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Margaret Berry: Text Analyst, Academic, Teacher and Friend

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Well, where do you start to pay tribute to Margaret Berry? Let's start at the beginning; Margaret was born in 1938 in the South West of England and studied at the University of London, Bedford College in 1956. As reported earlier by Davidse, Fontaine & Taverniers (2019), during her degree Margaret attended lectures by J.R. Firth, and was introduced to Halliday's (1959) *The Language of the Chinese "Secret history of the Mongols"* and Chomsky's (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. Fortunately, Margaret preferred the socially constructed view of language following Halliday's initial work and carving out her own contribution as introduced by Halliday (1959). After graduating with a degree in English and the intention to be an English teacher, Margaret became a lecturer in medieval linguistics at Nottingham University, where she remained until she retired in 1998. Even after retirement, Margaret was an active researcher, engaging in discussions and publishing papers that dealt with grammatical, syntactic and discourse conundrums. She presented a keynote presentation at the Paris European Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference (ESFLC) in 2014, and gave papers at many other conferences and workshops that could be reached by train from Nottingham (as she wasn't keen on flying). This tribute to Margaret Berry draws on some of her work related to Theme, exchange structure, group and phrase, along with other related work.

Margaret loved challenges, both linguistically in texts and in sharing and building a community for systemic functional linguistics to flourish. She would often refer to herself as a "text analyst" and was a gentle, inclusive, generous, teacher, friend and academic. If we were to ask Margaret to tell us about the contribution she made, without a doubt she would be extremely modest and humble. However, we take this opportunity to pay tribute and herald the huge contribution Margaret made to the field of applied linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, language education, international and local communities, teachers and in many other arenas. Even before her earlier publications, Margaret initiated and set up the Nottingham Linguistics Circle, an established community of like-minded applied linguists and language

educators who were motivated to take on challenges and push the boundaries of language theory and practice. Margaret continued to progress community building through the sharing and hosting of the Nottingham-based *Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics*. Her enthusiasm was instrumental in the development of the *Functions of Language* journal which was first published in 1994. A special issue of the *Functions of Language* in 2019 is dedicated to Margaret and the contribution she made from when she first started working as an applied linguist. One of Berry's first publications *An Introduction to Systemic Linguistics: I Structures and Systems* (1975) was closely followed by *An Introduction to Systemic Linguistics: II Levels and Links* (Berry 1977). These books provide a comprehensive overview to systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and provide the point of departure for many more publications.

Personally, I first met Margaret when I was studying for my Master's degree at Bristol University in 1993. Florence Davies invited Margaret to Bristol, where she ran a workshop on Theme. The workshop was also part of data collection for Margaret. In the workshop, she collected feedback on the choice of Theme and the interpersonal nature of Theme in three higher educational texts: a prospectus, a departmental handbook and the Faculty of Arts' Handbook. The gentle, inclusive methodology that Margaret adopted in this workshop wasn't quite a focus group, nor stimulated recall, but rather engagement and reflection on theoretical issues concerned with the function of Theme choices and the relevance of informant views (Berry 1996). The methodology encouraged and engaged participants (potential teachers) to be research-driven texts analysts, to identify patterns, provide informant perspectives and discuss language choice and meaning in texts. Participants felt that they were formulating questions, solving problems and understanding how different choices make different meanings. Inspired by this methodology, I (Forey 2004, 2009) adopted a similar approach which involved teachers and business informants analysing two texts: an authentic business text and a teacher written model text. Replicating Berry (1996), participants underlined and discussed the interpersonal choices in the two texts. The differences in the choice of Theme and the interpersonal meanings made by the choice of Theme were extremely revealing. Prior to this workshop at Bristol University, Berry's (1995) paper on the choice of Theme in children's written tourist texts, in which learners wrote an introduction about the city of Grantham for visitors, had a major impact for me (completely new to SFL) on the direct value of SFL theory for classroom practice. Berry (1995, 1996) and in all her publications encourages a text-analysis, research-driven approach to teaching.

