Tributes to Margaret Berry

Margaret Berry: An influential teacher, scholar and friend

Hilary Hillier (University of Nottingham)

I first heard Margaret's name on 30 June 1976. I was being interviewed as a poten-
tial student in the Department of English Studies, University of Nottingham.
"Miss Berry" would be asked to set an English Language paper for me, one of four
papers I would be required to take in a year's time. I was married with two young
sons, had no A-level GCE's – just five (good) O-levels – but if I passed this 'Special
Entrance' exam I would be accepted.

I took the English Language paper on 2 June 1977. One of Margaret's ques-
tions was:

> Write three paragraphs about the town or district in which you live. The first para-
> graph should be written as if it were an extract from a geographical textbook.
> The second paragraph should be written as if it were an extract from a tourist
> brochure. The third paragraph should be written as if it were an extract from a
> letter to a penfriend in another country.

This proved, of course, to be my unwitting introduction to the concept of language
variation according to context. And it was one of the life-changing elements I had
to negotiate from October 1977, when I embarked upon my brand-new, slightly
terrifying, journey as a mature undergraduate student of English at the University
of Nottingham.

"Miss Berry" was my tutor in each of my undergraduate years, from her com-
pulsory first year course on 'Linguistics and the English Language' onward. And it
was as "Miss Berry" that she was to be known throughout the three years.

My pre-university approach to grammar and punctuation was comparably
old-fashioned. I had worked for a long time as a secretary, and I had some rather
fixed notions about 'correct English'. We were always required, however, to exam-
ine very carefully our preconceptions – even prejudices – about language, and this
led to many lively tutorial discussions. In all three undergraduate years Margaret
introduced us to completely new ways of looking at and thinking about language,
always insisting on precise and ordered approaches to varied instances of real
language in use, i.e. 'texts'. I thus entered the comparatively familiar territory of
Quirk *et al.* (1972) alongside the undoubted challenges of, amongst others, Hal-

liday (initially via Berry 1975); Labov (e.g. Labov & Fanshel 1977); Popper (via Magee 1973); Sinclair & Coulthard (1975). In addition to 'text' (written and spoken), I met the special concepts of 'language function', 'system', 'choice', 'mood', 'marked/unmarked', 'discourse', 'exchange', 'hypothesis' (broad and precise, 'supported' and 'not supported') and so on and so on.

I did, unfortunately, miss one significant opportunity to benefit from Margaret's influence during my first undergraduate year. For our English Language assessment for that year we were given the option of doing either an extended (two-term) language project, under Margaret's supervision, or a single formal exam at the end of the year. I chose to do the exam, entirely because it seemed likely to be the easier option. I thus unwittingly deprived myself of what would have been a really valuable experience, not least by providing a springboard for later work, including postgraduate research. Happily, I did manage to catch up – eventually.

I graduated in 1980, and was encouraged (by Margaret) to stay on as a postgraduate student, ultimately for a PhD. This, however, proved to be a very long haul indeed. I knew from the start that I wanted to investigate, in some way or other, the spoken language of children – my own children being the obvious candidates as sources of data. I therefore collected many hours of audio-recorded data as my sons and their visiting friends played games on the family computer. However, I had no clear idea of what I might actually do with all this material: sometimes I felt I was drowning in data. Margaret was endlessly patient and supportive: her quoting of G.K. Chesterton – "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing *badly*" (emphasis added) – was particularly strengthening in my darker moments. I submitted many drafts to her, accompanied by scrupulously transcribed and presented data. The drafts were returned – always promptly and always covered with Margaret's famous red writing, framed as positively as possible of course. I vividly remember her calm gaze and measured praise over one submission: "The trees are wonderful – but what about the wood?"

Well, the wood did take shape, eventually: Margaret rescued me from drowning. She sent me to look at Morgan & Sellner (1980) and their discussion of discourse theory and a 'successful' text. She urged me to select just one manageable stretch of audio-recorded material from the many hours at my disposal, to examine it in minute detail, and to use that very specific text as a basis for exploring what might constitute success "in terms of the relation between the text and the intended content" (Morgan & Sellner 1980:196). Following this excellent advice, I chose to focus on a transcript of my sons and one of their friends as they played a game called 'Adventureland'. This particular game proved to be fruitful territory for considering 'success' since it required the children to instruct their surrogate adventurer to perform a series of actions in order to progress through the game's territory. Further, this usually prompted discussions between the children them-

selves as they decided what a particular action might be. I was thus able to use this very specific context to identify different kinds of interaction (children/adventurer vs. child/child), 'action sequences' within those interactions, and specific utterances which seemed intended to instigate action. I could examine how successful individual utterances appeared to be, and then relate (degrees of) success to syntactic form in each case.

