

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Kristin Davidse, Lise Fontaine and Miriam Taverniers

KU Leuven | Cardiff University | Ghent University

This thematic issue is both a tribute to Margaret Berry, offered to her on the occasion of her 80th birthday, and the 25th anniversary issue of *Functions of Language*. The two facets of this issue are inextricably linked. Margaret Berry had long recognized the need for appropriate publication forums dedicated to functional linguistics, for which she tirelessly took initiatives from the 1970s to the early 1990s. This paved the way for the start of *Functions of Language* in 1994 because the earlier Nottingham publication forums had shown the need and viability for such a venture. There was also a very direct link: Dirk Noël, a student of Margaret's to whom she had entrusted the editing of the Nottingham-based *Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics*, was the prime mover in the initiative to gather up support from a wide range of functional linguists for a high-quality commercial journal in which they would be able to define their own research programme. It is, therefore, very appropriate that we can combine the celebration of Margaret Berry's career and of the first 25 years of *Functions of Language*. At the end of this introduction we will briefly describe how *Functions of Language* emerged. This will be followed by the personal reflections by one of the original editors, Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenbergen, on the formative years of the journal. But first, we will salute Margaret for her remarkable achievements as researcher, teacher, supervisor, convener of workshops and editor. A researcher *pur sang*, Margaret has in all her other academic roles made very many good things happen. She has always steered clear of personal acclaim and has focused in every venture on the (joint) work and the people involved.

Margaret Berry went to University of London, Bedford College in 1956 to read English with the intention of becoming a secondary school teacher of English. In her first term, J. R. Firth was giving a series of lectures as part of the intercollegiate lectures. These lectures captured her fascination and she and a group of friends were dedicated attendees, so much so that they began calling themselves “The Firthians”, since they continued attending even after most of their contemporaries had dropped out. As Margaret started her research, her supervisor, Phyllis Hodgson, gave her a copy of Halliday's (1959) *The Language of the Chinese* “*Secret History of the Mongols*” and said, “This young man seems to know what he's doing”.

At the same time, another Bedford lecturer, Vivian Salmon, gave her a copy of Chomsky's (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. This presented a fork in the road but for Margaret the choice was clear. It is certainly worth noting that getting a position as a linguist, indeed as a female linguist, was far from easy in those days. Nottingham University wanted a medievalist and given Margaret's work on Middle English poems, she was a potential candidate. However, the Vice-Chancellor was keen to develop what was called 'Descriptive Linguistics.' Being a Firthian together with the training she received from the Bedford staff, Margaret was given the position, where she remained until her retirement in 1998. Her early teaching was related to the history of the English Language, but she eventually moved over to Modern English Language and Linguistics. At Nottingham University, Margaret met John Sinclair, who renewed her interest in Halliday's work and who advised her to join the newly-formed Linguistics Association, later to become the LAGB. According to Margaret, the LA/LAGB was very Halliday-oriented in those early establishing years, but was later taken over by the more popular Chomsky-oriented members.

At the core of all her academic achievements, there is Margaret, the accountable researcher. For Margaret, any type of linguistics is an empirical science, but the formulation of research questions and the argumentation and methodology to address them spring from the theoretical framework that one espouses. Like all functional linguists, she is interested in the external motivations, social and cognitive, of the internal organization of language. In opting for systemic functional linguistics, she commits to a meaning-centred, rather than form-centred, line of inquiry, to which the text-context relation is central (Berry 1996). Margaret's focus on text linguistics, with "its concern for text types and their relations to producers, receivers and settings", is motivated for her by the requirement that it be relevant and useful to users of language such as "teachers and professionals in business and industry" (Berry 1996:6).

Given the importance Margaret attributes to linguistic theory, it is not surprising that the first publications with which she made her mark were *An Introduction to Systemic Linguistics: I Structures and Systems* (Berry 1975) and *An Introduction to Systemic Linguistics: II Levels and Links* (Berry 1977). It was "the first comprehensive theoretical treatment" (Huddleston 1977:190) of systemic-functional linguistics theory, setting out "each of the most fundamental concepts of systemic linguistics, giving an explanation of each concept and discussing passages of English in relation to the concept" (Berry 1975:ix). "I make no claim to originality", Margaret (Berry 1975:ix) noted: "The ideas expressed are almost all those of other people, notably Professor J.R. Firth, Professor M. A. K. Halliday and Professor J. McH. Sinclair". Margaret has always stressed the importance and benefits of theoretical diversity: "Newcomers to linguistics sometimes consider it a weakness of the subject that there are different schools of linguistics ... Controversy is always a

healthy sign. Language is so complex that no one approach can cover all its aspects” (Berry 1975: 12).

Margaret then turned her attention to a number of descriptive topics, the main ones being exchange structure (Berry 1979, 1981a, b, c, 2016) and theme (Berry 1995, 1996, 2013). Her sense of rigour and scientific method in language description, as well as her accountability to text analysts, is reflected in the following quote.

