



## CREATIVITY IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES TEACHING AND LEARNING

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### Introduction

The Higher Education Academy is trying to encourage higher education teachers and subject communities to consider the role of creativity in students' learning and their experiences of learning.<sup>1</sup> Underlying this attempt to engage higher education are the assumptions that:

- Being creative is present in all disciplinary learning contexts, although we rarely use words like creativity to describe such things.
- We all need to be creative (inventive/adaptive) in a world that is constantly changing: a world that also requires us to change/adapt.
- Apart from these disciplines that explicitly recognise creativity as a central feature of their identity (like the performing arts and design), creativity is largely implicit in discussions about teaching and learning. However, teachers do value creativity, originality, flair and imagination in their students' learning. Indeed, creativity as one of the hallmarks of excellence in higher education learning and performance.

Underlying our project is the desire to show that **creativity is an integral part of Modern Foreign Languages**. This proposition is being evaluated through discussions with higher education modern foreign language tutors and lecturers aimed at gaining insights into how they understand creativity in the context of their professional practice (both disciplinary practice and practice as teachers). This Working Paper synthesises the results of an initial survey with the participation of sixteen higher education lecturers. The author welcomes feedback and additional contributions [Margaret.Clarke@port.ac.uk](mailto:Margaret.Clarke@port.ac.uk).<sup>2</sup>

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### **Questions used to prompt discussion:**

- What does it mean to say that someone is creative?
- How would you personally define creativity?
- Give five keywords that in your view best sum up the concept.
- What is it about the discipline of Modern Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics which embodies creativity?
- How can we recognise or assess creativity in Modern Foreign Languages?
- In what ways can language teachers be creative and enable students to work creatively in any or all of the following areas:

Materials development

Computer assisted Language Learning

Classroom practice

Setting and assessment of course work

- What contexts and conditions in the British Higher Education system encourage or enable teachers and students to be creative?
- What contexts and conditions in the British Higher Education system discourage teachers and students from being creative?

### **Modern Foreign Language perspectives on creativity**

Creativity comes from sensing the limits, not by working to models, definitions, defined objectives in teaching, but by working with the script and with students in such a way that the script, the limits, can be exceeded and new ways of being can be improvised and brought about. There are two games in town – the safe one which is profoundly anti-creative and infertile, and the one which embarks on a journey without necessarily predicting the intention, objective or outcome, where the journey is made together and where new things are discovered as a result.

Creativity is the dynamic in the process of life that enables us to find ever new ways of living together in and with the world. A creative person is someone who finds ways of doing this which play with the texture of our perceptions and show us that there are other worlds, for good and ill, and other ways of doing things and being human.

Although having the verb “create” at the root of the word, suggesting the birth of something absolutely new and original, I would rather associate the semantic potential of this noun to “recreation”, “reconstruction”, “recontextualization”, “redefinition”, the use of the prefix “re-” denoting an already existing linguistic and/or cultural content.

In my opinion “creativity” involves necessarily some “ingredients”: freedom from the subject/agent to be able to imagine something from a personal (often subjective) perspective. In a work of art, for instance, we may consider that creativity

inaugurates an open space where different readings, different sensitivities may converge. Connotation and ambiguity then may be a mark of creativity.

Creativity is thus the ability to re-define, re-create and/or re-produce things by firstly questioning them, then by looking at them from a fresher, different angle or perspective, and finally by formulating and/or producing a renewed, different alternative of the very thing that is being looked at. In order for this process to take place, a series of conditions need to be present along the way.

**Meaning:** firstly, the subject that is being tackled must be meaningful to the person or “creator”. Lack of meaning means lack of interest, lack of inspiration and thus lack of creativity. Secondly, the person will have a conscious or unconscious need to scrutinise, to question the subject or topic or interest area.

**Questioning** is thus an essential ingredient of creativity. Why is *it* this way? Why can't *it* be like that? What happens if I do *this* instead of *that*? These are some of the questions a creative person would ask.

**Exploration:** the creator or author, then, would need to spend time looking at ways in which to answer the array of questions initially posed, and the ones that spring out along the way. The student must be able to make new associations freely and without reference to existing rules or norms.

