PL is Hélène]

(6) [DP plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène.]

2. Sleeman & Ihsane (2016)

Gender agreement in (superlative) 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 these agreement patterns?

- Distinction between grammatical and semantic gender
- Valuation through inclusion of semantic gender on value of gender
- 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 (E)
- 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

3. 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:
- Grammatical/Categorical Judgement Task with 70 native speakers of French
- Online task using Google Forms
- 90 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

Judgements of class D nouns

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 predicate

(7) [la plus jeune des nouveaux ministres est Hélène.]

New 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
  - masculine feminine

Features marking the mental lexicicon:

- [m] masculine only
- [f] feminine only
- [c,m] masculine + common
- [c,f] feminine + common
- [c,m,f] masculine + feminine + common

This follows the ongoing process of feminisation in French

6. An analysis that seems to work...

(8) [DP plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène.]

(9) [DP plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène.]

Individual variation: difference in feature marking in the mental lexicicon

(10) [DP plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles est Jean-Luc.]

(11) [DP plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles est Jean-Luc.]

7. 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

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

References