Sexless animates?

Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French

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

Citation for published version (APA):

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: https://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.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
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

1. Introduction
Sexless animates?

Noun classes (adapted from Sleeman & Ihsane 2016)

Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms
is sœur/en ‘sister’ vs. le frère/la ‘brother’

Class B/C: Related forms: suffixes: s’s/s (determiner) [C] change to ch’s/ch’re/s – le chanteur/s, ‘the singer’

Class D: Fixed-gender nouns
la mère/s, ‘the mother’
le père/s, ‘the father’

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

Gender agreement in superlative partitives:

(4) Plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc.
⇒ plus jeune de la collection est Jean-Luc.
⇒ Plus jeune des sentinelles est Jean-Luc.
⇒ Plus jeune de la collection est Jean-Luc.

⇒ Grammatical and semantic gender agreement?

⇒ Previously investigated by Sleeman & Ihsane (2016)

3. Aims and 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 noun classes B, C and D included

⇒ Sentences with semantic and grammatical agreement

⇒ Control sentences

⇒ Background questionnaire

5. Towards an analysis

The theoretical explanation 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

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

⇒ the most young of the new 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)

⇒ gender common → underspecified gender

⇒ masculine feminine masculine feminine

⇒ Features marking in the mental lexicon:

⇒ [m] masculine only

⇒ [f] feminine only

⇒ [c, m] masculine + common

⇒ [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 ministère, professeur and sentinelle in different editions of the French Petit Robert dictionary:


ministère > masculine noun ministère > noun
professeur > masculine noun professeur > noun
sentinelle > feminine 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

6. An analysis that seems to work...

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

⇒ the most young of the (new M.PL) is Hélène.

⇒ Class C noun, no gender mismatch in partitive

⇒ Est Hélène.

⇒ Le plus jeune des (nouveaux) ministres est Jean-Luc.

⇒ the most young of the (new M.PL) is Jean-Luc.

⇒ Class D noun, gender mismatch in partitive

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: (1) Investigate quantified partitives (one of the X) & (2) Investigate same phenomena in German

References


