

On the salience of becoming a creative foreign language teacher

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Abstract

The paper discusses the aspects of creativity found to be essential for a foreign language teacher. The elements of professionally anchored creativity, having been juxtaposed with the segments of a language lesson, are meant to serve as a form of illustration that the final effect of any foreign language course depends on a creativity-based organization. Thus, an attempt to contrast and subsequently analyze script-labeled teacher approaches to foreign language education is made, and different creativity-inducing forms of foreign language lesson organization are presented in the paper.

Key words: foreign languages, creativity, creativity features, creativity types

Introduction

The general notion of a foreign language (FL) lesson assumes that it is learners who are given appropriate instructions on different forms of grammar rule-dependent linguistic behavior that is subsequently related to some context-bound out-of-language situations. Such an approach actually means that /1/ an FL teacher has to decide on the scope and content of any lesson delivered to students, and /2/ the pupils taking part in such a lesson have to be given clear instructions that should at least partly cover their assumptions as to what a given FL lesson is for. The two issues should not only be paired but should also be organized in a way that ought to help FL learners recognize short (but also long) term targets each of them hopes to meet. It has to be clearly indicated at the beginning of any FL course that what primarily matters for the teachers is not the completion of a course-book, nor the realization of course-curriculum didactic implications, but the fulfillment of the expectations of any FL course participants. In other words, it is the learning-driven form of teacher-student interaction (cf. Webster, Beveridge, Reed, 2002) that appears to be the foremost suitable one in the situation specified here.

The model offered by Webster et al. (ibid) assumes educational partnership of both the teacher and the students in the way that the students are not only the executors but also the creative indicators of the whole process of FL education; not only do they know where they want to arrive at, but also why they need to get involved in the educational process neatly organized by their teacher.

Current forms of FL education

What is currently possible to observe in many language classrooms is the recognition of the language the students are to work with as a foreign one. Following this form of educational acceptance of teacher-student behavior, a number of activities stressing the recognition of the subject matter of a lesson (i.e. the language) as a foreign one is being introduced. One of them has been labeled as stress on FL correctness. Such an approach actually means that when organizing a school-based FL course, what it has to be primarily based upon is putting language correctness before language fluency and producer-led forms of teaching before user-led ones. But also such an approach actually means eliminating most (if not all) of the typically observed (and applied) communicative techniques from an FL lesson. It is believed an FL course participant has to learn many of the language contents before they can be

allowed to participate in all the naturally emerging forms of linguistic interaction freely.

This form of education results in the application of frontal teacher-led lessons where what appears to be of primary importance is the mistake-free conduct of FL learners. Despite the fact that making mistakes has been allowed by theoreticians claiming the introduction of the method particulars (on condition they do not obstruct the correctness of the message) many teachers are still able to intervene when a mistake has been discovered. What is more, the exercises stressing language correctness appear to be far more popular among teachers than the ones where fluency is at stake. On the other hand, this form of lesson conduct, when accepted by learners, pushes them into the position of teacher-dependent reproducers of the language, which, in turn, means they gradually start believing that /1/ they have to learn a lot to meet their teacher's requirements and /2/ the language they have started to learn is difficult, full of unexpected traps and hardly used phrases or expressions. Because of the fact they have started recognizing language learning as a form of production where possible mistakes matter a lot, many of them have been able to develop Krashen-advocated monitoring of over-user attitudes and thus prefer not to say anything they are not sure of rather than make a mistake and experience their teacher's criticism. It is easy to guess that this form of FL learning makes them fully teacher-dependent and pushes them away from the moment when they come to understand why they learn in the language they do. It is also easy to expect that the syndrome of language anxiety may develop in many of them as well.