The whole investigation required multiple descriptions and analyses of the one text. With Margaret's encouragement, I used a very wide range of sources indeed to construct my own functional descriptive framework, adopting and adapting aspects of ethnomethodology and sociolinguistics as well as Systemic Functional Linguistics. For the formal analysis I identified "imperatives" vs. "other forms" according to two quite separate but complementary models, Ervin-Tripp (1976) and Sinclair (1980) respectively. Descriptions and analyses had to be carried out completely independently before all the different findings could be brought together for the testing of hypotheses. Margaret demanded, of course, that each individual stage be presented in full as supporting evidence: the whole materialised eventually as voluminous multi-coloured Appendices.

The thesis was finally completed in 1990. It subsequently appeared as Hillier (1992), the fourth in a series of Monographs in Systemic Linguistics published by the Department of English Studies, University of Nottingham. This venture (together with Reprints in Systemic Linguistics and Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics) was, of course, founded and initially financed by Margaret.

Throughout the research period, Margaret had expected me to give the customary postgraduate seminar papers within the university and, later, to attend workshops and conferences. My undistinguished presentational debut was at the Systemic Workshop in Nottingham in 1983. At that stage, however, my 'paper' consisted merely of a detailed description of data, how it had been collected, setting, participants and so on. More Systemic Conferences (and rather more substantial papers from me) followed. The ISFC in Helsinki in 1989 turned out to be highly significant for all of us, since it was during the flight home from there that Margaret came up with the plan to take advantage of having so many distinguished international systemicists in Europe. She devised and organised, on the hoof, a 'continuation' workshop held in Nottingham almost immediately afterwards. This proved to be the first of a series of Nottingham Systemic Workshops which have continued to this day, evolving along the way, eventually morphing into the European Systemic Functional Linguistics Workshop, and now the European Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference (ESFLC).

In the late 1980s I had also begun to do some teaching in the Department, tutoring groups of first year undergraduates as they grappled with their – now compulsory – Language in Context projects. Around this time, too, Margaret's

copious advisory notes were amalgamated into what quickly became known as The Project Guide (see Berry 1987a). Essential for first-year students (and their tutors), this was the ideal manual for anyone engaged in serious examination of language in use, and at any academic level – including doctoral! I myself learned an enormous amount in the very act of tutoring those first year students, and I did my best to follow the same or similar principles when, with Margaret's support, I went on to devise my own second- and third-year sociolinguistic modules. Margaret's project approach – 'learning by doing' – was also the inspiration and model for the single work of which I am most proud (see Hillier 2004).

The influence and encouragement goes on. Margaret has led me to draw on and develop, for research and teaching purposes, the store of spoken data I have collected over the years, and also to make it available to others for their own theoretical and analytical purposes, e.g. Berry *et al.* (2014). I have continued to benefit from her insightful comments and questions on various drafts for papers, books and so on.

To sum up, Margaret's enormous influence on my thinking and my work springs from her devotion to and deep knowledge of her subject; her integrity; her openness to ideas and discussion; her scrupulous attention to detail; the manifestation of all of these in her role as teacher and adviser; the evident joy that specific role brought her, and the corresponding joy felt by those of us learning from her and hoping to follow her example. I am just one of the many hundreds, possibly thousands, who have benefited from Margaret's gifts, and who have been privileged to (try to) hand on those gifts to succeeding generations of students and teachers in their turn. On behalf of all of us: thank you Margaret.

My great debts to Margaret Berry

Robin Fawcett (Cardiff University)

1.   Introductory remarks

Margaret Berry and I have a great deal in common. We both discovered Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in the late 1960s, and our views of what linguistics entails have always been similar. Above all, we have the shared experience of the eureka moments that led to the birth of SFL. The first such moment was when Michael Halliday revised his 1961 form-centred model of language to embrace the concept that the system networks for TRANSITIVITY, MOOD, THEME, etc. are choices between meanings rather than between forms (e.g. Halliday 1970:142); the second was his foregrounding of the plurifunctional nature of language (e.g. Halliday 1973:141); and the third was his mini-grammar illustrating what a generative

SFL grammar should be like (Halliday 1969). It is hard to convey the intellectual excitement that we in the growing band of systemic linguists experienced during the 1970s, and it was Margaret's and my shared recognition of the importance of SFL for linguistics that brought us together.

