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

- a. Die/De jüngste der Studenten ist Irene. mismatch
  - the youngest of the students is Irene.
- b. Juxta/la plus jeune des étudiants est Irene. mismatch
  - the youngest of the students is Irene.

Partitives: German = French

- a. Die/De der junge Student ist Irene. mismatch
  - the young student is Irene.
- b. Juxta/la des étudiants est Irene. mismatch
  - the student is Irene.

"One of the students is Irene."

→ How to explain this contrast?

2. Theoretical background

3. The proposal: A small clause analysis for partitives (Cf. Sleeman & Kester, 2002)

4. Quantified vs. superpartitive partitives

4.1 Superpartitives: French = German

4.2 Quantified partitives: French <> German

5. Concluding remarks

References

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 ...
  - ... the construction is headed by a referential element = DP
  - => Mismatch accepted in superpartitive partitives 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

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 & Insane (2016)

Sleeman & Insane’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

Partitives may contain a classifier-like element:

  - a copy of the books
- b. Un 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-i has one item of fruits.

In partitive constructions, nominal relator...

- ... spells out as preposition de in French
- ... assigns genitive case in German
- ... No PP in partitive constructions!

Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

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

- of = nominal relator (copula)

In partitive constructions, nominal relator...

- ... assigns genitive case in German

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Exploration of agreement differences between French and German

- Semantic feature valuation applies, if ...
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  - => Mismatch accepted in quantified partitives in German

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

3.1 Partitives involve a silent nominal classifier

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