



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Sexless animates?

Westveer, T.J.T.; Sleeman, A.P.; Aboh, E.O.

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Westveer, T. J. T., Sleeman, A. P., & Aboh, E. O. (2018). Sexless animates? Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French. Poster session presented at Going Romance 2018, Utrecht, Netherlands.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Sexless animates? Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French

Thom Westveer, Petra Sleeman & Enoch O. Aboh – Universiteit van Amsterdam

Going Romance 2018

Universiteit Utrecht – 12.12.2018



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication

1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

Class A	Suppletive forms: two distinct forms <i>la soeur</i> _[f] 'the sister' – <i>le frère</i> _[m] 'the brother'
Class B/C	Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change <i>la chanteuse</i> _[f] – <i>le chanteur</i> _[m] 'the singer' <i>la</i> _[f] / <i>le</i> _[m] <i>ministre</i> 'the minister'
Class D	Fixed-gender nouns <i>la</i> _[f] <i>sentinelle</i> – 'the guard' <i>le</i> _[m] <i>génie</i> – 'the genius'

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

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) ?*La/Le plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc.*
the.F/M most young of.the guard.F.PL is Jean-Luc

⇒ Grammatical or semantic gender agreement?

⇒ Previously investigated by 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 Gend
- ⇒ No semantic gender value = Failed Agree (Preminger 2011)
- ⇒ Spell-out of default masculine gender

	Encoded where?	Interpretable?
Grammatical gender	Mental lexicon (in principle)	No
Semantic gender	Functional projection Gender Phrase (GendP) <i>only present for animate nouns</i>	With class B/C: yes With class D: no

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 (5)
- 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 (6)

(5) [_{DP} *La*_{DEGP} *plus jeune*_{GENDP} *des*_F [_{FP} *sentinelle*_{FP} [_{PP} *de ces*_{GENDP} [_{NP} *sentinelles*]]]]] Class D *sentinelle* 'guard'

(6) [_{DP} *La*_{DEGP} *plus jeune*_{GENDP} *des*_F [_{FP} *ministre*_{FP} [_{PP} *de*_{PP} [_{GENDP} [_{NP} *nouveaux ministres*]]]]]]] Class C *ministre* 'minister'

3. Aims & methods

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

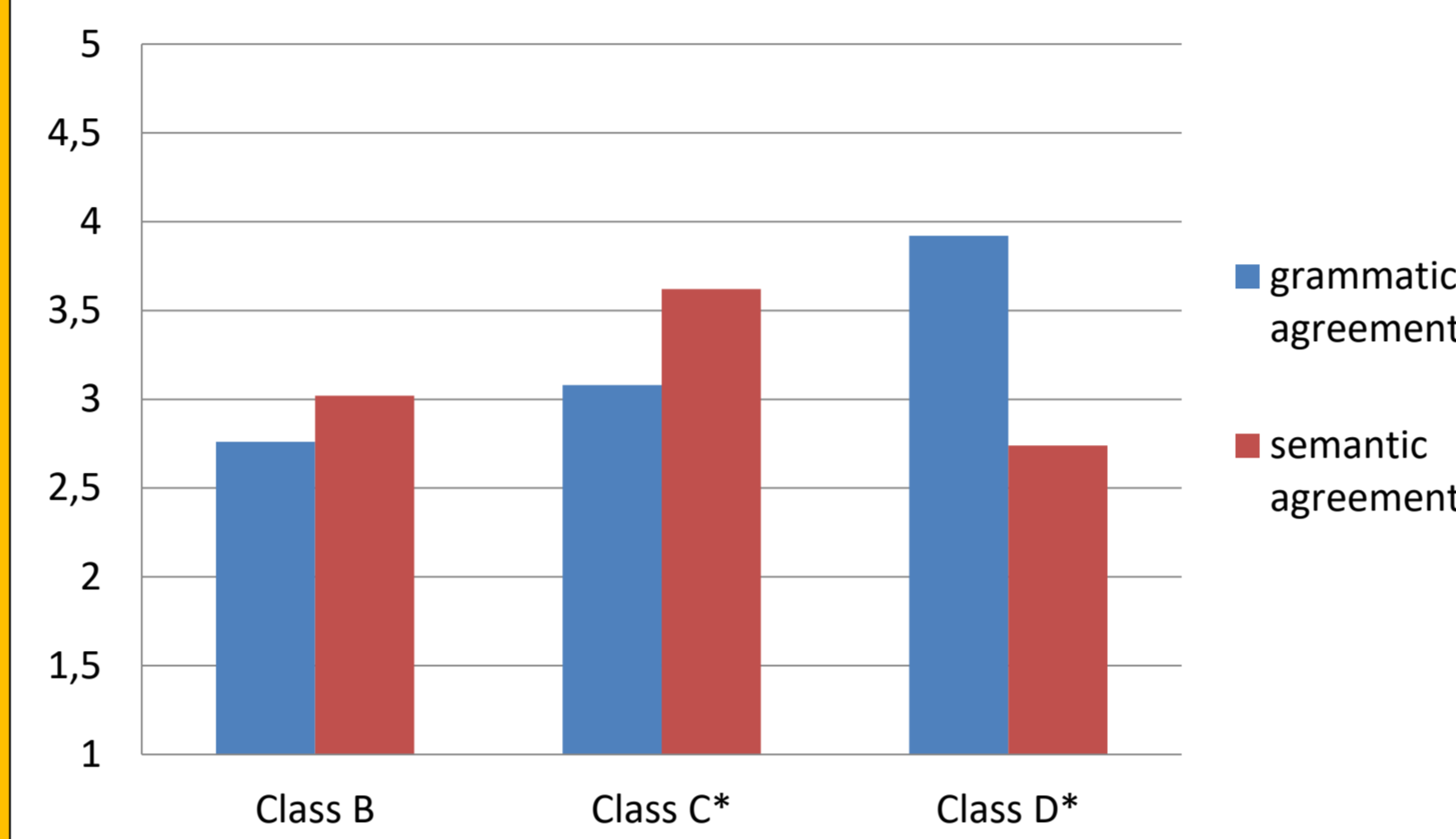
- ⇒ Replicate Sleeman & Ihsane's experiment on a larger scale and in a more systematic way
- ⇒ Provide a theoretical explanation for the agreement patterns we observe