I am deeply indebted to Margaret in two main ways, which I will now outline.

2.   Margaret's contribution to establishing the infrastructure of SFL

In 1973, when I was completing my PhD work at University College London (under Michael Halliday and then Dick Hudson) I gave a paper to the Linguistics Association of Great Britain on 'Generating a sentence in systemic functional grammar' (Fawcett 1973/81). This was the decade when Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) was establishing itself as the dominant theory of language, so I was surprised to find that my paper triggered several invitations to speak at universities' Linguistics Circles, including Nottingham, where I first met Margaret.

In 1974 I organized the first of what became a series of annual systemic workshops, attended by around two dozen people, but these included Michael Halliday, Ruqaiya Hasan, John Sinclair, Michael O'Toole, Dick Hudson, Geoffrey Turner, Bill Downes, Jim Martin and others – including Margaret Berry.

This workshop marked the beginning of Margaret's and my working together, as we – together with others, naturally – began putting in place the foundations of the current infrastructure of SFL. By infrastructure I mean the social constructs that are necessary for a theory to flourish. Margaret contributed to three vital aspects of SFL's current infrastructure.

First, Margaret was an inspiring workshop organizer and a wise adviser to others. She helped enormously in establishing the conference structure of SFL, while always championing the 'workshop' concept. Indeed, she organized three of the first ten workshops. But by the 1980s we had become the International Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ISFLA), and the workshops had become annual congresses.

In 1989, Margaret initiated a new series of workshops at Nottingham, which developed into small conferences and the establishment of the European Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ESFLA). This pattern of holding annual regional and/or national meetings of systemicists has now spread to about a dozen regional organizations. At the 2009 ESFLA meeting at Cardiff university, Margaret's crucial role as the 'mother' of ESFLA was rightly recognized by a special presentation.

Margaret's second contribution to SFL 'infrastructure' was to increase the publication outlets for SFL work. Margaret and her colleagues created non-

commercial publishing outlets, e.g. Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics, and the Monograph Series in Systemic Linguistics.

Thirdly, with Halliday no longer based in Britain after 1972, British systemicists owe Margaret a particular debt for establishing Nottingham as a centre for SFL, and for her caring and inspirational teaching. This is epitomised in her two-volume textbook *Introduction to Systemic Linguistics* (1975 and 1977). It is a remarkable work, written in a disarmingly simple style while explaining major theoretical issues in the clearest possible manner. And much of it is as relevant today as in the 1970s.

In summary then, the success of a theory does not depend only on conferences and publications; it also depends on good teaching and research in institutions of higher education – and, ideally, on having a group of scholars, however small, working in broadly the same framework. Margaret has a great gift for creating such communities. All systemicists share a debt to Margaret for the many ways in which she helped to lay the foundations of the infrastructure from which SFL benefits today.

3. Margaret's contributions to theoretical and descriptive linguistics

Margaret, who describes herself as a text linguist, has made valuable contributions to both theoretical and descriptive linguistics – with the latter involving the former. Her two-volume textbook (1975 and 1977) provided the best available SFL description of English available in the 1970s. She also provided insightful additions to the standard model of exchange structure (Berry 1981a, b, c and 1987b). As noted earlier, she wrote equally insightfully about Theme (Berry 1995, 1996; Berry *et al.* 2014).

But in my view Margaret's most significant contribution to SFL (so far!) has been theoretical. Right from Chapter 1 of Berry 1975 she foregrounds the concept that Linguistics is – or should be – a science, writing: "Linguists, like the scholars of other disciplines, do not regard their intuitive discoveries as truths or facts, but merely as hypotheses which need to be tested" (Berry 1975:17). And three pages later she writes:

> We should … distinguish between outline theoretical models and detailed theoretical models. … Theoretical models attempt to give a comprehensive and general view of what a language is and how it works, showing all the main aspects of language and relating them to each other. … But they are not sufficiently detailed or sufficiently precise to be objectively verifiable.   (Berry 1975:20)

So linguists should not commit themselves to an 'outline theoretical model' until a 'detailed' model of the relevant sub-component of a description of one or more specific languages has been thoroughly tested and the results evaluated positively.

With these statements in mind, we turn to Margaret's two major publications on methodology in SFL. Both strongly criticize the lack of scientific methodology that she found in SFL in the 1970s.