This producer-led form of language deliverance results in the appearance of the creation of a mistaken idea of what an FL is for in the minds of many FL course participants. First of all, it results in the appearance of a clear definition of the usefulness of the language (and thus of the short-term and – hazily observed – long-term goals it is to be learned for); it is namely learned /1/ to please the teacher, /2/ to earn a positive grade and /3/ to gain some safe and breath-giving position in the classroom (as the teacher cannot ask one learner all the time). As one can see, there is no place for communication on the list, mostly because communication is recognized as a far-located activity after one has learned to use the language in a mistake-free way. There is also no mention of communication particulars; this is mostly because communication has never become an important asset in the whole process of FL education; quite the contrary, the course particulars have placed communication (as a natural element of interaction) as an obvious and obligatory element of the FL course after all the activities proposed by the teacher have been completed in a highly satisfactory way. In this way, there appeared an unsaid promise that placed learners' possibilities to take part in FL communication as the final outcome of their highly-involved participation in an FL course. The question of whether such a situation (taking into account the conditions in which it was delivered to the learners) is practically possible has been left unanswered.

The notion of creativity in FL education – issues and outcomes

Numerous cognitive approaches in research, interpretation, and development of creativity have survived over the years. These theories try to explain various aspects of thinking and the processes influencing creative activities as they respect the influence of a cognitive style on creative thinking (Muglova et al. 2017). Feuerstein (1990) observes that the aspects that have to be taken into account during the design of a lesson (FL lessons included) have to comprise - apart from content, modality, or efficiency – such aspects as an abstraction (required to conceive of any mental activity), or a number of clearly defined cognitive operations, so as to have any mental act effectively performed by its participants. Any of the two final (i.e. specified above) mental act components appears to perform particular functions in the

process of FL deliverance to students. The second of them, i.e. cognitive operations are to provide a link between the target and the mother tongue mental lexicons on the one hand and the external world on the other; whereas the abstraction component should help a learner focus upon the processes and constructions necessary to produce a description of the out-of-language situation in the way following its verbal/phonetic picture required by the target language. In this way, both components (apart from many others not specified here) push foreign language education towards a situation where active and creative (observed both on the side of a learner and a teacher) behavior is a must and where any other form of FL acquisition will prove largely ineffective and psychologically tiring. It is in this way that the notion of creativity in education has to be observed and analyzed; it has to be systematically introduced into various FL education activities.

Creativity is recognized as one of the basic pillars of human existence; its essential, cognitively defined component that shapes the scope of human personality. Being creative means, as Reed (2015) calls it, non-stereotypical thinking, original propositions, not conforming to standards, outlining new frameworks, and new areas of human functioning. Rosenberg (2015) believes that it is not possible to have a homogeneous and straightforward definition of creativity, mainly because of its multiform nature; it can manifest itself either in the form of unique thinking, unusual, hardly expected portions of imagination, or in the form of non-standard solutions to a particular problem: as an original and innovative way out from a particular situation, or as a suddenly appearing mental opportunity to behave in a completely new and unique way. Being creative requires specific conditions: a sense of freedom, of consent for impeccable travel in the unfettered space of human thought. Being creative means being yourself apart from yourself, in the company of unrestrained thoughts that swirl freely in contact with each other and create unparalleled, artificially configured configurations; creating a number of innovative, unexpected ways of interconnection, resulting in a series of crazy - at first sight - ideas that later grow into logical and meaningful conditions, becoming over time important segments of the functioning rituals of some groups of society. Thus, being a creative member of a local community (classroom community included) means functioning in an open society, capable of accepting and discussing a number of emerging, demanding solutions.

Because the sense of creativity is expressed in many different ways, its precise definition is not (so far) possible. However, according to Maley (2015), in any case, encountering creativity (i.e. that which is perceived as creative), it is possible to recognize, experience, and define the scope of creative action. Given the description of the functioning of the phenomenon of creativity provided by Wallas (2014), as an attempt to define the scope of its functioning both within the whole human community and in the mind of each of its members, it should be noted that the whole process of shaping of that which is to be labeled as creative, as well as its subsequent emergence, approach, product, etc., begins with the search for as much information as possible carried out in any (more or less explicit) way and closely related to the particular case one wants to solve. The human mind is immersed as if in the information gathered, allowing their unconscious flow, haphazard mutual contact, until (not very sure, because this moment may never come) the moment of appearance of concrete, acting as a sudden injection of illumination, thought that makes one strongly and convincingly believe that the right and best solution to the problem has been found. The final phase of the process consists of verifying and practically checking the proposed solution and – as a rule, after several analyzes related to various possible opinions on the subject, which one intends to present - its public presentation. In this way, opportunities, tightly hidden in the mind of one person, can

become an evident part of the culture of a given society, its basis for the functioning and organization of life.