**Experimentation** results from exploration and this latter condition results in discovery. Whether the discovery conduces to a completely new subject or to exactly the same one that was being explored, the journey of such exploration and experimentation becomes the most informative and learning part of the creative process. However, there are some conditions that must be present throughout each one of the stages of this long process; conditions without which, no matter how hard the person may try, no matter how interesting or relevant the subject might be, the creative endeavour may not be fully achieved and fulfilled.

**Adaptation:** Coming up with imaginative ways of doing what might be considered otherwise mundane tasks; the deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas and forms.

**Open-mindedness** or the ability to be flexible, both with the subject being explored and with oneself.

**Insight:** the creator shows originality or insight, which entails powers of analysis and synthesis, and can be relied upon to produce something different from other people; excels at innovation and execution and may or may not inspire others to be creative in either a practical or intellectual context.

**Fearlessness** or the lack of fear to try, to question things, to try again, to go against the current.

**Innovation:** an ability to come up with new ways of thinking and doing things, that are out of the ordinary and require imagination.

**Abandonment and enjoyment,** or the ability to give oneself in, to immerse oneself totally in, the experience - in short, to live *it* to its full. No creative activity would ever be complete, or would lead to a meaningful and relevant conclusion without any of the above conditions.

The question of what makes a creative individual, or *who is* and *who is not* a creative person must, therefore, be redefined and looked at, for the above mentioned abilities are all universal human characteristics that every single person is genetically endowed with at birth. Some may argue that **talent** is *the* key ingredient, but talent alone does not constitute enough fuel to drive creativity. However, the possession of a special talent is usually the determining factor between a good creative effort and a masterpiece. Similarly, a degree of **intelligence** is crucial to support, to underpin the whole creative process but in itself it does not guarantee a truly creative outcome, for in many instances other characteristics such as inflexibility can easily annul intelligence.

**Risk-taking:** the difference between an apparently more creative person and one who appears not to be so could arguably be measured by **the ability to accept making, and to positively resolve, mistakes**. Mistakes are an essential part of the exploration process and its conclusion. Even the most talented and intelligent of people make lots of mistakes, but the successful ones are those who rely on their own tools to find a way through and succeed: self-awareness, self-belief, self-confidence, in short, resourcefulness and determination, even in the most hopeless of situations. Mistakes are, therefore, the most important teaching and learning experiences any person could possibly have, which both inform and fuel creativity. Therefore, not being afraid of making mistakes is paramount when trying out something new, when not knowing where it is all leading, or whether the questions will be satisfactorily answered. It is here, in this sticky, unknown, terrifying territory, where creativity is created, challenged and tested, and where truly creative solutions are reached.

### **Keywords which best sum up the concept of creativity**

Flair, spark, originality, ingenuity, inspiration, meaning, exploration, experimentation, open-mindedness, fearlessness, talent, intelligence, original, dynamic, stimulating, thoughtful, new, different, out of the ordinary, innovative, inventiveness, intuition, capacity to see multiple meanings, improvising skills, spontaneity, forward looking, resourceful, synthesis, playfulness, iconoclasm, construction, freedom, personal, imagination, renewal, connotation, production, positive, change, lively, malleable, on the edge.

## What does creativity mean in Modern Foreign Languages?

A language is somewhat indefinable but has the scope for an enormous number of combinations and options. Although governed by rules, it offers immense scope for originality.

Languages are not always creative, but they have enormous potential to be so. They are used deliberately to create works of art, and for spontaneous communication. Learning a language may be a creative exercise because languages are so vast and complex, and each user needs to use and combine elements of knowledge in new ways constantly. The discipline of Modern Foreign Languages carries these associations, and uses them, without necessarily truly promoting creativity. Language study also lends itself to creativity as it can be seen to embrace other disciplines with endless scope for doing so in new ways.

MFL by its very nature involves communication - the human dimension of this is open to the imagination and individual character of each person. Work in the target language can encompass an enormous variety of fields - all that human beings communicate about. This gives vast scope for creative responses and explorations.

In relation to the discipline of MFL teaching and learning, everything potentially embodies creativity. Language teaching is one of those very open and flexible areas where creative activities can be easily embedded in both the teaching activities as well as in the language curriculum. It is like having different ingredients to cook and being able to combine them differently each time in order to create as succulent a dish as one can manage to. Thus creativity lies in the ability to construct meaningful language from the building-blocks available and to express ideas using the resources available; but also, recognising that the resources can be adapted and that the language learner can often be in control of resources, rather than subject to their limits and restrictions. On another level, creativity also means the scope to play with language and ideas for their own sake.