Methodology:

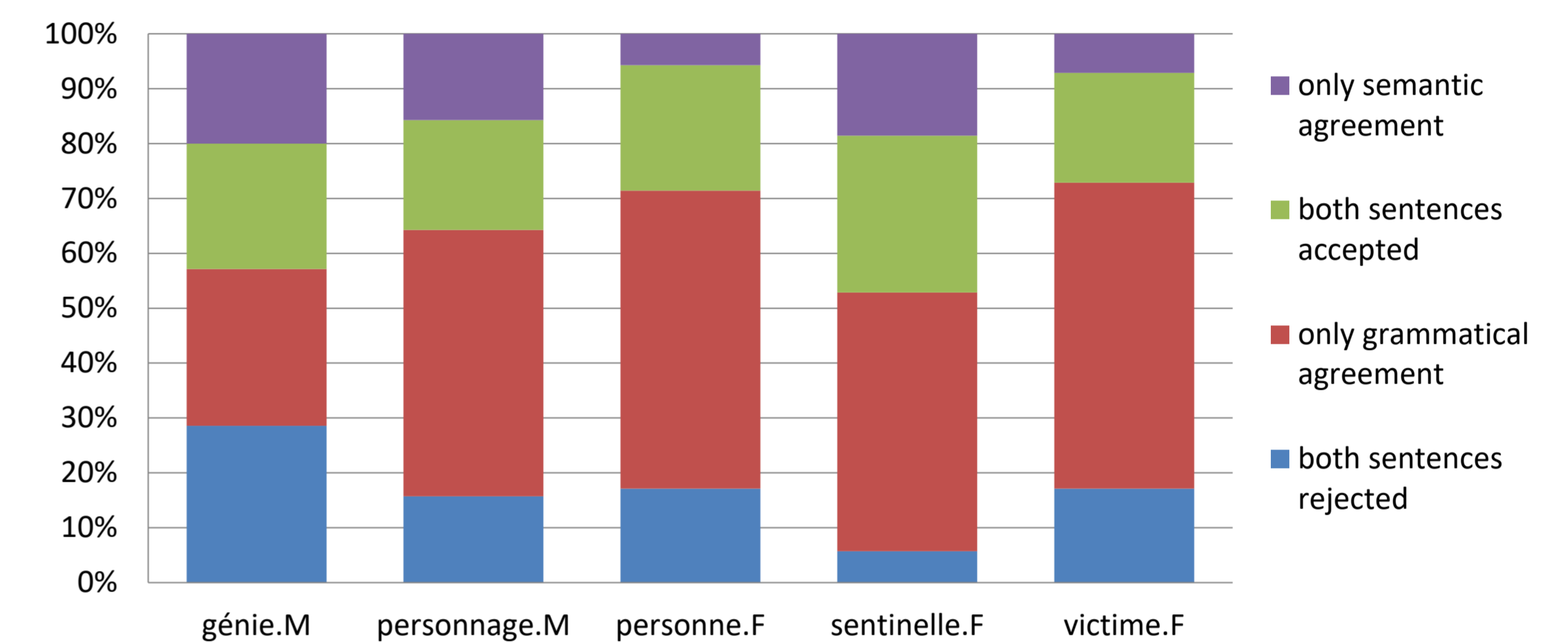
- Grammaticality Judgement Task with 70 native speakers of French
- Online task using Google Forms
- 80 sentences judged on a 5-point scale, presented in random order
- 13 different nouns of noun classes B, C and D included
- Sentences with semantic and grammatical agreement
- Control sentences
- Background questionnaire

