Sexless animates?
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1. Introduction
Sexless anatomes?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

- Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms 
to show ‘the sister’ = le père, le ‘the brother’
- Class B/C: Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change
to show ‘the singer’ = le chanteur, ‘the guardian’
- Class D: Fixed-gender nouns 
la ministre, ‘the guardian’

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

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

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

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

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) Il est le plus jeune des nouveaux ministres est 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
- Sentences with semantic and grammatical agreement
- Control sentences
- Background questionnaire

This follows the ongoing process of feminisation in French:

- Compare the entries for the nouns ministre, professeur, et sentinelle in different editions of the French Petit Robert dictionary:

  Petit Robert (1977) 
  ministre > masculine noun 
  professeur > masculine noun 
  sentinelle > feminine noun

  Petit Robert (2016) 
  ministre > masculine noun 
  professeur > noun 
  sentinelle > feminine noun

⇒ Westveer, Sleeman & Aboh (2018):
⇒ 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

4. Results

Comparison noun classes

Judgements of class D nouns

6. An analysis that seems to work...

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

(9) La plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène.

(10) La plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles est Jean-Luc.

(11) Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) sentinelles est 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 quantitative partitives (one of the X) & (ii) Investigate same phenomena in German

References

- Sleeman, Heidi and Enoch O. Aboh – Universiteit van Amsterdam