Since the kind of exercise in which I have been engaging in this paper is often misunderstood by coders of texts, I will emphasise that when one proposes rules one is not saying that all the relevant stretches of texts must obey these rules or be consigned to the waste-paper basket. One is simply providing an idealised norm with which stretches of naturally occurring texts can be compared. Without such an idealised norm for the purposes of comparison, it is, in fact, very difficult to say anything interesting about naturally occurring texts. (Berry 1981c: 61)

In a flurry of publications in 1979–1981, she developed her personal model of exchange structure, which takes from the Birmingham School of Discourse the units of exchange, move and act. She mapped out the structural potential for the exchange of knowledge and action, which she elaborates into three layers corresponding to Halliday’s metafunctions. The choice of initial move predicts specific discourse consequences for the following moves in a way that transcends mere adjacency. Even though this work has already had strong impact, many of its promising aspects remain to be discovered, thought through, and further developed. It is heartening that Margaret herself has recently taken up this thread of her research again. She has also focused on theme and rheme (e.g. Berry 1995, 1996, 2013), looking at the micro-choices language users make to distribute the information in individual clauses, and how this affects success in written and spoken communication.

As a research-driven teacher, Margaret has had a profound impact on her students at all levels. To her, teaching is not a matter of unilaterally imparting knowledge, but of teacher and students together formulating questions and problems and looking for ways to address them. This emerges nicely from a footnote in which Margaret offers “Thanks ... to those of my BA and MA students who have discussed Theme with me and who have carried out project work in this area” (Berry 1996: 1). Practicing the Socratic method of cooperative argumentative dialogue, Margaret stimulated the completion of the doctorates, often published as monographs, of a host of doctoral students, including Butler (1982) *The directive function of the English modals*; Hillier (1990) *The language of spontaneous interaction between children ages 7–12: Instigating action*; Gibson (1992) *Towards a discourse theory of abstracts and abstracting*; O’Neal (1994) *Narrative structure in the*

writing of primary school children in the British Virgin Islands and Parsons (1995) *Measuring cohesion in English texts: The relationship between cohesion and coherence*. In addition to these, Margaret also had a supervisory role in the work of Caroline Stainton, Roberta Dewa, Dirk Noël and many others.

Her mentoring extended beyond her official doctoral students to other up-and-coming researchers who were members of, or in other ways came into touch with, the Nottingham Linguistics Circle, which promoted lively and open debate about many subfields of linguistics. The year 1971 saw the launch of the *Nottingham Linguistic Circular* edited by Ronald Hartmann and Walter Nash, which appeared till 1985. Margaret was an active member of the advisory panel, and looking at the tables of contents, one finds a veritable A-list of authors, most functional but also some with a more formal background, including Chris Butler, David Butt, Deirdre Burton, Chris Candlin, Ronald Carter, Jennifer and Paul Coates, Grevelle Corbett, Donald Cruse, Ruqaiya Hasan, Richard Hudson, Michael Lumsden, Jim Martin, Cate Poynton, Geoffrey Pullum, John Sinclair, Michael Stubbs, Sandra Thompson, Eija Ventola and Katie Wales. From 1981 till 1993, Margaret was also on call as assistant editor of *Network*, a newsletter-type publication launched by Robin Fawcett, dedicated to “report on ... work both theoretical and applied, ... in the broad Firthian tradition”. Margaret took the initiative for two further Nottingham-based publication forums dedicated to systemic-functional linguistics in a broad sense: *Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics*, which appeared from 1987 to 1993, and the series *Monographs in Systemic Linguistics*, in which a number of dissertations were published, including, besides those of Margaret’s own PhD students listed above, Cloran (1994), Torr (1997), Plum (1998), Davidse (1999), and Ravelli (1999), all prefaced by introductions written by Margaret.

The culture of lively and variegated debate of the Nottingham Linguistics Circle was naturally extended by Margaret into the organization of a series of Systemic Workshops in the 1980s and early 1990s, which focused on specific topics and brought in linguists from diverse backgrounds with special expertise on these topics. The oldest guest-editor of this thematic issue was fortunate to participate in the 1983 workshop on “The analysis of texts, spoken and written”, attended by West Coast Functionalists Sandra Thompson and William Mann, and the 1990 workshop on “Rheme”, at which Jan Firbas from the Prague School was a special guest. As indicated on the home page of the European Systemic Functional Linguistics Association, “The origin of the association lies in a series of meetings in SFL, originally held in Nottingham in the 1980s, organised by Margaret Berry. In 1993 the meeting went regional”, rotating around Europe, as it still does today.