4. Results

Comparison noun classes



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:

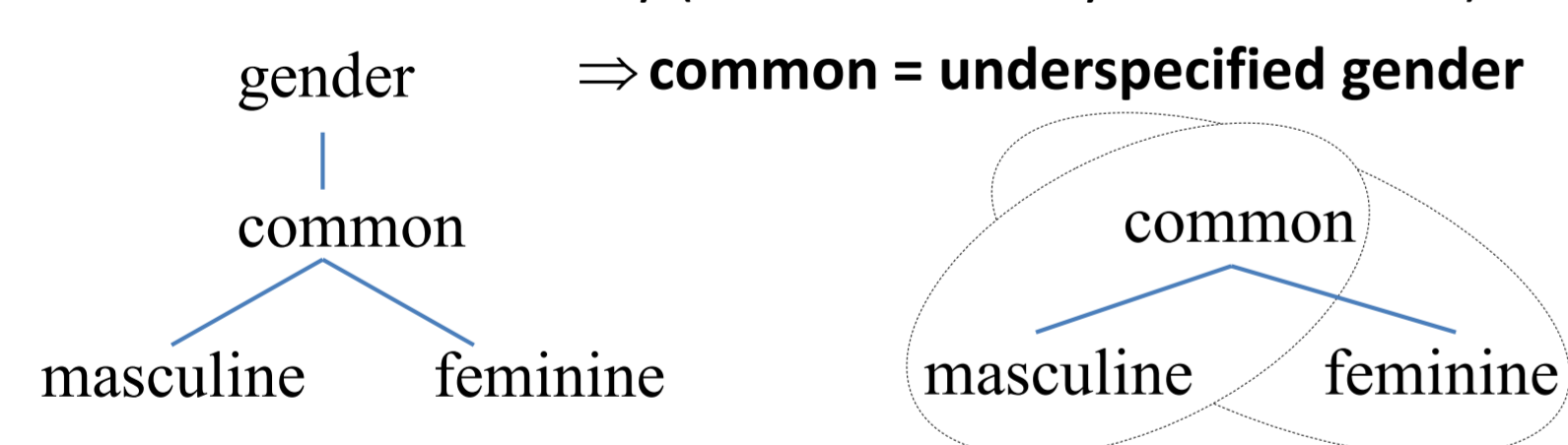
- The gender of the noun in the inner DP
- The gender of the predicate

(7) *La/Le plus jeune des nouveaux ministres est Hélène.*
the.F/M most young of.the new.M.PL minister.M.PL 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):



Feature marking in the mental lexicon:

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

- ⇒ Some nouns marked as either feminine [f] or masculine [m]
- ⇒ Some nouns marked with a hybrid feature [c, f] or [c, m]

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:

Petit Robert (1977)	Petit Robert (2016)
<i>ministre</i> > masculine noun	<i>ministre</i> > noun
<i>professeur</i> > masculine noun	<i>professeur</i> > noun
<i>sentinelle</i> > feminine noun	<i>sentinelle</i> > feminine noun

⇒ Westveer, Sleeman & Aboh (2018)

