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## **On Linguistic Creativity**

### **К вопросу о лингвистической креативности**

The beginning of wisdom is  
to call things by their right names.  
Socrates

Creativity is an extremely complex interdisciplinary phenomenon. The study of creativity has different perspectives and approaches. This article presents an overview of some definitions of the notion “creativity” and through the analysis of aphorisms also presents some perspectives on creativity in linguistics.

Creativity is possible in all areas of human activity: at play and work, the arts and sciences. Despite a tremendous surge in creativity research in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, no absolute consensus or overarching theory of creativity has yet been reached. The situation in creativity research is similar to the fable of the blind men trying to describe an elephant by touching different parts of the animal, where the one touching the tail says it is like a snail and other touching the flank says it is like a wall.

Some theories evolving simultaneously from many branches of knowledge converge in the root definition of creativity, which means “to make”. The root of the words *create* and *creativity* comes from the Latin *creatus* and *creare*. This means “to make or produce” or literally “to grow”. The word also comes from the Old French base *kere*, and the Latin *crescere* and *creber*. The Roman goddess of the earth, Ceres, is an example, as is the Italian corn goddess, Cereris. Creativity as a word has roots in the earth. Other similar words are *cereal*, *crescent*, *creature*, *concrete*, *crescendo*, *decrease*, *increase*, and *recruit*<sup>1</sup>.

The first recorded use in English of the abstract noun “creativity” is as recent as 1875<sup>2</sup>. Certainly, cognate forms such as “creation”, “creator” and “create” were around much earlier, first with religious and then with artistic senses. But what do we actually mean by “creating” and “being creative” nowadays? One of the most urgent problems in the scientific study of creativity is precisely how to define the phenomenon (the idea expressed in the epigraph). The English word *creativity* is linked, historically and etymologically, with the Latin word *creare*, “to make”, and

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<sup>1</sup> Runco, M. and Pritzer, S. (1999) *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, San Diego, CA and London: Academic Press. P. 595.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (1928, 2nd edn 1989) ed. R. Burchfield, J. Simpson, et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

the ecclesiastical Latin word *creator* (Creator); therefore, both refer to the concept of origin itself. One of psychological definitions was given by Csikszentmihalyi in 1996 who suggested that the term *creative* could be applied to “any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one”. Another definition was given by Martindale in 1994 who said that a phenomenon is creative if it is novel and, in some manner, useful or appropriate for the situation in which it occurs. The noun *creativity* is used if a process or phenomenon is being discussed while the adjective *creative* is used if a behavior, an experience, a product, a person, a group, or an environment is being discussed. In all these instances, there is the assumption that something is both novel and culturally appropriate to a given task<sup>1</sup>.

Let’s review some more definitions of the term and notion “creativity” singling out its essential characteristics in order to answer the question “What is creativity?”

*Creativity* is understood as a complex of psychological characteristics that are needed to achieve effective novelty in all areas: artistic, literary, and musical to be sure, but also in science, engineering, commerce, government, and interpersonal relations<sup>2</sup>. *Creativity* nowadays is widely defined as the production of relevant and effective novelty<sup>3</sup>. *Creativity* is a multifaceted term often including concepts of novelty, innovation, and effectiveness<sup>4</sup>.

*Creativity* is the process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed. The result of the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation. *Creative Process* – any kind of problem solving on any level of a culture or civilization which contributes to the elimination of crises situations.<sup>5</sup> In informal use, creativity can be regarded as the processes leading to the generation of new and valued ideas. *Creativity* means more than an idea and an aspiration; also required is that something actually be created, a creation<sup>6</sup>.

*Creativity and/or Creative Thinking* – the cognitive processes that lead to the production of new, original ideas, processes, or artifacts that are judged to be useful or otherwise of some value. Many experts also recognize the importance and interaction of emotion and affective processes with cognitive skills in creativity and creative thinking.

*Creative Product* is the result of the creative process which helps with the survival of social entities on different levels of a culture and/or civilization. *Creative Product* – concrete outcomes, ideas, or behaviors may be identified by two criteria: originality, or relative newness compared to other outcomes (either in a larger society, for eminent creativity, or in a person’s more immediate

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<sup>1</sup> Runco, M. and Pritzner, S. (1999) *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, San Diego, CA and London: Academic Press. Volume 2. P. 597.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 631.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P. 511.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 547.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 433.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 800.

environment or experience, for everyday creativity), and meaningfulness to others, which implies a potential understandability or usefulness of an outcome, while ruling out productions which are fully random or idiosyncratic. A *creative product* must not only be novel, but must also be communicated to other people and, most important in the present context, be accepted or at least tolerated by them<sup>1</sup>. It also emphasizes the final step in the emergence of a creative product: the phase of validation by the surrounding society.