MFL becomes creative when it ceases to be about language learning and becomes *linguaging*. The term 'linguaging' is one that I have developed together with my colleague Mike Gonzalez (Phipps & Gonzalez 2004). It emerged for us out of the process of struggling to find a way of articulating the full, embodied and engaged interaction with the world that comes when we put the languages we are learning into action. It is what happens when we depart from the pre-existing scripts and begin to play, perform and live in languages as part of an expression of a fuller dimension of life than that demanded by limits imposed on curriculum practices by aims, outcomes and shallow notions of performance. We make a distinction between the effort of using languages that one is learning in the classroom contexts and the effort of being a person in that language in the social world of everyday interactions. 'Languagers', for us, are those people, we may even term them 'agents' or 'language activists', who engage with the world-in-action, who move in the world in a way that allows the risk of stepping out of one's habitual ways of speaking and attempt to develop different, more relational ways of interacting with the people

and phenomena that one encounters in everyday life. 'Languages' use the ways in which they perceive the world to develop new dispositions for action in another language and they are engaged in developing these dispositions so that they become habitual, durable.

Personally I believe that "creativity" is a favourable condition for FL learning, implying renewal (at several levels, namely linguistic and cultural). In order to avoid using dichotomic terms which usually put forward a reductionist, essentialist view, I imagine "creativity" at the end of a continuum line and would place "reproduction" at the other end. In terms of an educational perspective "reproduction" embodies the traditional paradigm of education, privileging transmission and a conformist, passive reproduction of stereotyped forms. Opposing this conservative, functional environment where creativity was marginalized, we come to meet concepts such as "intercultural being" and "languaging" (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004) that rely on creativity as a necessary condition for FL learning. I have finished reading A. Phipps and M. Gonzalez (2004) *Modern Languages – Learning and Teaching in an Intercultural Field*. London: Sage. The authors argue for teaching-and-learning as a space of shared exploration of personal responses and understandings and their exchange. I identify myself very much with their views and would underline how their proposal implicates a fundamental rethinking of the space that modern language teaching occupies. In this sense "creativity" favours the discovery of different angles and involves a projection or an expression of a more intimate and engaged self. "Creativity" may be recognized and assessed alongside the above mentioned continuum in numerous ways. The above mentioned authors present several examples of this (cf. pp. 96-97; 105; 106-107; 139) from where we may see that creativity often appears hand in hand with a critical voice.

The use of any language is inherently creative. Thinking, re-enacting the speech, thought and lexis of another foreign culture inspires creativity in itself. Examples would be the need for creativity as part of translation strategies, in oral communication (e.g. to paraphrase when we don't know the exact word), and in written communication. An appreciation of creativity is also fostered through the cultural aspects of MFL courses, where students are normally exposed to a wide range of creative forms (literature, art, film, pop lyrics etc.) either because these are used as texts for language study or because they are part of separate courses that help students acquire an understanding of the culture(s) related to the language. The year abroad is a particular space available to linguists in which to exercise creativity and in which students are frequently free of the time constraints which competing modules and part-time jobs can generate at home.

### **Creativity in materials development**

Speaking as a MFL teacher trainer, I believe that the teacher should be responsible for the selection, organization and exploration of the materials s/he brings to class. I am clearly against the systematic use of course books and this is an area that should include contributions from the students (at the levels of (self) production of both

materials and tasks). Materials should be meaningful, provocative, allow for the active, critical exploration of students and teacher.

There is therefore ample scope for teachers to be creative in the development of materials. Such materials should, in turn, support creative classroom practice and elicit creative learning, in a dialectic continuum between language regularities and lexical expansion.

The teacher should therefore create tasks based on authentic materials, combining source material in new or unexpected ways or to achieve a hitherto non-standard or unexpected end, combining input from English source and target language source or taking materials associated with one era or area and using them in another.