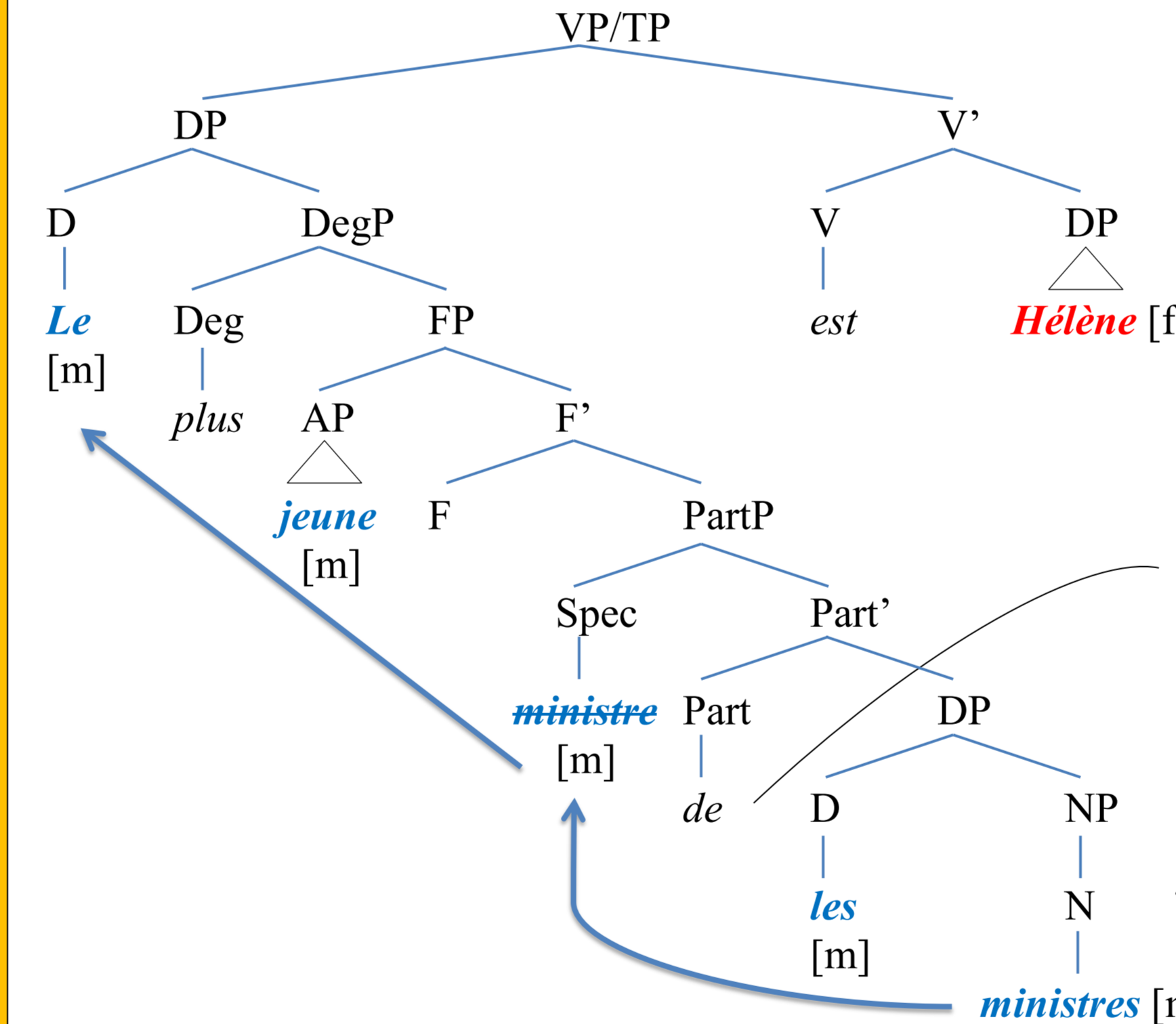
⇒ Class D noun *sentinelle* still marked as feminine: gender mismatches less acceptable

In this way, we can account for variation:

