

Gender mismatches in partitive constructions, phases and locality

Petra Sleeman (University of Amsterdam) & Tabea Ihsane (University of Geneva)

0. According to Cardinaletti & Giusti (2006, §3.3.4), partitive constructions can present mismatches in number (*one of the books*), but not in gender. This is also suggested by examples such as (1) and (2):

- (1) *La /*le plus jeune de mes gentilles filles est malade.*
the.F.SG./ the.M.SG. most young of my.PL. sweet.F.PL. daughters.F.PL. is sick
- (2) *La /*le plus jeune de toutes ces sentinelles a une barbe.*
the.F.SG./ the.M.SG. most young of all.F.PL these.PL. sentinels.F.PL. has a beard

In this paper we challenge this claim by providing new data from French that show that gender mismatches in partitive constructions are possible. The data are based on the judgments of ten native speakers of French. To the best of our knowledge such data have never been discussed before. We analyze gender mismatches in partitive constructions containing an animate noun. On the basis of the data we examine, we distinguish between nouns that can have a masculine, a feminine, and a default masculine realization (*enfant* ‘child’ and *professeur* ‘professor’), nouns that can be masculine and default (*étudiant* ‘student’) but which have a feminine counterpart (*étudiante* ‘student.F’) and nouns that are feminine, but which may refer to men (*sentinelle* ‘sentinel.F’). We propose a feature checking analysis that accounts for the differences in agreement presented by these nouns in various constructions. We also claim that our data can provide further insight into what counts as a phase and what the role of locality is in semantic agreement.

1. In (3), *enfant* ‘child’ is used as a feminine noun, as the agreement on *gentilles* ‘sweet. F.PL’ shows. This sentence corresponds to (1-2) in that there is no gender mismatch. This is different in (4):

- (3) *La /*le plus jeune de mes gentilles enfants est malade.*
the.F.SG./ the.M.SG. most young of my.PL. sweet.F.PL. children.F.PL. is sick
- (4) *La plus jeune de mes gentils enfants est malade.*
the.F.SG. most young of my.PL. sweet.M.PL. children.PL. is sick

The gender agreement on the adjective *gentils* ‘sweet’ in (4) shows that the noun *enfant* ‘child’ is masculine. The feminine form of the determiner *la* is therefore unexpected. In the spirit of, e.g., Kramer (2009), we propose that the semantic gender of animate nouns is expressed in a functional projection (GenP) dominating the noun, between NP and DP, and that its value is the consequence of Agree with grammatical gender expressed in NP. Within a feature checking analysis of agreement (Pesetsky & Torrego 2007) we propose that in (2), although agreement with the grammatical gender expressed in NP values the probes in DP as feminine, the feature in GenP is uninterpretable, which may lead to a semantic gender mismatch without syntactic consequences (cf. Percus 2011). For the noun *enfant* in (4) we claim that it does not have a gender feature in NP, and that therefore the feature on the probes remains unvalued. This results in failed Agree inside DP, and, as a consequence, in the default masculine spell-out of the unvalued features of the DP, including D, at Phonological Form (Preminger 2009, 2011). Crucially, we further propose that it is this unvalued feature which allows gender to be specified in the (inner) DP phase in a second cycle of Merge. As DP is spelled-out, we suggest that the gender specification is added to the feature in the layer dominating DP, ϕ P (split DP). This is possible because the head of the phase (ϕ) is not excluded by the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC, Chomsky 2001) from further operations after the DP has been sent to the Interfaces. The feature specification later in the derivation (as feminine in (4)), will serve for new operations, such as agreement with the

outer DP in a partitive construction or a predicate. Since the inner DP/ ϕ P contains a semantic gender phrase, the feature specification establishes the sex of the referent.

2. The difference between (4) and (5) suggests that the feature specification can be added to the inner DP/ ϕ P, as in (4), but not to the outer DP: for the predicative adjective in (5) to be feminine, the subject would have to be feminine, too. This would imply that gender is specified in the D of the outer DP, which is not possible, as the ungrammaticality of the example shows. Sentence (6) contrasts with (5), in that it contains a simple DP subject (and not a partitive DP), to which a feature specification can be added. This suggests that the inner DP in (4)-(5) and the subject DP in (6) are phases, to the edge of which a feature specification can be added once they have been sent to the interfaces.

(5) **Le /la plus jeune de mes gentils enfants est toujours contente.*
 the.M.SG./F.SG most young of my.PL. sweet.M.PL. children.PL. is always happy.F.SG.

(6) Talking about a woman:

Mon ancien professeur de français était toujours contente.
 my.M.SG. former.M.SG. professor.SG of French was always happy.F.SG.

3. The mismatches in the partitive constructions we analyze also lead us to extend Corbett's (1979) Agreement Hierarchy with "partitive". The further left an element is in the hierarchy, the more likely syntactic agreement is to occur; the further right it is, the more likely semantic agreement is. We relate the hierarchy to phase theory.

(7) Attributive – **partitive** – predicate – relative pronoun – personal pronoun

Based on different types of nouns, we provide a morphological account for the fact that some types of animate nouns in French presenting agreement mismatches seem to resist semantic agreement more than others. Whereas in the case of the masculine default noun *enfant* in (4), attributive agreement is grammatical, and partitive agreement is semantic, with the animate noun *étudiant* 'student' in (8), partitive agreement can only be grammatical (9):

(8) **La plus intelligente de mes anciens étudiants est malade.*
 the.F.SG. most intelligent.F.SG. of my former.M.PL. students.M.PL. is sick

(9) *La plus intelligente de mes anciennes étudiantes est malade.*
 the.F.SG. most intelligent of my former.F.PL. students.F.PL. is sick

4. Finally we argue that our data provide evidence for a structural distinction between several types of partitive constructions (cf. Cardinaletti & Giusti 2006). On the basis of (10-11), we place such "looser" partitive constructions to the right of the structurally "tighter" ones (8-9) in the Agreement Hierarchy: this is because semantic agreement in the "looser" partitive constructions is possible with animate nouns of the *étudiant* type:

(10) *La plus intelligente parmi mes anciens étudiants est malade.*
 the.F.SG. most intelligent.F.SG. among my former.M.PL. students.M.PL. is sick

(11) *De tous mes étudiants, la plus intelligente est malade.*
 of all.M.PL. my students.M.PL. the.F.SG. most intelligent.F.SG. is sick

5. In sum, to account for our data we propose a feature checking analysis of gender agreement in relation to phase-theory and Corbett's Agreement Hierarchy. This allows us to distinguish between different agreement patterns, between structurally different types of partitives and between different noun types in constructions that have not been discussed so far.

Selected references:

- Cardinaletti, Anna & Giuliana Giusti. 2006. The syntax of quantified phrases and quantitative clitics. *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, vol. V, ed. by M. Everaert & H. van Riemsdijk, 23-93. Oxford: Blackwell.
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