Sexless animates? Gender agreement with fixed-gender nouns in German and French
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1. Introduction

Sexless animates?

Class D nouns marked for specific grammatical gender (M, F, (N)) in the lexicon

Ihsane

Some animate nouns marked for gender in the lexicon (class D), others would be difficult to interpret in a formal sense…

This competition is not possible with German neuter class D nouns!

Preminger, Omer. 2011.

Semantic agreement with French and German class B/C nouns

Competition in agreement, caused by

Do we observe the same patterns as

Gender feature hierarchy:

If present, gender value copied together with noun

Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch

Class D: marked for specific grammatical gender in the lexicon

Second Gender Phrase in outer DP

Can refer to females and males

Grammatical or semantic gender agreement?

Gender agreement in superpartitive constructions (i-iii):

For French: Sleeman & Ihsane (2016)

Class D: nouns only grammatical gender (not verified by them!)

Class B/C nouns: semantic agreement possible (gender mismatch between set noun and subset noun accepted)

What about German?

Noun classes (adapted from Ihsane & Sleeman 2016)

Class A

Suppletive forms: two distinct forms

die Schweizer F “the sister” – der Bruder M “the brother”

Class B/C

Related forms: suffix (B)/determiner (C) change

die Studentin F “the student”

die Flüchtling M “the refugee”

Class D

Fixed-gender nouns
do Kind.N. “the child”

5. Results

(i) Das/ Der/Die älteste der Kinder ist Paul/Marie.

the.N./M./F. oldest of the child.N.PL is Paul/Mary

German neuter

(iii) La/ Le plus jeune des sentinelles est Paul.

the.F./M. most young of these guard.F.PL is Paul

French feminine

Interim conclusion:

– Sleeman & Ihsane’s analysis can explain difference between class B/C and class D nouns in French

– Some animate nouns marked for gender in the lexicon (class D), others unmarked (class B/C)?

6. A slightly different approach

Assumption: all nouns are marked for grammatical gender, but not all to the same degree of specification

Class D nouns marked for specific grammatical gender (M, F, (N)) in the lexicon

Class B/C nouns marked for hybrid grammatical gender (M/F), not specified as either masculine or feminine yet

Comparison with Dutch gender system:

– Originally three genders: masculine & feminine & neuter

– Conflation of masculine and feminine: M = F = common

– Now two genders: common & neuter

HYBRID GENDER = COMMON GENDER

Adapted from Hanson, Harley & Ritter (2002)

Supporting evidence:

– The use of neuter in the inner DP is ungrammatical when the inner DP is masculine/feminine

– "The youngest of the teachers…"

– "The youngest of the persons present…"

7. Conclusion & outlook

– Grammatical agreement with German neuter and French class D nouns

– Semantic agreement with German masculine/feminine class D nouns

– Semantic agreement with French and German class B/C nouns

– We propose a gender feature hierarchy to account for these patterns

Unresolved issue: Why is the agreement competition possible between German masculine/feminine class D nouns, but not/less so with similar French nouns?

Is gender to be understood as a continuum?

– Would be difficult to interpret in a formal sense…

References


4. Methodology: Grammatical Judgment Task

Native speakers of German (n = 20) and French (n = 70)

– Sentences with and without gender mismatch, including control sentences

– Sentences judged on a 5-point scale

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