Useful materials will need to include some key features, as follows:

- \* a graded presentation of the Target Language containing a well-balanced input from three distinct angles – (1) how meanings are expressed (semantics); (2) structures at and below sentence level (grammar); (3) the sound system (phonology).
- \* a systematic contrastive comparison of phonological, grammatical and semantic points between the student's first language and the TL, where traces of interference from the former can be expected in the latter (in some groups with students from various linguistic backgrounds, English can be the term of comparison, not as their first language, but as their language of first use).
- \* provision for cyclical revision, including re-lexicalisation of identified models in new combinations of learnt language elements.
- \* exploring authentic texts (written and spoken) which reflect the culture(s) associated with the speakers of the TL – e.g., everyday life (family, occupation, leisure); social behaviour and customs; local knowledge; values and beliefs.
- \* particularly at the more advanced stages, exploring authentic texts (written and spoken) from:
  - (a) Area Studies, i.e. on the TL culture(s) with a focus on the socio-political and economic aspects of the country/countries involved – e.g., government, welfare, law and order, legal system, education, business and industry.
  - (b) Literature, for stylistic analysis of the choices writers make and appreciation of the ways the language can be developed to its fullest creative limits; and also traditional folk literature.

Sometimes students are asked to exercise creativity directly, e.g. by writing short passages using their own imagination, by taking a set position in a debate, or by producing oral work which has an element of role play and/or involves the use of creative media. Examples of the latter could be producing a poster, making a short 'radio broadcast' on tape, designing a web page. In these cases, the exercises teach transferable skills, stimulate creativity AND make language-learning more interesting and effective. Asking students to create materials or approaches involves the teacher

letting go, but may succeed in involving students who might otherwise remain detached.

### **Creativity in computer-assisted language learning**

A variety of approaches and activities, with a range of feedback. Using it for the presentation stage, reinforcement, assessment or just for variety and fun. We need to remember that information technology is the idiom of the era, and that those who lack linguistic ability can be drawn into language study if they see the relevance of IT to languages and vice-versa, and through its use can feel a sense of achievement in language learning.

As far as teaching staff are concerned, creativity for me involves openness to the use of a variety of media and to stimulating ways of using them. Use of video and audio resources must be a key part of this, as must the preparation of tasks using multimedia resources connected to newspaper and television company websites and archives. Film is clearly a further area linked to this. Creativity may be best seen not as the mere use of these resources but also in mixing them with written texts and written (or word-processed) products by the students. Our digital language lab allows subtitling of silent clips of film, for example. Students may be asked to produce a word-processed summary of the contents of an audio recording or TV news reports as a further example.

Before being printed out, electronic texts are extremely easy to manipulate. They are fluid. This quality makes them good promoters of creative learning exercises, both in a classroom situation and private study. CALL programs are available for different levels of language competence. Equally, several types of corpora, written and spoken, are available via the Internet. Some can be collected according to pre-defined variables, e.g. a particular time, place or function.

### **Creativity in classroom practice**

Creativity here may be twofold: a criterion to be present at the planning moment and at reflecting upon and sharing dialogically in class. Assessment of coursework should also involve sharing and the active participation of the students. Therefore the parameters (or levels alongside the continuum) of creativity that are to be assessed should be made clear with the students beforehand, to arise awareness and for clarification. If the teacher, acting as an example (in the sense of providing a model, not exempt from analysis or criticism), shows to be creative, s/he is also stimulating this quality in her/his students, making them active participants while contacting with the chosen materials and tasks, developing a critical approach to the FL linguistic and cultural space. From the perspective of the teacher (and to a different extent of the student as well) this may involve taking risks (as opposed to the 'reproduction' paradigm that implied a more secure and unchallenging method).

Teacher and student creativity in MFL will greatly benefit from a teaching/learning policy that promotes transferable skills. This can be best nurtured through a



combination of analysis of language macro- and micro-features with direct language experience and practice based on spoken and written texts and their contexts. Incremental progression and cyclical revision will facilitate consolidation and further creative development. Regular assessment of learning progress will provide guidance to students and can also provide pedagogical findings which can contribute to a continual update of MFL frameworks. Individual teachers might pool their ideas so as to bring greater diversity to programmes - creative ideas are very often stimulated through group discussion and by having different perspectives.