The core of the function of creativity is the idea of creating something in another, innovative, and unheard-of way. This positioning of the notion of creativity and the fact that the human (mammal) entity is naturally predisposed to being creative – as demonstrated by Köhler (1976) in his famous chimpanzee experiment – means that attempts to measure, emphasize, and promote this feature, as well as the question of how natural human creativity can be transformed into an action promoting the functioning of the human community have long been sought for; such an approach has become one of the essential forms of human research not only because creativity has allowed for the creation of a system that evidently promotes a simpler and more organized life, but also that with its help it was (and still is) possible to effectively have such a better life organized. In his book Koestler (1989) observes that the function of creativity lies in the act of bisociation, i.e. confronting at least two apparently independent matrices and seeing the effects of such confrontation. Furthermore, the author considers it possible to carry out strictly planned empirical forms of this type of activity, believing that it will facilitate the appearance of illumination in a series of inventive activities or the discovery of a number of new ways of functioning specific parts of human activity. This approach, however, also means accepting activities aimed at learning/ discovering the forms of creative thinking; from this perspective, creativity is not only a natural human tendency but can be shaped, visualized, emphasized, trained, and used to achieve specific (earlier-planned) actions.

It is precisely in this moment that one should ask an important question about the forms and the ways that can be used in school learning so that the school becomes a forerunner of creative, well-meaning, and independent people, people not looking for salvation or counseling in others, but those certain of their capacity to cope within their lives. It seems that one of these platforms of educational activity, which is specifically designed to shape such beliefs among people, is linguistic activity (Lewandowska 2017). Apart from the fact that the globalization of human life has been brought up to unprecedented proportions, the fact that such recent inventions as television, personal computers, cell phones, and many other products of human creativity that clearly facilitate and stigmatize everyday human functioning are based on language performance, is never to be left unnoticed. This is mostly why one should consider not only whether the school is ready for this task, but also how to do it.

The situation in foreign language teaching presented in the first part of this paper, stressing large technical divisions and inconsistencies of glottodidactic activities (both within course organizers and teachers themselves, which mostly results in the appearance of passive students), means that many participants of language courses are not able to see quite a number of important and educationally valid elements that fall within the scope of language learning. Closing oneself within the traditional and partly fossilized structures of the IRF (Intonation – Response – Feedback) syndrome, where students are not actually given a chance to really understand what a foreign language is, cannot, in the long run, lead to real dissemination of knowledge of a foreign language. Becoming proficient in a foreign language is definitely not to be connected with the fast, continuous transmission of information naturally expected of the teacher and its repeated re-play by pupils (whose internal, mental contact with the context is either unspecified or weak). Similar to the situation observed in the case of mother tongue learning, students must be given a possibility to have recreated internal conditions that let them reappear genuine interest in specific context-referring phrases and terms used by users of a given language. In other words, the students must be given a chance to participate in a situation that they consider as their own. Following Feuerstein's (1990) theory of

mediation, children will genuinely participate in task-solving situations (i.e. ask a series of task-solving questions), only with those who they themselves have recognized as competent and capable of resolving the doubts that they have undergone during the (not fully successful) analysis of the situations in which they participate. In other words, the three basic issues of the theory of mediation must be met, and the solution of each of them must be primarily considered relevant by the student and not by the teacher. Answering a specific question must thus be assessed as cognitively important; it has to result in the appearance of concrete, cognitively justified mental connections, and, finally, its communication by the teacher ought to be assessed by the learner as technically involving. Only in this way will a student "open up to knowledge", i.e. recognize and internalize specific parts of the message, then test it and, in the case of positive test results, use it in practice. Internalized knowledge is the knowledge that a student can use when they consider it is important for them to support themselves with it. This means that knowledge stored artificially, in a loose connection to the external and/or internal context, is in many cases intentional knowledge, stored only in order to achieve a specific external goal; and that, very often, this knowledge, after obtaining the indicated target by the learner, is the knowledge that is voluntarily and purposefully destined for oblivion.

