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: German = French

1. a. Die/der jüngste der Studenten ist Irene. mismatch
   b. Die plus jeune des étudiants est Irene. mismatch

“the youngest of the students is Irene.”

Quantitative: German => French

2. a. Ein/eine der Studenten ist Irene. mismatch
   b. Un/exemplaire des étudiants est Irene. mismatch

“One of the students is Irene.”

→ How to explain this contrast?

4. Quantified vs. superpartitive partitives

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

→ Superpartitive headed by a DP → d referential projection; links superpartitive to its referent in discourse

4.1 Superpartitive: German = French

→ Possible in superpartitive because of referential DI

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)!

5. Concluding remarks

Novel syntactic analysis of both quantified and superpartitive partitives:

Small clause analysis, building on Sleeman & Kester (2002, Den Dikken 2006)

→ No PP, but nominal referal, 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 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

References


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