Classroom practice can capitalise on the creative materials. Through authentic texts students will be experiencing the target language as it occurs naturally as well as the **pragmatics**, that is, interpretation of its utterances in context. This can be enhanced by spoken texts with a visual component as found typically in television broadcasts and films, where speakers and listeners can be seen in an interpersonal context and non-verbal phenomena can be observed which reinforce the verbal exchanges, such as **paralinguistic functions** of gesture, facial expression and body language. Students will also receive explicit information for a more conscious learning of the semantic, grammatical and phonological characteristics of the TL. With this compounded assistance, students can themselves be creative in their foreign language learning process.

**Substitution** is a flexible tool for student creativity at different stages of development, within the safety of a correct syntactic pattern. For beginners, basic dialogues can be personalised by substituting the student's name, place names, and so on. At advanced stages, a court case interaction could be the object of dialogue variation for students preparing to become public service interpreters.

**Intertextuality** and **register identification** can play a significant role in student creativity and are particularly relevant at advanced stages of language learning. Intertextuality can be explored in both literary and non-literary texts, both synchronically and diachronically. Sensitising students on register will equip them to make appropriate language choices according to situational context, intention and audience.

In my experience, students are best encouraged to be creative when they are given independence to choose their own focus for tasks, and, indeed to decide what they will study. Students might be encouraged to be creative by involving them in decisions about how and what should be taught in the language classroom.

MFL teachers may encourage students to take active participation in the class by promoting a friendly, mutually beneficial atmosphere and emphasising that individual participation is crucial to collective learning. The teacher him/herself should engage in class activities (e.g. mimicking, role-playing, etc) and ask for students' feedback on issues related to language. Thereby students begin to perceive the classroom context not as an arena where to compete, but as a meeting point where to learn from each other. Once the antagonistic/fear barrier is broken, creativity will express itself more easily. Students will be more willing to have their

say. Needless to say, however, that the success of any approach is greatly dependent on the in-class chemistry.

More time in the curriculum needs to be put aside for students to interact creatively with the material: for example, a stimulus text quickly followed by student-centred activities where students themselves search for, present and discuss material.

The most creative work by our students emerges particularly in level one portfolio work, in year abroad projects and in discussion and debate at level three, as well as in presentation and role play tasks at all levels, in the use of a range and combination of activities, combining genres, senses, periods, the Internet and songs.

Stimulating and supporting the work of students outside the classroom will also be an area in which staff demonstrate creativity. Portfolio work can be a powerful motivation for students to engage with this.

### **Questions that teacher should ask themselves and their institution:**

- Is what we do at all meaningful to us?
- Do we question, explore, experiment, discover things when preparing teaching materials?
- Do we actually enjoy teaching, and preparing materials for our students?
- When preparing materials, do we openly share in our explorations and mistakes with other colleagues?
- Do we organise meetings where creative ways of organising materials, or anything, are discussed?
- Do our institutions provide a safe place in which mistakes can be explored and resolved?
- Do our institutions offer staff development workshops, and other related opportunities, in creativity?
- Is the creative pursuit an essential part of our courses' curriculum?

### **The relation between the teacher and the students**

- Do we provide (sufficient) opportunities in the classroom for questioning, exploration, experimentation and discovery?
- Are we providing a sufficiently open-minded environment for creativity to flourish?
- Do we provide a safe and non-judgemental, un-biased environment in which mistakes can be made and corrected?
- Do we react positively when students make mistakes?
- Do we create opportunities to show how mistakes can be handled?
- Do we recognise talent in the students' output?
- Do we let them know how good they are at something? How frequently?
- Do we know enough about our students: their likes, dislikes, talents, interests, learning styles, etc?

- Do we provide enough opportunities for students to engage in **our own** teaching material preparation?
- Do we include creative type of exercises in both our teaching materials and assessments?
- Are our students sufficiently motivated by the class/ course?
- Are they afraid of asking questions?
- Do they feel accepted, warts and all, by us?

If the answer to any of the above is “no”, then we are all paying a great deal of disservice to creativity and its potential benefits.

### **The recognition and assessment of creativity in Modern Foreign Languages**

In assessing creativity, most people, including teachers, are unable to distinguish between what is creative and what they personally like. If something is produced that is disliked, it will not be seen as creative. But producing exactly what the teacher likes is not necessarily creative. Assessing creativity is very difficult. Most assessments or tests in schools or university are not asking for creativity; those that do appear to ask for creativity want it within severely restricted limits which they, unhelpfully, often fail to describe - or even be aware of. As there are very subjective judgements related to creativity, it can be very difficult for a student to know where they stand, and how to do well.