Such kind of targeted knowledge is very often the school knowledge, stored in order to positively pass a diagnostic or any other type of test (e.g. the matriculation exam). In many cases, students force themselves (or are forced by their teachers) to store it without seeing any other benefits other than those mentioned above. Only when they begin to participate in a series of replicating situations in which they will perceive specific individual and long-term benefits one can talk about the appearance of personally marked self-directed actions, such as those that will result in a number of other long-term benefits to the students, apart from these they do consider as obvious (e.g. a passed test).

Language-related issues have been analyzed many times and by different authors (Harmer, 2001; Harmer, 2003, Dakowska, 2005; Entlova et al., 2017; Scrivener, 2005, and others). In each case, the proposed forms of linguistic education assumed the appearance of three basic elements: the introduction (input), the self-made explanation of the known material segment (intake), and the implemented training (output). In this way, Harmer (2003) believes that it is necessary to introduce a closely related glottodidactic triad, acronymized as ESA by the author, and defined there as methodologically important; it entails the student's interest in the topic (E – engage) - organizing the process of analyzing and synthesizing specific thematic information (S – study) - carrying out the linguistic activation process within the unit cognitive (A – activate). According to the author's assumptions, such activities can be freely altered and exchanged so that learners have the widest spectrum of topic-specific information (that should come closest to their cognitive response system), that will enable them to initiate and implement both the entire implementation system and the active use of specific knowledge segments of both declarative and procedural type. Gondova (2012), in turn, while carefully analyzing both the order and the effectiveness of the appearance of particular lesson-included segments, indicates the five stages she recognizes as obligatorily present in the foreign language lesson: /1/ exposing the student to specific structures of the second language; /2/ making the student observe the functioning of the discussed structures; /3/ creating a situation in which learner is able to understand context-dependent language structure/form; /4/ organize language training of given structure/form under the strict supervision of the teacher; and, finally, /5/ the learner's departure to 'wider waters', i.e. placing them in an environment of more authentic use of the target language's structures/forms.

In both cases, it is apparent that the student is expected to work on a particular learning FL structure or form, but simultaneously, it is the teacher who is

made responsible for all that the learner will do during such organized language classes. However, none of the authors presented above take seriously the matter of the student's internal attitude to language activities, i.e. a whole range of effective shades that make the student more or less motivated to work on the language; students are simply expected to attend classes, study the language, honestly and meticulously practice the use of specific language structures/phrases, whether or not they are interested in this type of behavior.

This type of procedure does not take into account the fact that it is the student who is ultimately to become the beneficiary of the entire language course. As the use of something must be closely related to understanding the meaning of the thing, the student should first understand the appropriateness of using a given language structure to describe a particular situational context; what seems important here – is that the desire for that understanding should come from the student. One cannot assume in advance that students will always admit to a teacher; the students will recognize their power and competence, but they will always stick to their own will and externally (not internally) growing conviction that the description of a particular out-of-language reality should only be made with the knowledge of the linguistic structure or form they have just come across. When students do not acquire such an inner conviction, it could be assumed that they will prefer the application of those terms that are closer to them (what, in many cases, will result in the appearance of a negative transfer). A situation like this may even occur when the student was honestly training the use of particular structures or phrases of the language to describe the situation related to a given out-of-language episode, i.e. the reality created by the topic of the lesson.

The explanations for the appearance of this type of situation may be found in many of the above-mentioned moments of educational contact with a language learner; it seems, however, that the most likely explanation for the situation described above is the mere fact of misunderstanding the authentic need to use a concrete description of reality by the student. While remembering that the use of language is always associated with a specific situational context, the participant of the communication contact must want to use a specific language structure or phrase to describe the particular reality in which the participant is currently taking part (see also Birova et al.). The level of internalization of a given (selected by the communication participant) structure/phrase must be so deep that they know that in a given situation, the correct description of a given out-of-language reality does take place. So if despite intense training, concrete expressions did not affect the phase of internalization (and therefore were not permanently attached to deep memory in a way that could be used in any significant situation), they would most likely not be used by the student even if the external context would allow for such an option.

