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

Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms (a noun ending in ‘the sister’ – le frère, ‘the brother’)

Class B/C: Related forms: suffixes (B) determinant (C) change in stem (D) – le chanteur, ‘the singer’

Class D: Fixed-gender nouns (F) feminine (M) masculine

Gender agreement in superlative partitives: noun of inner DP copied onto outer DP (subset), remains unpronounced

Gender agreement in superlative partitives: (4) Reclaim Sleeman & Ihsane’s experiment on a larger scale and in a more systematic way.

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
- Evaluation through insertion of semantic gender on value
- 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

Aims & methods

Sleeman & Ihsane’s results only based on a limited number of informants’ judgements

Provide a theoretical explanation for the agreement patterns we observe

Methodology:
- Grammarmatical judgment task with 70 native speakers of French
- Online task using Google Forms
- 80 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

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

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 (adapted from Harley & Ritter 2002):

- Gender: common = unspecified gender
- Masculine = masculine
- Feminine = feminine

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