Sexless animates?
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Citation for published version (APA):
1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

Class A
Suppletive forms: two distinct forms of le frère, la sœur = le frère, la sœur ‘the brother’, ‘the sister’

Class B/C
Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change le frère, la sœur ‘the brother’, ‘the sister’

Class D
Fixed-gender nouns

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

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) Fut/Fut plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc. 

⇒ Replicated Sleeman & Ihsane’s experiment on a larger scale and in a more systematic way

Methodology:

- Grammaticality judgement Task with 70 native speakers of French
- Online task using Google Forms
- Sessions with semantic and grammatical agreement
- 80 sentences judged on a 5-point scale, presented in random order
- Background questionnaire

1,5 3,5 5 6 90%

50% 60% 70% 90%

1. Replication of Sleeman & Ihsane’s experiment on a larger scale:
- Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns

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

Future research: (i) investigate quantified partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

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

- Class B/C nouns: unmarked for grammatical gender

- Valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on Gender agreement competition, the outer DP can agree with:

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

- Spell-out of default masculine gender

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

(5) [m] masculine only

⇒ Grammatical gender

(6) Class D sentinelle ‘guard’

Class D sentinelle ‘guard’

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

Therefore, we can account for variation:

This follows the ongoing process of feminisation in French

This is Li the most young of the new. PL ministres... est Hélène.

⇒ Class D noun, gender mismatch in partitive

Individual variation: difference in feature marking in the mental lexicon

3. Aims and 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

Main theoretical assumptions:

- A two noun analysis of partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

- Inner DP’s noun copied onto outer DP, but remains unpronounced

- Sentences with semantic and grammatical agreement

- Control sentences

- Background questionnaire

4. Results

6. An analysis that seems to work…

(8) [m] masculine only

⇒ Grammatical gender

(9) [f] feminine default masculine

⇒ Semantic gender

- With class B/C: yes

- With class D: no

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) [m] masculine only

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

- Features marking in the mental lexicon:

[m] masculine only

[f] feminine only

⇒ Some nouns marked as either masculine [m] or feminine [f]

⇒ Some nouns marked with a hybrid feature [c, m] or [c, f]

⇒ 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ministre &gt; masculine noun</td>
<td>ministre &gt; noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professeur &gt; masculine noun</td>
<td>professeur &gt; noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentinelle &gt; feminine noun</td>
<td>sentinelle &gt; feminine noun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⇒ Westveer, Sleeman & Abolh (2016): Class D noun sentinelle 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

7. Conclusion

1. Sexless animates? Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French

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