1. Introduction

SeXless animates? Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French

1.1. 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)

1.2. How do they explain these agreement patterns?
- Distinction between grammatical and semantic gender
- Valuation through insertion of semantic gender on Gend
- No semantic gender value = Failed Agree (Preminger 2011)
- Spell-out of default masculine gender

1.3. 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

2. Sleeman & Ihmsane (2016)

2.1. Gender agreement in (super)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)

3. Aims and Methods

3.1. Sleeman & Ihmsane’s results only based on a limited number of informants’ judgements
- Replicate Sleeman & Ihmsane’s experiment on a larger scale:
  - Background questionnaire:
    - Sentences with semantic and grammatical agreement
    - Background questionnaire

3.2. Main theoretical assumptions:
- A two noun analysis of partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihmsane 2016)
- Inner DP’s noun copied onto outer DP, but remains unpronounced
- There is a phase boundary between inner and outer DP

3.3. Gender feature hierarchy (based on Harley & Ritter 2002):
- Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms
  - I’aie la plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc
- Class B/C: Related forms: suffixes (D)etermine [C] change to “le chanteur” = ‘the singer’
  - La plus jeune des sentinelles "l’image"
- Class D: Fixed-gender nouns
  - I’aie le plus jeune des sentinelles est Hélène

3.4. Gender agreement in superlative partitives:
- (4) La plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc
  - Th/f Pl young of the guard Pl is Jean-Luc (4)

4. Results

4.1. Comparison of noun classes

5. Towards an analysis

5.1. The theoretical analysis should explain:
- General differences between the noun classes
- Variation within the results

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

5.3. Main theoretical assumptions:
- A two noun analysis of partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihmsane 2016)
- Inner DP’s noun copied onto outer DP, but remains unpronounced
- There is a phase boundary between inner and outer DP

5.4. Gender feature hierarchy (based on Harley & Ritter 2002):
- Gender: common = underspecified gender
  - [m] masculine
  - [f] feminine
  - [c, f] feminine + common

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

5.6. 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) ministre > masculine noun
  - (Petit Robert 2016) professeur > masculine noun

5.7. 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...

6.1. Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène. (9)
- Th/f Pl most young of the (new) M Pl is Hélène
- Class C noun, no gender mismatch in partitive

6.2. La plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelle(s) est Jean-Luc. (10)
- Th/f Pl most young of the (new) f Pl guard f Pl is Jean-Luc
- Class D noun, gender mismatch in partitive

7. Conclusion

7.1. 1. Replication of Sleeman & Ihmsane’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
- We have proposed a theoretical analysis that explains the agreement patterns observed

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

References
