Sexless animates?

*Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French*

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Citation for published version (APA):
We have proposed a theoretical analysis that explains the agreement patterns observed in French. There is a phase boundary between inner and outer DP. The core idea is that agreement is always possible in the inner DP, so we have to look for the factors that make agreement impossible in the outer DP.

### Feature marking in the mental lexicon:

#### Main theoretical assumptions:

1. **Gender agreement competition**: the outer DP can agree with the noun of the inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset), remains unpronounced.
2. If present, gender value copied together with noun (5)
3. **Gender agreement**: semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns.
4. **Gender agreement**: gender value copied together with noun (5)
5. If failed Agree, function projection Gender Phrase (GenP) only present for animate nouns

#### Grammatical gender:

- **Mental lexicon (in principle)**
  - With class B/C: yes
  - With class D: no

#### Semantic gender

- Functional projection Gender Phrase (GenP)
- With class B/C: yes
- With class D: no

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### 2. Sleeman & Ihnane (2016)

Gender agreement in (superlative) partitives in French:

- Class B nouns: only grammatical agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)
- Class C nouns: no gender agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

#### How do they explain these agreement patterns?

- **Distinction between grammatical and semantic gender**
- **Gender agreement competition**: the outer DP can agree with the noun of the inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset), remains unpronounced
- **Gender Phrase in outer DP**
  - If failed Agree has taken place in inner DP, second chance to insert gender value in outer DP (6)

#### Two-noun analysis of superlative partitives:

- Noun of inner DP (set) copied onto outer DP (subset), remains unpronounced
- Gender value copied together with noun (5)
- Gender agreement competition, the outer DP can agree with

### 3. Aims and methods

Sleeman & Ihnane’s results only based on a limited number of informants’ judgements. The theoretical analysis should explain:

- General differences between the noun classes
- Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns
- Gender agreement in superlative partitives:
  - Gender agreement competition, the outer DP can agree with

#### Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

- Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)
- Class D nouns: no gender agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

#### Linguistic features:

- **Gender agreement competition**: the outer DP can agree with
- **Gender agreement competition**: the outer DP can agree with

### 4. Results

#### Comparison noun classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun class</th>
<th>Grammatical agreement</th>
<th>Semantic agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B/C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Judgments of class D nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun class</th>
<th>Grammatical agreement</th>
<th>Semantic agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Class A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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### 5. Towards an analysis

The theoretical analysis should explain:

- **General differences between the noun classes**
- **Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns**
- **Gender agreement competition**: the outer DP can agree with

#### Gender agreement competition, the outer DP can agree with:

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

#### Main theoretical assumptions:

1. A two-noun analysis of partitives (cf. Sleeman & Ihnane 2016)
2. Inner DP’s noun copied onto outer DP, but remains unpronounced
3. There is a phase boundary between inner and outer DP

#### Gender feature hierarchy (based on Harley & Ritter 2002):

- **gender**
  - common
  - unspecified gender
  - masculine
  - feminine

#### Features marking in the mental lexicon:

- **[m]** masculine only
- **[f]** feminine only
- **[c]** common
- **[e]** unspecified gender

This follows the ongoing process of feminisation in French:

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

#### Petit Robert (1977)

- **minister**
  - masculine noun
  - feminine noun
- **professeur**
  - masculine noun
  - feminine noun
- **sentinelle**
  - feminine noun

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

#### Petit Robert (2016)

- **ministre**
  - masculine noun
  - feminine noun
- **professeur**
  - masculine noun
  - feminine noun
- **sentinelle**
  - feminine noun

#### Conclusion

1. Replication of Sleeman & Ihnane’s experiment on a larger scale:
   - Semantic agreement is preferred with class B and class C nouns
   - Gender agreement is preferred with class D nouns
2. We have proposed a theoretical analysis that explains the agreement patterns observed

#### References