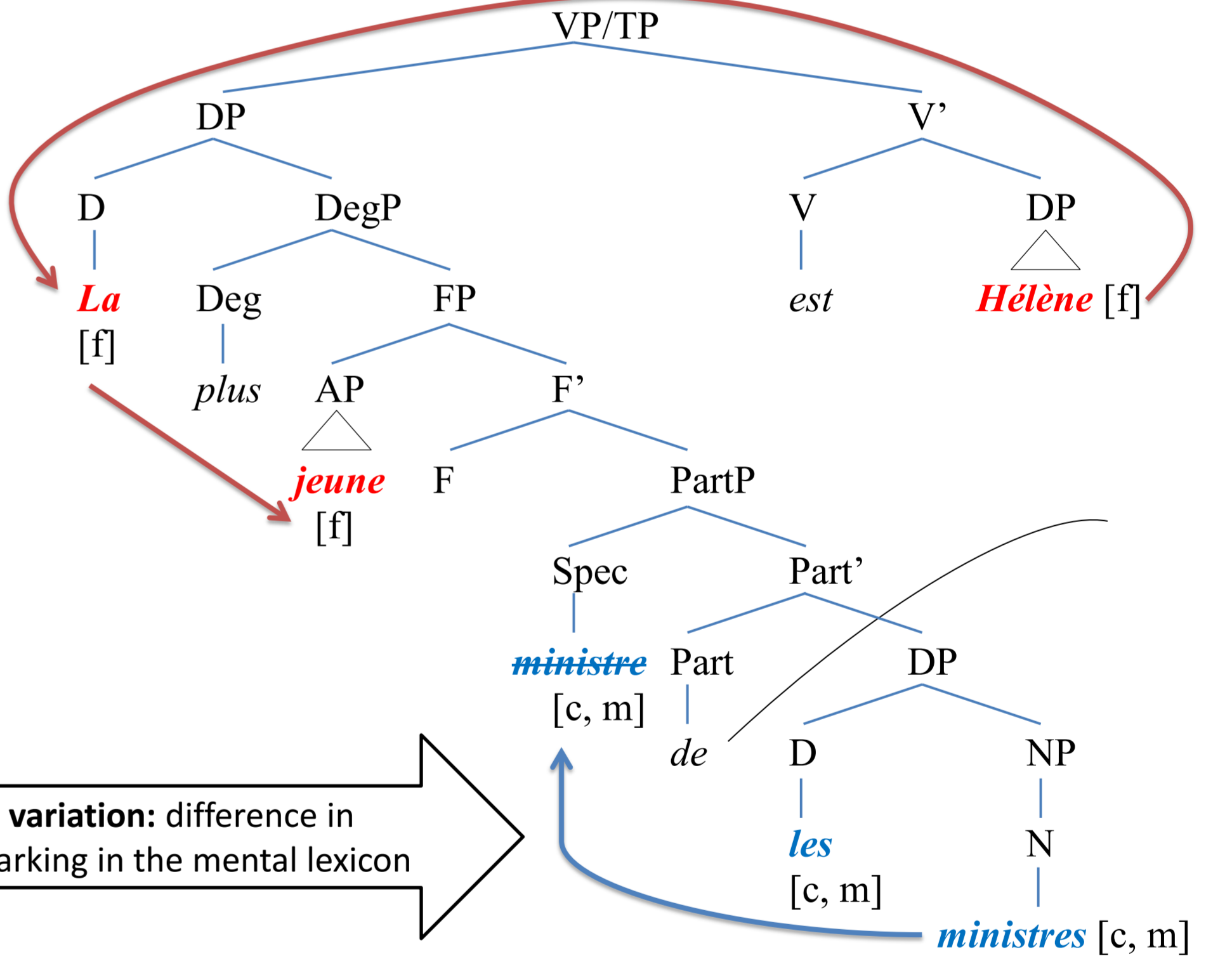
- If gender mismatches are not accepted with a noun, this noun is marked as either [f] or [m] in the mental lexicon
- If gender mismatches are accepted with a noun, this noun is marked as either [c, f] or [c, m] in the mental lexicon

6. An analysis that seems to work...

(8) *Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène.*
the.M most young of.the (new.M.PL) minister.M.PL is Hélène
⇒ Class C noun, no gender mismatch in partitive