As a teacher and workshop facilitator, Margaret was encouraging, open, inspiring, inclusive and understood that working with adults or children allowed for alternative

interpretations and the development of ideas related to text, language choice and meaning. Her encouragement and enthusiasm for understanding the meaning-making potential of texts and language choices was contagious. This drive to support colleagues, and to broaden her own knowledge and understanding was a constant thread throughout her life and is evident in her own students at Nottingham, both undergraduates and postgraduates. In Nottingham 2018, Lise Fontaine, Peter Stockwell and I organised the *Nottingham SFL Workshop on the WHY of Text Analysis and Mood and Speech Function* in celebration of Margaret's 80th birthday. The papers, collegiality and legacy of Margaret's work and friendship were abundant throughout the two days. Her generosity and curiosity extended to the wider community, as evidenced in the Roundtable in Honour of Margaret Berry at the ESFC 2021, where personal correspondence between Margaret and many in the SFL community was shared. Up until her final days Margaret was still collaborating and encouraging colleagues.

1. Theme: The writer's priority

Returning to Margaret's work on Theme, she challenged and questioned what constituted the 'unit of analysis' for Theme, which continues to be a contentious issue (Forey & Thompson 2009). Berry (1995, 1996) recommends going up to and including the Subject of the main verb, a very different approach to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) who generally advocate for Theme to include only the first ideational element. Berry (1995, 1996), Davies (1997), Forey (2004, 2009), Fries (1995a, b, 2009) and Martin and Rose (2007) adopt a similar definition for the unit of analyses for Theme. The rationale for going up to the main verb and including the Subject is that it allows the analyst, reader, writer, teacher to focus on the discourse structure and the conscious choices a writer makes by selecting either Subject as Theme, or a marked Theme when something other than Subject is in initial position. Berry (1996) suggests that Theme, although part of the textual metafunction, can realise interpersonal concerns. She argues that a writer's priority need not be solely ideational: "The speaker or writer's primary concerns may be interpersonal" (Berry 1996:19). Berry distinguishes between Theme as meaning (interpersonal) and Theme as form (textual). Her work on Theme continued and in Berry (2013a) introduced the term 'contentful' and 'content light' Themes. Based on evidence, she demonstrated that spoken registers rarely introduced New Topics in the Subject position, whereas written registers frequently do. She established the point that contentful Themes referred to a New Topic (NewTop) or a Resumed Topic (ResTop), a topic that was already

introduced and in thematic position was giving attention to old information or a Given Topic (GivTop) continuing with a topic that was given in the previous clause. Margaret was an avid fan of system networks, as they allowed the analyst to illustrate the choices available in all aspects of language. Figure 1 is the system network Berry (2013a) developed to understand contentful and content light topics.

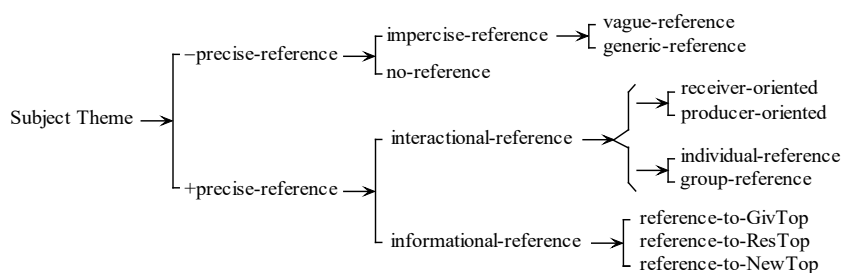


Figure 1. A network showing referential meaning options for subject themes (Berry 2013a: 382)

Martinez-Insua (2017, 2019) developed this approach and identified different choices with respect to GivTop, ResTops and NewTops and introduced a new concept Inferable Topics. As suggested in Berry (1995) it is highly likely that one of the differences in the learner texts is that the less successful writer used content light choices, whereas the more successful writer was able to use a range of contentful topics, realised in the choice of Theme. Berry (2013b) states that

Learners need to suppress what seems to be the most natural way of communicating – foregrounding themselves and their readers in their texts... to avoid vague references and to moderate the use of presentative there. Instead they will have to learn to make use of their Subject Themes in a more contentful manner.

(Berry 2013b: 265)

For many learners such ability to use language more effectively will only be achieved if such choices are known and explicitly taught by the teacher (Forey 2021). This motivation to support teachers was at the heart of the work that Margaret undertook.

2. Exchange Structure: A Metafunctional Approach

Margaret was continually motivated in solving problems from the very start to the final days of her career. A month before she passed away, she was working with Sarah-Jane Mukherjee on a paper which focused on the challenges when analysing the exchange structure used by young learners (Mukherjee 2016; Mukherjee & Berry 2021). The particular challenge in their data was the exchange structure that emerged when 4-to 5-year-olds were role playing a baby clinic in the classroom, without the intervention and guidance of a teacher or adult. Sarah-Jane and Margaret were due to present their paper at the European Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference in Sheffield Hallham, July 2020. Unfortunately, due to covid the conference was postponed until July 2021, where the presentation was given by Sarah-Jane and posthumously Margaret.

