Gender agreement and mismatches: the syntactic structure of quantified and superlative partitives

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

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1. Introduction

The problem: acceptability of gender mismatches in partitive constructions

**Superpartitives: German = French**

- (a) Der/Ier Die junge студен. der Studenten-ist der w.pl. Irene. mismatch
- (b) Die/Ier plus jeune des étudiants-est student.w.pl. is Irene. mismatch

"The youngest of the students is Irene.

**Quantified partitives: German <> French**

- (1a) la/ié plus jeune student-w.pl. is Irene. mismatch
- (1b) l'étudiant des étudiants-est student.w-pl. is Irene. mismatch

"One of the students is Irene.

→ How to explain this contrast?

2. Theoretical background

Existing studies on the syntactic structure of partitives (e.g. Jackendoff, 1977; Sleeman & Kester, 2002; Falco & Zamparelli, 2019)

But: focus on quantified partitives (see examples in 2)

- Only study that also addresses superpartitive partitives (see examples in 1): Sleeman & Ilhanse (2016)
- (building on Hulk & Tellier, 2000; Sleeman & Kester, 2003)

Sleeman & Ilhanse’s (2016) analysis raises some questions:

2. Movement of preposition? What motivates this?
3. How to extend the proposal to German? German = genitive case marking instead of preposition

3. The proposal: A small clause analysis for partitives

(Cf. Sleeman & Kester, 2002)

**Predicative construction with nominal relator**

→ No copying!

**German = genitive case marking instead of preposition by 1**

**French: no need for semantic feature valuation; lower D bears gender value in (12)**

3.1 Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

Partitives may contain a classifier-like element:

- (5a) Ein Exemplar der Büch-
er
- (5b) Un exemplaire des livres-

Presence of classifier also suggested by Falco & Zamparelli (2019; classifier attested in other languages, e.g. Turkish ‘item’ (von Heusinger & Kornfert, 2017):

- (6) Meyve-ler-ı üç tane-sin-i ye-di-m.
  - fruit.pl-pl three,3pl.acc item-3sg.acc eat-3st-1sg

→ No copy theory of movement (Sleeman & Ilhanse, 2016): silent nominal classifier

3.2 Partitives involve a nominal relator

Den Dikken (2006a): nominal predicate analysis for qualitative constructions (7)

- e.g. an idiot of a doctor

→ of = nominal relator (copula)

→ ... spells out as preposition in French
→ ... assigns genitive case in German

→ No PP in partitive constructions!

4. Quantified vs. superpartitive partitives

Difference between quantified (8) and superpartitive partitives (9):

- (8a) le plus jeune des étudiants-est student.w-pl. is Irene. mismatch
- (8b) l'étudiant des étudiants-est student.w-pl. is Irene. mismatch

→ Superpartitives headed by a DP
→ ... referential projection; links superlative to its referent in discourse

4.1 Superpartitives: German = French

Gender mismatch accepted in German (13), but not in French (12):

→ Possible in superpartitive because of referential DI

4.2 Quantified partitives: French <> German

Gender mismatch accepted in German (13), but not in French (12):

→ Why would semantic feature valuation be allowed in German?
→ ... gender restriction in the plural in German: no gender value on lower D in (13)!

**References**

5. Dikken, Den. 2006a: nominal predicate analysis for qualitative constructions (7) e.g. an idiot of a doctor

5. Concluding remarks

Novel syntactic analysis of both quantified and superpartitive partitives:

  - No PP, but nominal relator, spells out as de in French; assigns genitive case in German
  - Silent nominal classifier, no copying

Explanation of agreement differences between French and German:

→ Semantic feature valuation applies, if...

1. ... the construction is headed by a referential element = DP
→ => Mismatch accepted in superpartitive partitives in French and German
2. ... if the lower D does not bear any gender value = last resort
→ => Mismatch not accepted in quantified partitives in French
→ => Mismatch accepted in quantified partitives in German

\textbf{Gender agreement and mismatches: the syntactic structure of quantified and superpartitive partitives}

\textbf{Thom Westerveer, Petra Sleeman & Enoch O. Aboh - Universiteit van Amsterdam}

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