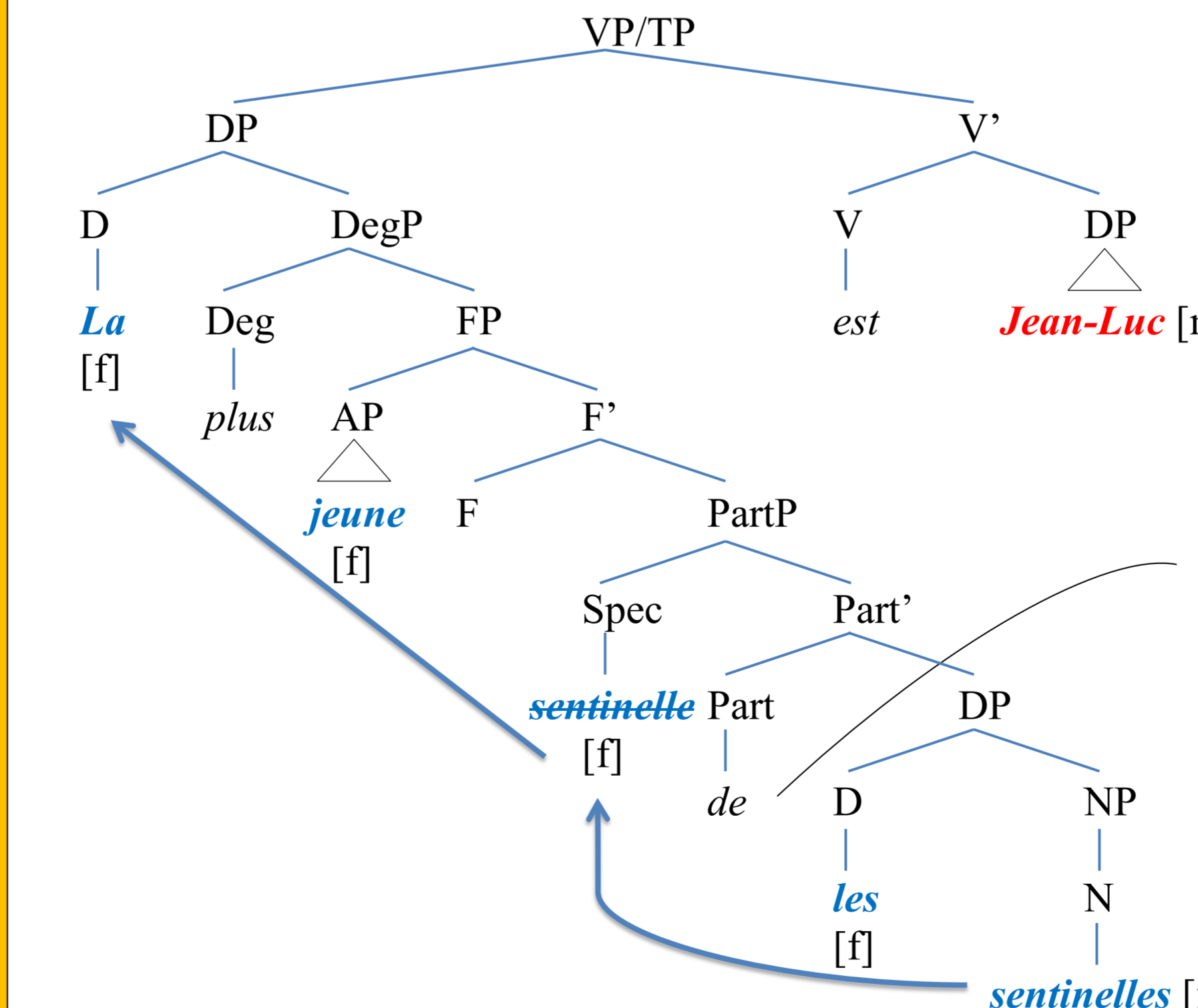


(9) *La plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Hélène.*
the.F most young of.the (new.C.PL) minister.C.PL is Hélène
⇒ Class C noun, gender mismatch in partitive

