A Tribute to Margaret Berry: The WHY of text analysis

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A Tribute to Margaret Berry: Special Issue of *Functions of Language.*

How did Margaret influence you in your thinking and work?

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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 and Coulthard (1975), Wickens argued that "Berry (1981) 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" (2000:73). 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 points out 'This 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)." (2000: 180) 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	dkl	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 (1981) 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 to argue that the online interaction is 'fake' and cannot support the constructivist pedagogy as claimed (2000:265).

Berry's (1981) 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 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" (2000:182).

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 and 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 (1981) 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, "My 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 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," (2013:365) 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. 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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