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

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1. Introduction

The problem: acceptability of gender mismatches in partitive constructions

Superpartitive constructions:

- **German = French**
  - Gender mismatches can occur in partitive constructions.
  - Example: "Irene is the youngest student."

Quantified partitives:

- **German = French**
  - Example: "One of the students is Irene."

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)

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3. The proposal:

A small clause analysis for partitives

(Cf. Sleeman & Kester, 2002)

3.1 Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

Partitives may contain a classifier-like element:

- a. Exemplar der Bucher,
  - a copy of the books
- b. ein exemplaire des livres
  - a copy of the books

Presence of classifier also suggested by Falco & Zamparelli (2019); classifier attested in other languages, e.g., Turkish 'item' (Von Heusinger & Kornfilt, 2017):

- (6) Meyve-ler in uc tane-sin-i ye-di-m.
  - fruit-pl gen three,3sg.acc item-3sg.acc eat-pst-1sg
  - "I ate three items of the fruit."

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3.2 Partitives involve a nominal relator

In partitive constructions, nominal relator...

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

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4. Quantified vs. superpartitive partitives

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

- (8) QP 
  - No copying!
- (9) QP 
  - Q PredP 
  - No PP!

4.1 Superpartitive: German = French

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

4.2 Quantified partitives: French <-> German

Why would semantic feature valuation be allowed in German?

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5. Concluding remarks

Novel syntactic analysis of both quantified and superpartitive partitives:

- **Small clause analysis, building on Sleeman & Kester (2002)**
- **Falco & Zamparelli (2019)**
- **Silent nominal classifier, no copying**

Explanation of agreement differences between French and German:

- Semantic feature valuation applies, if...
  - ... the construction is headed by a referential element = DP
  - ... the lower D does not bear any gender value = last resort
  - ... the construction is not accepted in quantified partitives in French
  - ... Mismatch accepted in quantified partitives in German