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 partitives:**

1. a. Der/Die jungen der Studenten ist Irene. [gender mismatch]
   b. Die junge des Studenten ist Irene. [gender mismatch]

2. a. Des jüngsten der Studenten ist Irene. [gender mismatch]
   b. Die jüngste des Studenten ist Irene. [gender mismatch]

- “The youngest of the students is Irene.”

**Quantified partitives:**

1. a. Le/la plus jeune des étudiants est Irene. [gender mismatch]
   b. Les plus jeunes des étudiants est Irene. [gender mismatch]

2. a. Le/la plus jeune des étudiants est Irene. [gender mismatch]
   b. Les plus jeunes des étudiants est Irene. [gender mismatch]

- “One of the students is Irene.”

→ How to explain this contrast?

4. Quantified vs. superpartitive partitives

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

5. Concluding remarks

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:

- (5) a. ein Exemplar der Büch-er.
- b. un Exemplaire des livres.

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

- (6) Meye-lar-in üc tane-sin-i ye-di-m.

- “I ate three (items) of the fruits.”

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

3.2 Partitives involve a nominal relator

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

- (7) a. ein Exemplar der Büch-er.
- b. un Exemplaire des livres.

In partitive constructions, nominal relator...

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

→ No PP in partitive constructions!

4.1 Superpartitive partitives: German = French

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...

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Explanations of agreement differences between French and German...

- Semantic feature valuation applies, if...

1. ... the construction is headed by a relational 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

Explanations of agreement differences between French and German...

- Semantic feature valuation applies, if...

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