Sexless animates?
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Citation for published version (APA):

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Sexless anates? Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French

1. Introduction

Sexless anates?

Noun classes (adapted from Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

- Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms le frère ‘the brother’
- Class B/C: Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change
- Class D: Fixed-gender nouns: noun = ‘the guard’

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) Plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc.

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

Main theoretical assumptions:

- Gender mismatches are accepted with a noun, this noun is marked [f] feminine only
- Some nouns marked as either feminine [f] or masculine [m]
- Class C noun, no gender mismatch in partitive

Sleeman’s (2016) results only based on a limited number of informant’s judgements

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 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 (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 experiment on a larger scale:

- Replication of Sleeman & Ihsane’s experiment on a larger scale:
- 1,5 or 2,5 the most young of the (new M.P.) minister M.P.

4. Results

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

Main 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
- [m] masculine only
- [f] feminine only
- [c] feminine + common
- Some nouns marked as either feminine [f] or masculine [m]
- Some nouns marked with a hybrid feature [c, f] or [c, m]

6. An analysis that seems to work...

(8) Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres

Hélène.

(9) La plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres

Hélène.

Individual variation: difference in feature marking in the mental lexicon

(10) La plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles

Jean-Luc.

(11) Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles

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

- Sleeman, Petra & Tabea Ihsane. 2016. Gender mismatches in partitive constructions with superlatives in French. Glossa 1 (1) 1-25.

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