In order to assess creativity, the system must generate conditions, and allow for mistakes to be made in a safe learning environment. This view, however, is in total conflict with the correct vs. incorrect answer-type of assessment procedures, which tend to underpin the heavy structures of most educational assessments and learning outcomes system. Perhaps a combination of the two may give students a more fulfilling, and indeed enriched and rewarding language learning experience.

I wonder if our assessment criteria could make more explicit reference to a creative dimension, although the use of words such as lively, interesting, sophistication does allow room for rewarding creativity in the higher mark bands.

It is inevitably subjective, but we can acknowledge and approve the originality shown by our students, rather than repressing it as often happens. We can measure the result of creativity against what was there before, i.e. the existing norm. We can commend what is creative and effective in its context. It can at times, and for some, be hard to know how to react to what may be innovative, yet just plain wacky – except in circumstances where wackiness might be a criterion!

In order to work creatively, students need a certain amount of autonomy. The learning strategies, techniques and materials described above serve that end. Autonomy in assessment can reduce inhibition in self-conscious performers and thus foster creativity. This said, self-testing may leave students with insufficient feedback unless it is monitored by the teacher. Besides, formal testing will be instrumental for diagnostic purposes, providing information on which to build further lesson plans,

and for evaluative purposes, grading students according to their performance in attaining specific objectives.

Creativity is encouraged by creating tasks based on authentic materials, by combining source material in new or unexpected ways or to an unexpected end, by making assessment meaningful to students so that they may even come along afterwards and say: "I enjoyed that. In that role play I really thought I was that person. What a pity it all ended."

We also need to allow for more creative writing: not necessarily fiction in the target language, but also by assessing how the students interact as individuals and social groups with language – rather than simply straitjacketing and expecting academic writing alone. Again, using some of the text types listed above, and many more (songs, film script, cartoons) we can do much more to engage students' creativity at a level of personality and ideas, as a first step to engaging them with a foreign language.

### **Conditions in the classroom that encourage and enable students and teachers to be creative**

- Attitude: commending what is different
- Resources; the unprecedented range available to some (but regrettably not all) learners
- Student diversity
- The provision of assistants from a different educational background
- Allowing a sense of fun (not found in all education systems)
- Teacher's commitment to the method
- We do have the flexibility and freedom to have significant input into module content and assessment, although assessment word limits can constrain what is possible at times.

### **Factors that inhibit students' and teachers' creativity**

- Pressure to perform and emphasis on league tables
- Expectations and suggestions that languages are dull, involve rote learning and are for swots
- The fact that effective communication requires accuracy – a skill which is all too often overlooked in other disciplines
- Time constraints
- Supposed lack of resources (money goes into other subject areas)
- Actual lack of resources for capital outlay and maintenance
- Lack of technical expertise
- Thinking too ambitiously or not thinking ambitiously enough
- Teacher's fear of loss of control
- Unhelpful time-tabling (only short stretches available for language classes)
- Fear of failure on the part of teacher and students

- Conservative attitude of students peer pressure (must not enjoy classes)
- Teacher ground down, lack of stamina, too jaded to experiment
- Set syllabus leading to exams
- Teacher fearing disapproval of peers due to their possible reactions (inadequacy, jealousy etc)
- Students can prefer what is perceived in terms of being right/wrong or black/white
- The time required to adjust, when what is expected of students is at variance with what they were expecting.

### **Institutional factors that have a bearing on creativity**

I think that systems and institutions are only constrained by the limitations, both personal, professional, spiritual or otherwise, of the people running them. Creativity must, therefore, be an integral part of management courses, as well as of management review and quality assurance procedures.

The constant imposition of limits – not so much in resource terms, though a bit of money can always ease the creative process – but in terms of the dominance of a script that is technocratic, bureaucratic, consumer-orientated and even militaristic inhibits creativity. Creativity comes in such circumstances but it is hard won, and a struggle with the dominant discourses. The agenda of employability reduces the scope of creativity in languages for life and for languaging.

