Sexless animates?

*Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French*

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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

- Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms (e.g., "the sister" - le frère, "the brother")
- Class B/C: Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change (e.g., "les chanteurs", "la chanteuse")
- Class D: Fixed-gender nouns (e.g., "la sentinelle", "le génie - "the genius")

Class D nouns can refer to both females and males!

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) La plus petite des sentinelles est Jean-Luc. l’élève most young of.the guardians is Jean-Luc.

- Pronouns - Grammar

5. Towards an analysis

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) Le plus jeune des nouveaux ministres est Hélène. the.most young of.the new.ministers is Hélène.

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):

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

This follows the ongoing process of feminisation in French

6. An analysis that seems to work...

(8) Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène. the.most young of.the (new) ministers is Hélène.

- Nouns marked as [m] or [f] in lexicon: agreement with inner DP
- Nouns marked as [c, m] or [c, f] in lexicon: agreement with predicate

References: