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

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Publication date
2021

Citation for published version (APA):
1. Introduction

The problem: acceptability of gender mismatches in partitive constructions

Superpartitives: German = French

(a) die intelligenten 
the intelligent.

b. die intelligentes 
the intelligent.

Norah Jones: I ate three (items) of the fruits.' 

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

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 syncretism in the plural in German: no gender value on lower D in (13)!

References

For the foundation of German classifier grammar: Meurers & Unbehauen: 2017.

3.2 Partitives involve a nominal relator

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

→ of = nominal relator (copula)

In partitive constructions, nominal relator...

• ... spells out as preposition in French

• ... 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...

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

→Mismatch accepted in superpartitive French

→Mismatch not accepted in superpartitive French

2. ... if the lower D does not bear any gender value = last resort!

1. Existence of syntactic structure of partitives (e.g. Jakendorf, 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 & Ißlane (2016)

Building on Huls & Tellier, 2000; Sleeman & Kester, 2002)

Sleeman & Ißlane’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

3.1 Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

Partitives may contain a classifier-like element:

(5) a. Een exemplaar der Bucher.

b. Un exemple de livre.

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

(6) Meyve-lar-ın uc tane-sin-i ye-dil-m.

fruit-pl-gen three, 3sg,acc item-3sg,acc est-pst-1sg

‘I ate three items of the fruits.’

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

2. Theoretical background

Example of a partitive structure with gender mismatches in French, (Oliver 2008)