The increasing comodification of education and the resulting bureaucracy, centralisation and bullying inhibit creativity to a large degree. One thing that cuts down the possibilities for a creative approach to life is the closing of traditional Language Studies departments and their replacements with "Open Language Programmes", "Language Centres" etc where throughput is all important and an academic approach to language studies is buried in a business model that is only interested in bums on seats.

Underfunding of staff posts and the consequent reliance on hourly paid staff can be a constraint on creativity, as those individuals often hold multiple jobs and do not have the time and energy to devote to devising creative tasks. Similarly, even full-time staff are often juggling a variety of modules (15 contact hours in our case) along with increasing amounts of paperwork (a significant amount generated by the 'quality burden' as well as marking and committee meetings). Time available for preparation can be severely squeezed. The increasing unwillingness of students to engage in tasks which are not summatively assessed will also impact on their creativity, although assessment can be used to encourage students to maximise creative input.

## The teaching/research binarism:

Creativity in the education system is recognized widely to reside primarily in research; teachers whose principal creative activities relate to language-learning or teaching have been systematically undervalued. In my view, this erroneous recognition of the place of valued creativity as residing solely in research is actively discouraging creativity in the teaching and delivery of content- and language-centred courses amongst individuals who have much more to give in these spheres, and leading to a devaluation of those colleagues whose main activities relate to teaching and administration.

To a greater or lesser degree, theoretically institutions encourage staff to be updated as regards new methods and approaches of teaching languages, and thus promote the attendance to events and training sessions that deal with them. In practice, such emphasis is in contradiction with the illogical split that is kept between teaching and research and the value that research is given over teaching. This publishing-is-what-counts 'philosophy', wholly embedded in the British Higher Education system, is thus harming teaching a great deal. To start with, teaching should be as highly valued as research, as the former necessarily involves the latter and only by incorporating research one can be fully creative. The split that is kept between one and the other should be done away with once and for all.

Two other major factors hinder creativity in Modern Foreign Languages in the British Higher Education system. However, their roots do not necessarily lie in Higher Education.

Students already come into Modern Foreign Languages at Higher Education level with a rather jaded/utilitarian view of undergraduate study. My experience has shown that less formal and more imaginative scenarios – conversation in 'normal' social settings, the opportunity to engage with the cultural forms of the particular linguistic communities and the chance to focus on ideas that are of personal interest to the students, are invaluable in bringing the foreign language to life, but mostly when these activities are *not* attached to a particular assessment. The major disabling factors, then, are an over-bureaucratized and pressurized system where real learning is replaced with methodical but often meaningless testing.

Thus modern foreign language students in British Higher Education in general display lack of understanding of abstract metalanguage, which impedes successful discussion of language use. Furthermore, they also tend to display lack of understanding of grammar rules, which produces failure to internalise target language patterns and use them correctly. Without awareness of how languages operate, creative efforts may be frustrated. We can always hope that future generations of students will come into higher education equipped with a sounder linguistic foundation.

Secondly, there is another, more complex, source of difficulties in MFL creativity, which, in British Higher Education, may be present as a two-tiered problem. It is

associated with some students' sense of personal identity and national heritage. It is also associated with the global projection of the English language.

When learning a foreign language and, in the process, learning a foreign culture, we may be laying our own language and culture open to external influences. Consciously or unconsciously, this can be felt to be a threat to one's personal identity and national heritage. People affected by this concern may feel inhibited to face the challenge of looking at their own language and culture with the eyes of a member of the foreign language and culture. This can result in a half-hearted approach that will prevent insight-giving comparative links from being established and thus obstruct creativity in target language learning.

A reticent mind to the acceptance of otherness on equal terms may be prevalent amongst some native speakers of English. If you perceive your mother tongue to be the world's *lingua franca*, then you are probably bound to see other languages from a hierarchical standpoint, where yours ranks top. Your view of the world may not be the only possible one but must be the best. It is after all the overarching one carried by the English language as the dispenser of universal means of communication. Learning a foreign language becomes a token gesture, for 'they all speak English'. Affiliation to this outlook is likely to correspond to low commitment in a creative learning of the target language.

As a final note, the hierarchical outlook is also related to the wider issue of language politics, inside and outside higher education. The lesser the prestige conferred to a foreign language and its native speakers, the harder it may become for the MFL teachers of that language to motivate their students into working creatively.