*Creativity* can be conceptualized as a process of perceiving new relationships and new challenges, coping with changing situations, and expressing one's unique perceptions and responses whether through the symbolism of art, through meaningful and appropriate social action, or through widening the knowledge base so that answers to individual and societal problems can become available. Cross-cultural creativity is found in any or all of these human endeavors. It makes its solid contribution to the maturity, delight, and well-being of man. Underlying this process is a deep concern on the part of the creative individual as to how to interact with his or her environment – natural, cultural, and sociopolitical<sup>2</sup>. *The concept of Creativity* – a useful distinction in the conceptualization of creativity is that of the creative product as opposed to the creative process. The creative product is the output of the individual. This output is then judged according to criteria in a particular field as to its creativity. There is a consensus in the field that for a product to be judged as creative, it must be original, unique, novel and useful – that is, adaptive and aesthetically pleasing according to the standards of the particular discipline<sup>3</sup>.

*Creative Personality* – a personality structure marked by possession of properties favorable to the emergence of creativity. *Personal Prerequisites for Creativity* – psychological properties of an individual that are necessary (but not sufficient) for the emergence of creativity<sup>4</sup>. These may include both ongoing trait characteristics and fluctuating state characteristics of the person, and may involve observable evidence as well as more inferred capabilities and personal traits. Consideration may include abilities, cognitive styles, affective and motivational patterns, underlying intentions, attitudes, and values, and many other features we may yet need to identify.

The psychological discussion has, as a result, concentrated on the process, person, and social environment<sup>5</sup>. The term *creativity* is a social construct used to describe various social outcomes<sup>6</sup>. In business and industry, the emphasis is frequently on innovation rather than creativity. The difference is that innovation requires not only creating novelty, but also putting it into concrete practice in a particular setting. Thus, in a certain sense, creativity can be seen as a prerequisite for innovation or as encompassing a stage or phase of innovation. Several

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<sup>1</sup> Runco, M. and Pritzner, S. (1999) *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, San Diego, CA and London: Academic Press. Volume 2. P. 519.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 453.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P. 660.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 629.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 520.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 599.

definitional problems are easy to solve in the framework of innovation, for instance, the question for whom novelty should be surprising, relevant, and effective, or the issue of chance. Innovation requires the deliberate introduction of ideas, products, production, or marketing processes, and the like that are novel for a work group or an organization into which they are introduced<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, according to different approaches the word *creative* has several possible meanings. This adjective describes something new that has been brought into existence, the psychological process by which novel and valuable products are fashioned, the person or group of persons involved in the process and the press or social milieu in which the transaction took place can be described as creative. Definitions of *creative* and *creativity* range from simple problem solving to the full realization and expression of all an individual's unique potentialities. So, there are at least four aspects of creativity: the creative process, the creative product, the creative person, and the creative press or situation, the Four Ps of Creativity<sup>2</sup>.

Research within the language and creativity paradigm falls into two broad categories: that which uses linguistic tools to analyse literary and creative works, and that which aims to describe the "creativity" of "everyday language".

Approaches within applied linguistics which take as their objects of study literary works of art are perhaps best exemplified by the long tradition of literary stylistics, a field of literary criticism which uses tools from linguistics to analyse literary texts. The way creativity is defined in this approach is primarily as a function of "patterns of formal features" and "linguistic idiosyncracies of particular texts"<sup>3</sup>. Stylisticians' conception of creativity is not totally limited to texts, but also takes into account the relationship between texts and their social contexts. In fact, Jakobson, the thinker whose work serves as the foundation for contemporary stylistics, defined "literariness" as "a property of texts and contexts (which) inheres in patterns of language in use as opposed to patterns of language in isolation". Nevertheless, most of the work in stylistics is primarily *product focused*, locating creativity in the formal aspects of language use.<sup>4</sup>

From the perspective of linguistic creativity, language is actually the primary human creative activity. "Linguistic creativity is not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of all people"<sup>5</sup>. Language and creativity are inherently combined; they are inseparable. Philosophers, writers, musicians, artists, scientists, politicians and celebrities all over the world have created a great number of aphorisms. They are the treasury of human wisdom. Aphorisms are portable wisdoms, the quintessential extracts of thought and feeling.

