Sexless animates?

Gender agreement in superlative partitives in French
Westveer, T.J.T.; Sleeman, A.P.; Aboh, E.O.

Citation for published version (APA):
1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

1.1 Noun classes (adapted from Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

- Class A: Suppletive forms: two distinct forms, i.e. feminine “la sœur” vs. masculine “le frère”, “the brother”
- Class B/C: Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change, e.g. “le chanteur” vs “le chanteuse”
- Class D: Fixed-gender nouns. The feminine “la ministre” vs. masculine “le ministre”

Note: Class D nouns can refer to both females and males.

2. Sleeman & Ihsane (2016)

- Gender agreement in (superlative) partitives in French:
  - Class D nouns: only grammatical agreement
  - Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible

How do they explain these agreement patterns?

- Distinction between grammatical and semantic gender
- Valuation through insertion of semantic gender value on gender
- No semantic gender value → Failed Agree (Preminger 2011)
- Spell-out of default masculine gender

2.1 Towards an analysis

- 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 (F)
- 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

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

4. Results

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:

5.1. The gender of the noun in the inner DP

5.2. The gender of the predicate

6. An analysis that seems to work...

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

1. The most young of the (new) ministers is Hélène.

(9) La plus jeune des (nouvelles) sœurs est Jean-Luc.

1. The most young of the (new) sisters is Jean-Luc.

7. Conclusion

References