Mukherjee and Berry (2021) built on Margaret's multi-layered approach to exchange structures, which she introduced in 1979 and developed later in 1981 (Berry 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c). The model is designed to examine how an interaction unfolds and the choices available to speakers. Building on Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Berry's multi-layered approach asserts a metafunctional approach in the exchange structure of classroom interaction (Berry 2021). This metafunctional approach introduces the interpersonal metafunction in referring to the roles the speakers take on as they negotiate information, where the primary knower (K1) and the secondary knower (K2) negotiate meaning through the exchange structure. Also, based on an analysis of classroom interaction, Berry asserts that the teacher has the knowledge and the answer to questions she may ask, but in order to stimulate thought and scaffold learning, the teacher delays answering certain questions and tries to elicit responses from the learners. She adopts 'D' to stand for 'Delayed' knower, e.g. Dk1 refers to the teacher who is eliciting a response and knows the answer. The textual metafunction, when analysing the exchange structure, is related to the initiator of the exchange (labelled as a) and the second speaker is b. Their subsequent turns are simply labelled as ai, bi, aii, bii, and so on. Through the textual analysis we can see who opens and closes the

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interaction, whether one person dominates the talk and, in general, the flow of the turns taken. The ideational metafunction directly relates to the ideas being proposed: Berry distinguishes between a proposition that is completed (pc), a proposition base (pb) and a propositional support (ps). Kimps, Davidse & O'Grady (2019) added the role of action in negotiating exchanges and, parallel to the proposition, they named these action base (ab), action completed (ac) and action support (ac). A metafunctional analysis can reveal the interpersonal nature of an exchange through the primary knower, the textual analysis the unfolding of the exchange through the turn taking, and the ideational analysis the propositions that are being discussed. Berry (2017b, 2021) based on a metafunctional analysis of discourse consequences discusses challenging and supporting moves in spoken interaction. Thus, an important contribution to the understanding of speech functions has been Margaret's application of the metafunctions in categorising different types of moves (Berry 2021; Taverniers 2021).

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Berry's (1981a, b, c) analytical framework of the exchange structure, in particular her construct of the interpersonal 'knower', paved the way for further research in the field, both theoretically and practically. Berry's (1981a, b, c) has been acknowledged and informed the work of many who followed in her footsteps, such as Ventola (1987), who discussed service encounters, Martin (1992), Matthiessen (1992) and other writers in similar or different contexts. Davidse (2021) deepens understandings of Berry's primary/secondary knower and primary/secondary actor as roles concerned with epistemicity and deonticity. Wickens (2000), Gardener (2004, 2006, 2008), Gardner and Yaacob (2009) directly apply a metafunctional analysis to classroom interaction. Zappavinga & Martin (2018), Martin, Zappavinga & Dwyer (2009) and Rose (2014) extended Berry's initial exchange structure and argued that knowledge and action can simultaneously occur and could be double coded. Berry (2021) noted that the double coding of spoken interaction could show clearly what was happening in the discourse.

Margaret was motivated to identify the cline of consciousness choices made by speakers and writers, through the choice of the word, phrase, the exchange structure and the conscious effort of writing (Berry 1975). The question of whether these choices are made consciously or unconsciously and whether they are collective or individual choices intrigued Margaret. Berry (2013a, 2016a) challenges applied linguists further by asking:

- How can we identify the cline of consciousness? (Berry 1975: 52–54)

- Are they collective or individual?
- How can the teacher support consciousness development of language?
- Are the choices free or constrained?
- Is there a *heuristic* for different genres? (Davies 1994)
- Are they choices of meaning or choices of form or choices of context, and how can we teach this?
- Are choices of meaning contextually determined or do they determine the context and how can they best be explicitly taught? (Berry 2016 b, 2017b)

A major concern for Margaret in doing research was: what is teachable? She was always motivated to solve linguistic problems and challenges in order to advance what teachers could teach in the classroom and how they could achieve social justice by providing access to knowledge through the language that was used. To help “teachers see themselves as extending the range of choices open to their students” (Berry 2013a: 365) was at the foundation of the work that drove Margaret. She found important the explicit teaching of the structure of the clause, allowing learners to understand how the different choices in a clause provide the structure directly linked to the meaning (Fontaine & McCabe 2021). Margaret believed that teaching was “encouraging the students to make the choices consciously” (Berry 2013a: 369). In her research Margaret was interested to understand “what choices are made in what contexts... [and] which options seemed to be most successful in which contexts” (Berry 1995, 2013a: 378).