With the added perspective of time, it has become very clear how exceptional Margaret has been in fostering talent, research, and the exchange of ideas

at meetings and in publications. In the ‘Tributes’ section of this special issue, a number of people who have been close to her over this long period over time testify about their debts to Margaret: Hilary Hillier, Sheena Gardner, and Robin Fawcett. The next section groups squibs on a topic that has always been close to Margaret’s heart, the ‘why’ of text analysis, by linguists who have known her at various stages of her academic career: Rebekah Wegener, Elissa Asp, Eirian Davies, Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg, and Dirk Noël. The invited contributions were asked to address the following questions: ‘why do you analyse text(s)’ and ‘why should linguistic theories be interested in text(s)’. First, Wegener offers a convenient starting point by focusing our attention on what a text is, introducing three useful distinctions. Following this, Asp gives a systematic overview of the functions of text analysis, arguing that text analysis has generally been more central in functional(ist) frameworks. Davies evaluates textual analysis and raises questions about the theoretical challenges with corpus linguistics. These concerns are shared by Simon-Vandenberg, who offers reflections on text-analytical research, drawing also at times on corpus linguistics such as the absence of negative evidence. Finally, Noël proposes, from the perspective of (diachronic) construction grammar, to relate innovation to idiolectal grammars. Change should be explained in relation to individual usage, taking into account the textual context of usage events. These six contributions offer a valuable perspective on the interrelated functions of text analysis.

The final section of this special issue contains three articles investigating aspects of speech function and mood. This topic was chosen for a number of reasons. When we started thinking about this thematic issue, plans were already in place for a Nottingham Workshop¹ in June 2018 on the occasion of Margaret’s 80th birthday focusing on speech function and mood. This, of course, is no coincidence either, as it is the area to which Margaret’s work on exchange structure has made important contributions. The advances made by Margaret are explored in different ways by the authors contributing to this section.

Butler’s paper critically examines the extent to which functional linguistics has a ‘fundamental unity’. Using the area of illocution, speech function, and mood, Butler highlights the similarities and differences, as well as the reasons for them, among three main functional approaches. Kimps, Davidse & O’Grady focus on English tag questions eliciting knowledge or action, to which they apply both the speech function model (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) and the exchange structure analysis (Berry 1981a, b, c, 2016). They argue for a synthesis between both approaches and conclude that further development of the principles of

1. We would like to thank Professor Peter Stockwell and the University of Nottingham for agreeing to co-host this workshop with Lise Fontaine and Cardiff University.

adjacency and exchange shows potential for capturing the dynamics of conversation. Finally, McGregor's paper considers interpersonal grammar from an evolutionary perspective. Having identified a particular mode of symbolic cognition, McGregor shows how this relates to a social or interpersonal act of meaning making.

During most of her career, Margaret Berry was, as we have seen, associated with editorial ventures with a (systemic) functional core. In 1992, the then editor of *Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics*, Dirk Noël, conceived of the plan to take these ventures to the next step of "a fully-refereed, professionally published, commercially-distributed journal". He involved Kristin Davidse and Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg in this plan, and the three of them started consulting, in the first place, with roughly the group of functional linguists that had been involved in the Nottingham ventures.

From this consultation and healthy internal debate came the insight that the new journal would not narrowly position itself in the Firthian tradition, but rather, in Peter Fries' words in a letter of 16 May 1992, as a general journal of "functional approaches to language". In a letter of 4/5 July 1992, Robin Fawcett spelt out the intended readership as embracing "Systemic Functional Linguists; Prague School Linguists; Functional Linguistics of the Simon Dik variety; West Coast functionalists; and various smaller groups of functional linguists". Noting that Cognitive Grammar, according to Langacker (1991) concerns both semantic functions and their "structural implementation", the editors included this school of linguistics in the journal's profile as well. This "broad vision" (see editors' preface) was reflected in the originally very large Editorial and Advisory Boards, on which representatives of all the targeted schools agreed to serve, such as František Daneš and Jan Firbas for Prague School Functionalism, John Du Bois for West Coast Functionalism, Mike Hannay and Anna Siewierska for Dik's Functional Grammar; Margaret Berry, Robin Fawcett, Michael Gregory, Christian Matthiessen, Jim Martin and Ruqaiya Hasan for Systemic Functional Linguistics; John Taylor and Ronald Langacker for Cognitive Grammar; as well as other leading scholars such as Robert Kirsner, Michael Silverstein, Stanley Starosta and Anna Wierzbicka. John Benjamins happily took on the publication of the journal, for which after further consultation the name *Functions of Language* was chosen.

Michael Halliday offered his special support to the journal by accepting the function first of Consulting Editor and later of Honorary Editor. When on 31 December 2017, Michael learnt that the twenty-fifth anniversary issue would be a tribute to Margaret Berry, he was delighted and dictated the following dedication: "Congratulations to Margaret on her eightieth birthday for all that she has done and continues to do in support of true linguistic scholarship".

We now gladly give the last word, in the next contribution, to Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg, the longest serving editor who formed a loyal constant in the changing editorial teams. Complementary with the editors' preface, she gives a personal account of the formative years of the journal and expresses her wishes for its future.

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Address for correspondence

Kristin Davidse
 KU Leuven
 Faculty of Arts
 Department of Linguistics
 Blijde Inkomststraat 21 PO Box 3308
 3000 Leuven
 Belgium
 kristin.davidse@kuleuven.be

Co-author information

Lise Fontaine
 Cardiff University
 School of English, Communication and
 Philosophy
 fontainel@cardiff.ac.uk

Miriam Taverniers
 Ghent University
 Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Department
 of Linguistics
 miriam.taverniers@ugent.be