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

Superpartitives: German = French

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 superlative partitives (see examples in 1): Sleeman & Ihnase (2016)

Building on Hulst & Teller, 2000; Sleeman & Kester, 2003

Sleeman & Ihnase’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. Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

Partitives may contain a classifier-like element:

→ No copying!

3.1 Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

Presence of classifier also suggested by Falco & Zamparelli (2019) classifier attested in other languages, e.g., Turkish ‘item’ (von Heusinger & Kester, 2002; Falco & Zamparelli, 2019)

In partitive constructions, nominal relator...

→ No copying of movement (Sleeman & Ihnase, 2016) silent nominal classifier

3.2 Partitives involve a nominal relator

Novel syntactic analysis of both quantified and superlative partitives:

→ Semantic feature valuation applies, if...

→ Assigns genitive case in German

→ No PP in partitive constructions!

5. Concluding remarks

Novel syntactic analysis of both quantified and superlative 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...

... the construction is headed by a referential element = DP

→ => Mismatch accepted in superpartitive in French and German

→ 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