The Middle Ranks of Grammar: Group and Phrase

Margaret’s contribution to SFL has been extensive, ranging across metafunctions, strata and ranks (Berry 2017a). As Fontaine and McCabe (2021) point out, Margaret was intrigued by the messy, challenging task of understanding the middle ranks of language. The ranks of grammar within SFL are described by the rank scale which scale is “assumed to consist, in hierarchical order, of the following units: clause, group, word and morpheme” (Berry 2017a: 50). For Halliday (1961: 287) “the middle ranks of grammar are often the most complex, presumably since they face both ways”. At the middle rank, the unit of group, Halliday has always argued for a distinction between two types of group unit: group and phrase, where “a phrase is different from a group in that, whereas a group is an expansion of a word, a phrase is a contraction of a

clause” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:362–3). In Berry (2019), this unit is referred to as group/phrase. However, in personal correspondence (p.c.) email discussions with Fontaine, Margaret argued that “one can't treat ‘group’ and ‘phrase’ as different units and distinguish between them in the way that Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) do” (p.c.; Fontaine & McCabe 2021). Margaret would often have detailed discussions via email with colleagues about a wide range of topics. These discussions informed Fontaine & Schönthal’s (2019) examination of the nature of these two types of group unit: their findings provide strong evidence in support of Margaret’s claim. There is no space here to review the full set of arguments and at this point the focus is on just a few issues.

As suggested above, the group is sometimes discussed as an expansion of a word and more precisely, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 362) explain that “a group is in some respect equivalent to a word complex”. Fontaine and Schönthal claim that “the distinction between a word complex and a group unit is not clear in SFL”. Berry agrees that the distinction gets blurred at times (p.c.; Fontaine & McCabe 2021). She points out that “the two differ in rank: a group directly realises a function in a clause and a word complex realises a function in a group” (Berry, 2019: 96). In other words, the rank principle offers a clear distinction in this regard. There are many problems in viewing word complexes as group-like. (See discussion of the nominal group in Fontaine & Schönthal (2019) for example).

The main reason for the distinction at the rank of group unit is the classification of the prepositional phrase, which for Halliday is quite different for all other units at this rank. Fawcett (1980, 2010) has done away with the distinction, keeping only the term group for all such units, including what is for Halliday the prepositional phrase. Fontaine & Schönthal (2019) show that there is effectively no difference between the units of group and phrase but conclude that

given that the term ‘group’ is so prevalent in SFL theories and given that there does not seem to be any justifiable reason for differentiating between groups and phrases, we suggest to use the term ‘group’ for all the different types of group units at the rank between clause and word, including the prepositional phrase.

(Fontaine & Schönthal 2019:140)

Halliday does maintain a group and phrase distinction for prepositional units (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:423), where we find the preposition group has a “Modifier-Head structure expanded from and functionally equivalent to a preposition”, for example *right behind*.

Margaret has claimed that she is unable to find “any justification for regarding "preposition groups" as groups”. She explains that “they are functioning in other groups/phrases, so they are of word rank, not group rank” (p.c.: Fontaine & McCabe 2021). While there is certainly room for debate, it is important to ask these kinds of questions and Margaret loved tackling problems, discussing issues with colleagues, asking questions and being a text analyst.

Concluding remarks

There is a lot we know about language and the challenge is to know more. An insatiable desire to know more about language was evident in all Margaret engaged with. She was always open to conversations with colleagues on many different topics, generous with her support, comments and friendship. She continued to engage in open discussions via email with many colleagues, as briefly illustrated by the personal correspondence with Lise Fontaine. She was open to critiques of her own work: for example, on her draft papers which she would readily share there was always a note “*Comments Welcome*”. Pushing the boundaries of SFL theory was close to her heart and as new generations continue to push the boundaries, they will be able to draw upon the insights provided by Margaret. Gone, but with an interpersonal and intellectual legacy never to be forgotten.

Acknowledgements

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