Let us look first at Berry (1980/89), which carries the provocative title of 'Everyone's out of step except our Johnny'. Margaret suggests (1980/89:5–6) that "there are two ways in which we [systemicists] are out of step with our fellow linguists: in our subject matter and in our methodology". By subject matter she means "relationships between types of language and types of situation/culture", which she sees as a strength of SFL and a weakness of TGG – as indeed all systemicists do. And in terms of methodology, she suggests that systemic linguists "do not seem to have any coherent methodology at all" (1980/89:6). And this, she implies, is in contrast with other 1970s theories that did seem to be claiming to have an adequate scientific methodology. Margaret then outlines the methodology used in her own text-oriented research, with, as its key concepts: (i) rival analyses of (ii) the same data (i.e. text), (iii) the statement of analyses in a suitable form and (iv) counter-examples.

In Berry's 1982 review of Halliday's *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978), her main concern is that, while the model of language that Halliday describes there has the potential for being useful, it is still merely an outline of a model that has not been 'filled in' sufficiently to make it testable. Margaret's criticisms seem to me to be essentially well-founded, and I salute her bravery in publishing them at that crucial time in SFL history.

However, not only did Margaret make contributions in theoretical linguistics directly through her work, she was always very generous with her personal support of students and fellow academics. It is no exaggeration to say that the productive flow of publications by me and my colleagues from 1987 onwards might not have occurred without Margaret's steady support. For example, at an SFL conference over two decades ago, I gave a paper that explained how and why I had replaced Halliday's approach to semantico-logical relations between clauses. The audience didn't seem particularly enthusiastic, but Margaret came up to me afterwards and said something like 'Thank you, Robin – I agreed with every word you said!' Coming from Margaret, that made my day – and it encouraged me to continue to work on the topic.

4.   Concluding comments

My major debts to Margaret, therefore, are as follows. The first is for the way in which she and I worked together, in complementary ways, in the early days of SFL when we were establishing the infrastructure that has enabled SFL to grow in the impressive way that it has. The second major debt is for the support that she has given me as a linguist, over the last 45 years (and counting!). But I have a third debt to Margaret, which is in practice inseparable from the first two: it is for her friendship over many decades.

A Tribute to Margaret Berry

Sheena Gardner (Coventry University)

Although I came into contact with Systemic Functional Linguistics in Canada in the early 1980s, it was not until I was at Warwick University in the UK, teaching Systemic Functional Grammar with Meriel Bloor, that I properly encountered Margaret Berry's work through a then PhD student of Hilary Nesi's, Paul Wickens. His research project (Wickens 2000) was a critical examination of the constructivist claims for computer based learning materials developed for university law courses – a topic that still resonates today.

In his review of the literature on classroom discourse, which was at the time dominated by Sinclair & Coulthard (1975), Wickens (2000:73) argued that "Berry (1981a) proposed perhaps the most radical retheorising of the model, which starts from Sinclair and Coulthard's rejection of the multifunctional view of language in SFL". Berry's approach is simple in its elegance and re-assertion of the three metafunctions within her model of the exchange structures in classroom interaction.

Berry illustrates her model with a focus on the canonical IRF exchange, or teacher display questions, where the teacher asks a question (Initiation), a student answers it (Response) and the teacher provides Feedback or Follow-up (eg. 'well done' or 'yes'). She identifies the interpersonal metafunction with the negotiation of information, and in particular the identification of the primary knower (K1) and the secondary knower (K2) in an exchange. Thus, an inform exchange might have one turn, as in the tour guide who says:

> **K1** this is Buckingham Palace on your left.

Or an exchange might have two turns, as in a request for information, where the information is provided by the primary knower (K1):

> **K2** where are you from?
> **K1** London

Alternatively, in the teacher 'display' questions there might be several turns, where 'D' stands for 'Delayed' because the K1 (here the teacher) knows the answer, but wants to elicit it from the class:

> **Dk1** What is the capital of Brazil?
>
> **K2** Rio de Janeiro
>
> **K1** No, it's Brasilia
>
> **K2f** oh really.

This means that in all cases, all elements in the exchange up to and including the K1 move are obligatory. As Wickens (2000:180) points out "[t]his provides a far more satisfying account for the fact that the third element, feedback, in the three part exchanges that are found commonly in classrooms is obligatory and that it is predicted by the initial Dk1 and not by the response of the student (K2)". This notion of primary knower and the role of a teacher in such exchanges has influenced my own thinking and analyses of classroom discourse in subsequent years. Before I expand, it is worth explaining how the other two metafunctions work in such exchanges.

The textual metafunction relates to turn taking in the exchange. The person who initiates the exchange is labelled a, the second speaker is b, and their subsequent turns are numbered ai, bi, aii, bii, and so on.