An aphorism can be a thought, a joke, a small "poem", a loose haiku, an image, a glance, a paradox, an observation – almost anything, as long as it is short and concise. It is defined as "a short, pithy statement containing a truth of general

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<sup>1</sup> Runco, M. and Pritzer, S. (1999) *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, San Diego, CA and London: Academic Press. Volume 2. P. 519.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 709.

<sup>3</sup> Rodney H. Jones "Creativity and Discourse" / *World Englishes*. Vol. 29, issue 4. P. 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Carter, R. (2004) *Language and creativity: The art of common talk*. London. New York: Routledge. P. 45.

import”<sup>1</sup>. The Webster Dictionary defines aphorism as “a short, pithy sentence; to mark off by boundaries, set aside, cast out, and define; a terse and often ingenious formulation of a truth or sentiment usually in a single sentence; adage, maxim”. An example of an aphorism is, “Men's maxims reveal their characters”<sup>2</sup>. An adage is an older aphorism that has been long used because it contains a truthful observation, such as “don't burn your bridges behind you”. The maxim presents helpful instruction. An example of a maxim is, “An aphorism is the concise statement of a moral or philosophical principle. It offers a comment on some recurrent aspect of life, clothed in terms which are meant to be permanently or universally applicable”<sup>3</sup>.

Since the beginning of human society the aphorism has been used as a vehicle to express truth, and the author's observations of life. These may be thoughts of spiritual nature, or common experience. The aphorism stays in use if it is truthful, and speaks to the reality of the human condition. Codes and conduct, the emotions of life, and human strengths and weaknesses are gathered within the insights of the aphorism. In a glance the reader will know if it is the truth and can learn something about life.

The etymological root of the word “aphorism” also comes from the Greek: “apo” means “from” and “boros” means “boundary” or “horizon”. So the original meaning of the term was “something that marks off or set apart” – i.e., a definition. The definition is among the most durable forms of the aphorism, and the English novelist Samuel Butler supplied a wonderful example of it: A definition is the enclosing of a wilderness of idea within a wall of words<sup>4</sup>.

The term “aphorism” was first used in a collection of medical sayings in the “aphorisms of Hippocrates”, which contains the saying “Art is long; life is short”. The one-line aphorism can stand by itself, but is often found in two sentences in order to enhance the saying. These can be joined with other aphorisms in a cluster form to make a larger message, such as a parable. The phrasing should be resilient and of a perceptive nature, with an agreeable rhythm of interesting words.

Modern aphorisms are concerned with the same ideas and questions that have been puzzling humanity from the beginning of time. The desires and longings of the heart, our sense of identity, the nature of good and evil, time, religion, and the aftertime are common themes found in today's aphorisms. They are used to express the need to find spiritual fulfillment and understanding of the cultural experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup> and of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There are infinite views on creativity, let's analyse only a small number of them. The following aphorisms related to the topic “Creativity” are selected and grouped contingently according to four aspects of creativity: they are about the creative process, the creative product, the creative person, and the creative press or situation, i.e. the Four Ps of Creativity.

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<sup>1</sup> Gross, J. (2003). *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P. viii.

<sup>4</sup> Geary, J. (2007). “Geary's Guide to the World's Great Aphorists”. Bloomburg: USA. P. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Gross, J. (2003). *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. vi-vi.

### *The creative process*

1. "Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will" – George Bernard Shaw
2. "Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction" – Pablo Picasso
3. "Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things" – Ray Bradbury
4. "Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while" – Steve Jobs
5. "Creativity is a drug I cannot live without" – Cecil B. DeMille
6. "You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'" – George Bernard Shaw
7. "Creativity is contagious, pass it on" – Albert Einstein
8. "If you hear a voice within you say, 'You cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced" – Vincent Van Gogh
9. "Have no fear of perfection, you'll never reach it" – Salvador Dali
10. "You can't wait for inspiration, you have to go after it with a club" – Jack London
11. "Making the simple complicated is common; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity" – Charles Mingus
12. "To study music, we must learn the rules. To create music, we must forget them" – Nadia Boulanger
13. "Creativity often consists of merely turning up what is already there. Did you know that right and left shoes were thought up only a little more than a century ago?" – Bernice Fitz-Gibbon
14. "Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way." – Edward de Bono quotes ((Francis Charles Publius)
15. "Enthusiasm is excitement with inspiration, motivation, and a pinch of creativity" – Bo Bennett
16. "Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity" – Charles Mingus
17. "Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction" – Pablo Picasso
18. "Creativity is the ability to see relationships where none exist" – Thomas Disch
19. "Creativity is a lot like looking at the world through a kaleidoscope. You look at a set of elements, the same ones everyone else sees, but then reassemble those floating bits and pieces into an enticing new possibility. Effective leaders are able to" – Rosabeth Moss Kanter
20. "Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun" – Mary Lou Cook
21. "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness" – Martin Luther King, Jr.

