

# Form-meaning mismatches in number and gender

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## I. The form-meaning mismatch

- Number and gender mismatches in the noun phrase are an instance of a 1:0 form-meaning mismatch.
- Adjectives can display a mismatch in number & gender with certain classes of nouns as in (i). Numerals also can display a mismatch in gender in the presence of certain nouns as in (ii). Nouns, too, can display a mismatch in number in the presence of some numerals as in (iii):
  - i. kutub jadiid-ah (Arabic)  
books.M.PL new-F.SG 'New books'
  - ii. xams-at awlaad  
five-F boys
  - iii. xamsuun kitaab  
fifty book.SG
- These mismatches are morphosyntactic as shown by the presence of different forms of the modifier and the role of word order in imposing them.
- They can also be semantic given the availability of transparent agreement and the fact that many of these mismatches are triggered only in the presence of certain classes of nouns.

Question → To what extent do number and gender mismatches in the nominal domain constitute a 1:0 form meaning mismatch?

## II. Motivation

- The investigation of nominal mismatches can help us understand the interaction between the morphosyntax and semantics of nominal inflection.
- Specific properties of nominal agreement include:
  - i. Some features can only appear in the nominal domain such as definiteness and case.
  - ii. Some nominal mismatches do not carry over to the clausal domain, hence they can only be attested in the nominal domain.
- Given these properties, investigating number and gender mismatches can help us understand the nature of the inflectional system in the noun phrase and whether the existing theories of clausal agreement can also explain the specific properties of nominal agreement.

## III. Research questions

- How can we explain the mismatches in number and gender in the nominal domain?
- What is the range of variation in number and gender mismatches with different nominal classes?
- To what extent do these mismatches contribute to meaning?

## IV. Hypotheses and method

Hypothesis → number and gender mismatches are the result of constrained agreement domains. This restriction is triggered by the feature specification on the noun which dictates its merge position in the nominal skeleton. This implies that the noun phrase may have more than one agreement domain

- **First step:** formal theoretical analysis of the different contexts where feature-mismatches in number and gender arise in the noun phrase with focus on:
  - i. The apparent dependency between number and gender features.
  - ii. The range of variation, if any, in number and gender mismatches with different nominal classes.
  - iii. The effect of the semantics of these nominal classes on restricting agreement domains.
  - iv. The effect of word order alternation between the noun and other nominal modifiers in constraining the probe-goal relation in the nominal domain.
  - v. The extent of meaning contribution of these mismatches.
- **Second step:** Cross-linguistic comparison of number and gender mismatches with focus on:
  - i. The range of variation in number and gender mismatches in the nominal domain in other languages
  - ii. Whether this variation can be predicted by the current theory.

## V. Connections to other research projects

- Type of form-meaning mismatch: **1,2,3** (1:0 form-meaning mismatch)
- Empirical domain: **1,4,7,10** (Language variation across modalities)
- Content: **1,3**
- Methods: **4,9,10** (Cross-linguistic comparison)

## VI. Possible follow-up studies

1. Formal features vs. semantic features in the noun phrase.
2. Agreement on attributive vs. predicative adjectives.