

MULDER'S PARALLEL AND DIVERSE DETERMINATION DISTINCTION, A REPLY TO HESELWOOD^[*]

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In a recent edition of *La Linguistique* Barry Heselwood (1995/1) discussed Jan Mulder's distinction between parallel and diverse determination. The discussion first described the distinction and then criticised it as "an impossible procedure to implement" (p. 21 [p. 3]). Heselwood's conclusion is that "the distinction and the terms of the distinction should be abandoned" (p. 24 [p. 5]).

I hope to show that Heselwood's criticism is ill-founded and self-contradictory.

Parallel determination occurs when two or more peripheral elements in a construction each contract direct relations with the nucleus in such a way that no communicational difference can be attributed to the relations in question. Thus, in Heselwood's example *the blue vase* the signs *the* and *blue* separately determine *vase* in the relations *the* R^a *vase* and *blue* R^b *vase*. However, it cannot be shown that R^a and R^b are communicationally different. As Heselwood rightly comments "the peripheral elements (*the* and *blue*) cannot permute and neither can their commutants. We thus have two different position classes so that *the* and *blue* and their respective commutants always determine *vase* in the same way..." (p. 18-19 [p. 2]). It should be noted immediately, however, that the position classes arise from the establishment of the commutants in the terminals of the relations in question. The emphasis is first on the relations in syntagms. Thus, the position class "article" is the class of elements which may stand in the domain of the relation R^a above and "noun" is the class of elements which can stand in the counterdomain of that relation. *Blue* is the domain of R^b and *vase* the counterdomain. The position class "adjective" is the class of commutants in the domain of R^b .

In fact, I imagine also that Mulder would prefer to say that the relations are provisionally treated as "not different", rather than "the same". Later evidence may refute the hypothesis that the relations are not communicationally different.

The situation is very different in *John likes Mary* as opposed to *Mary likes John*. As Heselwood explains, "it is clear that *John* has a different relation to *like* in the two positions" (p. 18 [p. 2]), namely the subject and direct object positions. That is, the relation R^x in *John* R^x *likes* is communicationally different from the relation R^y in *likes* R^y *John*.

[*] Previously published as Rastall, Paul. 1997. "Mulder's parallel and diverse determination distinction, A reply to Heselwood". *La Linguistique* 33:1.127-9. Heselwood's original paper to which Rastall refers is re-published in *Linguistica* ONLINE, <<http://www.phil.muni.cz/linguistica/art/heselwood/hes-002.pdf>> (2008); the references in square brackets are to this edition. Heselwood wrote a reply to Rastall's response which is also published in *Linguistica* ONLINE, <<http://www.phil.muni.cz/linguistica/art/heselwood/hes-003.pdf>> (2008). [Editor's note]

Methodologically, what has happened is that the hypothesis that the two relations are not different has been refuted. If that were not the case the communicational difference between the permuted signs in *John likes Mary* and *Mary likes John* would be unexplained and we should have to treat the two syntagms as allomorphs or admit an inadequacy in our explanation (ultimately in the theory). Thus, one distinguishes between two types of determination. That Heselwood seems to accept when he says:

“The motivation behind the distinction appears to be that if the same set of entities can stand in two or more positions, say *position a* and *position b*, then when a member of the set is in *position a*, it must be determining the nucleus of its construction in a different way from how it determines it when it is in *position b*, otherwise the two constructions would be variants with the same distinctive function” (p. 18 [p. 2]).

Furthermore, again as Heselwood rightly observes, the hypothesis of parallel determination, i. e. that two or more peripheral elements are not differently related to their nucleus, is methodologically prior to any hypothesis of diverse determination. If a hypothesis of parallel determination is refuted, then we must be dealing with diverse determination, *Tertium non datur*.

It is true that in parallel determination we are usually confronted with disjunct classes often in a fixed sequence of realisation. In the English noun phrase, generally the article (if any) precedes the numeral (if any) which precedes the adjectival (if any) which precedes the pre-nominal (if any) which precedes the noun followed by the supplement (if any). (There is some variation in the sequential position of the adjectival when complex constructions stand in that position.) The various positions have a demarcative function because the identification of an article, for example, cannot be confused with the identification of a numeral or an adjective and so each gives an orientation in the structure.

In diverse determination, the classes overlap so that communicationally relevant permutation may occur. Functionalists will not need to be told that permutation may not be communicationally relevant and **thus permutation of itself is insufficient to show diverse determination**. *Last week he left* and *he left last week* and *the two other men* and *the other two men* are instances of communicationally irrelevant permutation in English.

Naturally, it cannot be known with certainty either that indefinitely large classes are identical or that they are disjunct. Mulder would never suppose that it could. It is surprising, then, that Heselwood's rejection of the distinction between parallel and diverse determination should relate to the fact that we are dealing with open classes. He argues that the impossibility of determining the equivalence of classes in diverse determination or indeed of the mutual exclusiveness of classes in parallel determination means that the distinction cannot be applied (p. 21-23 [p. 4-6]).

What is central in importance, however, is not the classes involved but the functions of signs in constructions used for the purposes of communication. The classes merely emerge from those communicational functions as generalisations. We must be constantly on the look out for refutations of those generalisations as a single valid refutation is enough to refute a hypothesis of parallel determination. The absence of such a refutation (e.g. for the article, numeral, adjectival and supplement positions in the noun phrase in English) does not show the hypothesis to be irrefutable, but merely that it has not yet been refuted.

That is to say that Mulder works in exactly the opposite direction from the one supposed by Heselwood. He is not concerned with the indefinite listing of the members of classes but with the attempt to refute the hypotheses relating to the communicational functions of the class members. Jan Mulder is, after all, first and foremost a functionalist.

It is a pity that Heselwood has not seen that the formal criteria relating to class membership must be subordinate to the criterion of communicational relevance. Furthermore, it is odd that Heselwood should not see that. After all, he explains clearly the difference between the parallel determination in *the blue vase* and the diverse determination in *John likes Mary*.

The communicational difference between *John likes Mary* and *Mary tikes John* must be seen in its proper perspective. What it shows is that the hypothesis of parallel determination for *John* and *Mary* in relation to the nucleus *likes* IS FALSE. That is, Heselwood has himself shown that a hypothesis of parallel determination can be refuted, contrary to what he claims, and is therefore not, as he claims, "inapplicable" (p. 24 [p. 6]). Indeed, we could ask how the communicational difference in question could be handled if the distinction between parallel and diverse determination were, as Heselwood suggests, "abandoned" (p. 24 [p. 6]). As suggested above, the theory would be inadequate to deal with a clear communicational difference.

The distinction between parallel and diverse determination is well founded and one of the many contributions to functional linguistics which Jan Mulder has made and I was happy to acknowledge in a previous article quoted by Heselwood (Rastall, "La linguistique fonctionnelle axiomatique", *La linguistique*, 1993/1).