The ideational metafunction relates to the propositions, and here Berry differentiates a completed proposition (pc) from a propositional base (pb), and propositional support (ps). Wickens (2000:181) provides the following example from his data that shows how the three metafunctions work together:

> Lecturer dk1 ai   pb Title is is what?
> student   k2   bi   pc Legal title
> Lecturer kl   aii ps Yeah Ownership
> student   k2f bii   Ownership yeah

In his analysis, Wickens demonstrates the value of including all three perspectives. For example in looking at the online materials, he identifies a typical exchange where the opening sentence on the screen is the main eliciting move 'In the following story, identify the relevant factors….'. This is followed by the information the student has to read to find the answer. The third move is the lecturer providing their own response to the question. In some analyses this would be treated as another inform move, but Berry's analysis captures the multifunctionality:

> On screen 'lecturer' Dk1 ai   pb
> The 'story'   KI
> Student response   K2   bi   pc
> On screen 'lecturer'   K1   aii pc

> The three … elements (K1, ai, pc) are the obligatory elements for an exchange in Berry's (1981a) model and they are all present which indicates a valid exchange. However, in the Ideational metafunction, instead of responding to the student's propositional completion (pc) with a propositional support (ps) the lecturer simply programs in his own propositional completion (pc). To put it simply, he answers his own question making the student's response irrelevant in interactional terms.   (Wickens 2000: 242)

Analyses such as these allow Wickens (2000: 265) to argue that the online interaction is 'fake' and cannot support the constructivist pedagogy as claimed.

Berry's (1981a) paper has been widely cited, and particularly for the concept of Knower. Although her model has been acclaimed by other SFL scholars, such as Ventola (1987), Martin (1992) and Matthiessen (1995), Wickens (2000: 182) suggests that they tend to focus on the interpersonal and "do not include the Textual and Ideational layers of analysis nor do they provide a rationale as to why they have been dropped".

In much of my own work on classroom interaction, I have focused on alternatives to the teacher display IRF type questions. For example, in analyses of the discourses of formative assessment in Year One classrooms with substantial numbers of children for whom English is an additional language, if teachers take a more learner-centred approach that does not always assume convergent 'correct' answers to questions, the concept of primary knower is very useful for demonstrating where the teacher in effect hands this role over to children in the class by asking genuine rather than display questions (Gardner 2004, 2008). In other studies we see how the class teacher hands over control to the EAL teacher (Gardner 2006), or indeed again to 'technology' in the form of a CD player (Gardner & Yaacob 2009). The layers of complexity and options afforded by the interplay of the different systems in Berry's model have enabled me to better see what is happening in these classrooms, and to clarify the options available, and their potential implications, to the teachers involved.

I think the ideas and approach in Berry (1981a) have remained with me for three main reasons. They have been retained because they build on the very simple yet so powerful three metafunctional view of language, as much of her work does. They remain with me because they provide the tools and system networks that allow others to apply her work and build on it, as many of her other papers do. And finally, they remain with me because they are made relevant to the teaching of English. As she says, "[m]y general purpose in linguistics is to provide information which I hope will be helpful to teachers of English" (Berry 2016: 184). I particularly like that she does this in ways that are fully theorised and at times complex in their detail, i.e. that she respects teachers enough not to dumb things down, and at the same time

is able to make the logic of her arguments shine through the well-chosen examples and clarification for teachers about their role in helping children learn.

Berry's (2013:365) stated long-term purpose is to "gain a greater understanding of the differences between the informal spoken English that children grow up with and the formal English they will need to learn to write in order to succeed in various careers", and it is perhaps therefore not surprising that alongside her influence on the analysis of spoken interaction, is her role in establishing an alternative model of Theme, alternative that is to the model presented by Halliday. In Berry's (1995, 1996) approach, which has been taken up by many in SFL (e.g. Davies 1997; Forey 2009; Hood 2009; North 2005) to good effect, the Theme includes all elements of the clause up to and including the participant functioning as Subject.

Thus, in teaching students how to analyse classroom discourse, or to examine thematic progression in student writing, I generally include the refinements that Margaret Berry made, with particular reference to her 1981 and 1995 papers. It is easy to explain their rationale and the additional insights they bring for classroom teachers. This same clarity is seen in her more recent work on context (e.g. Berry 2014, 2016), which I have been fortunate to hear her present in person, and it too promises to bring clarity, complexity and an SFL theoretical rigour in equal measures to our understanding of spoken and written language in context.

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