22. “Creativity can solve almost any problem. The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality overcomes everything” – George Lois

23. “Creativity often consists of merely turning up what is already there. Did you know that right and left shoes were thought up only a little more than a century ago?” – Bernice Fitz-Gibbon

#### *The creative product*

1. “No great thing is created suddenly” – Epictetus

2. “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower” – Steve Jobs

3. “Sometimes you gotta create what you want to be a part of” – Geri Weitzman

#### *The creative person*

1. “But, if you have nothing at all to create, then perhaps you create yourself” – Carl Gustav Jung

2. “Creative minds are rarely tidy” – unknown author

3. “Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can plan weird; that’s easy. What’s hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity” – Charles Mingus

4. “Every child is an artist, the problem is staying an artist when you grow up” – Pablo Picasso

5. “Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people” – Leo Burnett

6. “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep” – Scott Adams

7. “There is a fine line between genius and insanity. I have erased this line” – Oscar Levant

8. “Another word for creativity is courage” – George Prince

9. “The creative person is both more primitive and more cultivated, more destructive, a lot madder and a lot saner, than the average person” – Frank Barron

#### *The creative press or situation*

1. “Creativity is a natural extension of our enthusiasm” – Earl Nightingale

2. “There’s room for everybody on the planet to be creative and conscious if you are your own person. If you’re trying to be like somebody else, then there isn’t” – Tori Amos

3. “The principle goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – men who are creative, inventive and discoverers” – Jean Piaget

4. “Necessity is the mother of invention, it is true, but its father is creativity, and knowledge is the midwife” – Jonathan Schattke

5. “Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way” – Edward de Bono

6. “Necessity is the mother of invention, it is true, but its father is creativity, and knowledge is the midwife” Jonathan Schattke

7. “Creativity comes from a conflict of ideas” – Donatella Versace

*Person, process, product* “Originality is nothing but judicious imitation” – Voltaire

*Person, process, press* “Creativity – like human life itself – begins in darkness” – Julia Cameron; “Nothing encourages creativity like the chance to fall flat on one's face” – James D. Finley

*Person, process* “Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things” – Ray Bradbury

As it turned out most of the aphorisms are about the creative process, less – the creative person, then creative product and finally, the creative press or situation. There are cases when it is impossible to draw a line of demarcation between the four aspects of creativity. Such aphorisms present a combination of four of them.

As far as stylistic potential of aphorisms is concerned most of them are ironical based on *hyperbole* (e.g. Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction – Pablo Picasso); *antithesis* (e.g. “The chief enemy of creativity is ‘good’ sense” – Pablo Picasso); *metaphor* (e.g. “Creativity is discontent translated into arts” – Eric Hoffer); *oxymoron* (e.g. “Creativity is the power to connect the seemingly unconnected” – William Plomer); *parallel constructions* (e.g. “Conditions for creativity are to be puzzled; to concentrate; to accept conflict and tension; to be born everyday; to feel a sense of self” – Erich Fromm); *chiasmus* (e.g. “It is good taste, and good taste alone, that possesses the power to sterilize and is always the first handicap to any creative functioning” – Salvador Dalí) and *repetition* (e.g. “Creativity comes from trust. Trust your instincts. And never hope more than you work” – Rita Mae Brown).

So creativity as an English word originally meant a special ability of an individual to create something new, useful, and valuable which is or will be accepted by the members of a certain culture and/or civilization. After a considerable period of scientific development related to creativity, today the experts of this field mean by this term a large domain of factors and results connected with the aforementioned ability at different levels of human society. Thus, the word creativity has already lost its previous, merely linguistic meaning and has gradually acquired a position of a new scientific term which should be defined in a new and much larger way within its own scientific frame of reference.

Rethinking creativity means to challenge the established conceptual categories while providing a sound definition of this multidisciplinary phenomenon. The highest form of creativity, which may lead to a “revolution” in an area, requires introducing a new “paradigm”, Creative Linguistics, par excellence.

Look before you leap is criticism's motto. Leap before you look is creativity's<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951. P. 25.