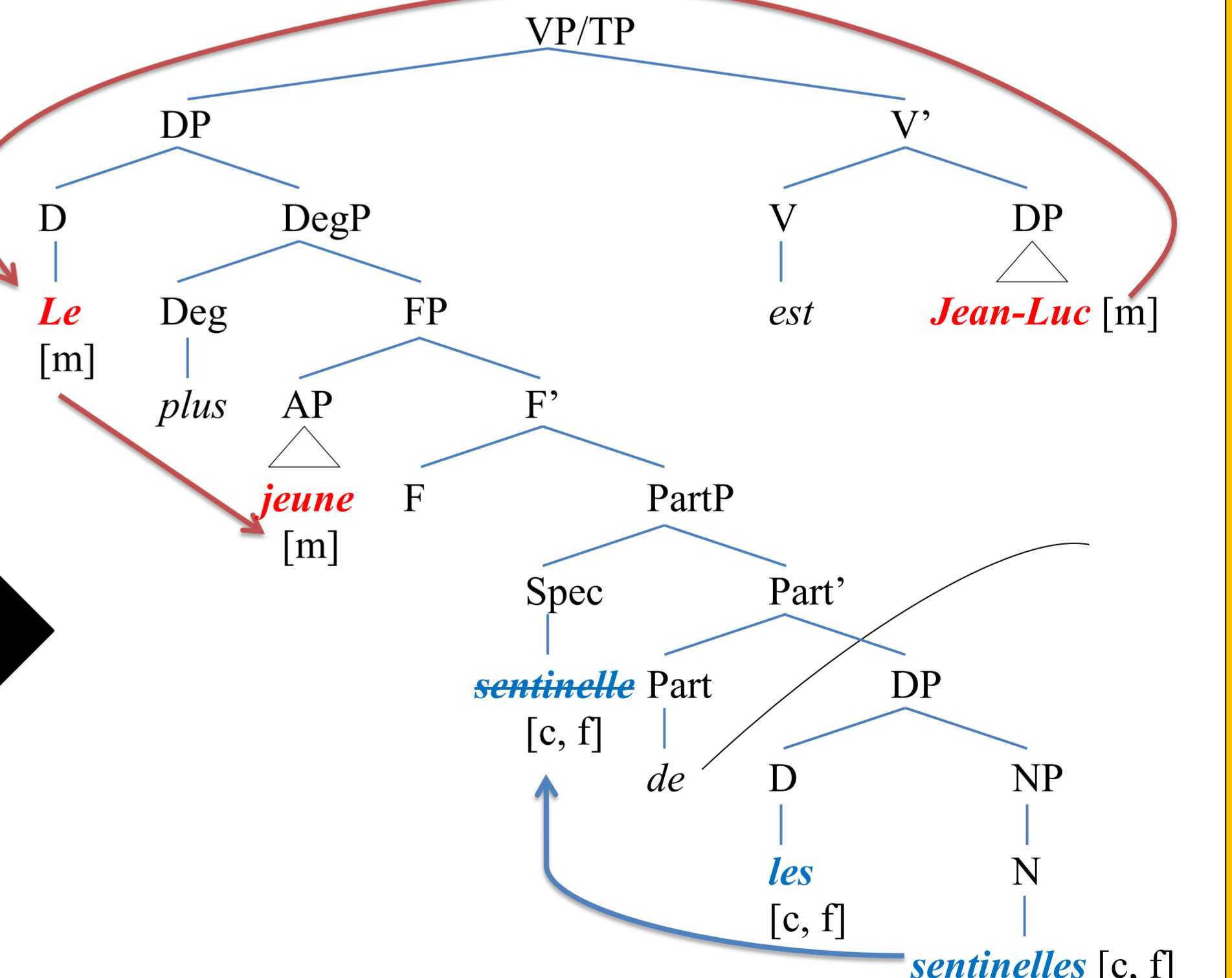


Individual variation: difference in feature marking in the mental lexicon

(10) *La plus jeune des (nouvelles) sentinelles est Jean-Luc.*
the.F most young of.the (new.F.PL) guard.F.PL is Jean-Luc
⇒ Class D noun, no gender mismatch in partitive



(11) *Le plus jeune des (nouvelles) sentinelles est Jean-Luc.*
the.M most young of.the (new.F.PL) guard.F.PL is Jean-Luc
⇒ Class D noun, gender mismatch in partitive



⇒ 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

7. Conclusion

- 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
- 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

- Harley, Heidi and Elizabeth Ritter. 2002. Structuring the bundle. A universal morphosyntactic feature geometry. *Pronouns - Grammar and Representation* ed. by Horst J. Simon & Heike Wiese. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 23-39.
- Ihsane, Tabea and Petra Sleeman. 2016. Gender agreement with animate nouns in French. *Selected Proceedings of the 43rd Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages* ed. by C. Tortora, M. den Dikken, I. Montoya, & T. O'Neill. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Sleeman, Petra & Tabea Ihsane. 2016. Gender mismatches in partitive constructions with superlatives in French. *Glossa* 1 (1) 35, 1-25.
- Westveer, Thom; Petra Sleeman and Enoch O. Aboh. 2018. Discriminating dictionaries? Feminine forms of profession nouns in dictionaries of French and German. *International Journal of Lexicography* 31 (4), 371-393.