In this context, a number of features commonly observed in the school and extra-curricular education system need to be considered, first and foremost, those characteristics that positively describe the language lesson. One of the basic features of foreign language learning seems to be the correct application of issues of language course-related creativity, as well as – closely connected with it – the notion of the attractiveness of which the selected course-book topic problem is being presented as.

As it has already been noticed, creativity is an important part of the cognitive process, allowing students not only to closely associate with a specific, re-worked subject but also to experiment and/or test known issues. In this light, creative activities used during classes mean quite a distinct change of classroom voices; in addition to allowing the learner to accept/reject a number of issues related to the teacher (such as the topical contents of their work, for example), the more active (and critical) position of the learner during the course, the forms used to fix the material and the use of the provided knowledge, the learner also has the right to decide on

matters related to the speed, quality, and quantity of the material being processed. Based on the basic issues arising from the theory of mediation, the learner decides whether the classes are to be more or less intensive, whether the duration of any activities included in the classes is to be strictly defined, or whether the topic fixing exercises proposed by the teacher should be given a more (or less) regular, i.e. routine-following, form. Finally, the decision whether the teacher's suggested ways of working on the language are those with which the learners can make important progress during their work on the language is also to belong to the learner. An approach like this indicates a clear desire to create an autonomous attitude in the learners, so as to place them in a situation in which it is the learner themselves who is to take on the obligation to work on the language, and the commitment that they will promise to do so, mainly because they want to. These activities form the basis of the classical concept of motivation and therefore promote the situation in which, apart from the learner's consent to work in order to realize their dreams, in effect, there are also a number of affective factors which constitute a specific "fuel" for the learner's long-term commitment to continue various forms of specified educational activity. Any poorly motivated (or not motivated at all) learner, who is constantly reminded what to do to make their teacher relatively happy, is motivated only by specific actions that mostly do not involve learning a foreign language for themselves because such a feeling has been effectively replaced by the concept of learning a foreign language in order to satisfy the teacher (and often - to save their own skin). This form of learning the language is certainly used to accumulate specific knowledge, only to let it disappear after satisfying a particular purpose. Therefore, the proposed change should foster liberation in the learner of greater responsibility for their future, to create in them a sense of lifelong language education and the permanence of the indestructibility of learning. It is to be remembered that well-planned creative activities certainly offer learners such opportunities.

From a technical point of view, any language lesson, and one which ultimately aims to regain learner autonomy, should simultaneously meet two assumptions; in addition to settling its high creative potential, it should also have a high degree of thematic attractiveness. In other words, it should contain – at the same time – two factors: fun and creativity. The fun factor defines the level of attractiveness of a particular language lesson; the creativity one describes the potential of creativity emerged mainly due to the lesson-connected subject matter during class activities. Both factors simultaneously depend on each other, although their objectives during the lesson are different. The fun factor is the factor influencing mainly the external affective situation of the learner, and its task is to create a cover of attractiveness around all the activities that are being carried out in the classroom. The creativity factor, in turn, is a totally-educative factor, promoting the learner's self-reliance (or being recognized by the learner as such) in gaining knowledge in the lesson-defined area. In this way, both factors overlap, and the lack (or insufficient quantity) of one of them strongly hinders the functioning of the second factor.

The fun factor refers to the learner's affective sphere; it is, therefore, a factor that is entirely responsible for the learner's internal motivation for work and a willingness to engage personally in all activities related to the resolution of specific out-of-language created problems by means of known (internalized) foreign structures/expressions, despite existing awareness of the potential loss of a learner's face. The well-formed attractiveness of a language lesson that encourages learners to try their own linguistic activity and search in their deep memory for the appropriate expressions necessary to become effective as far as the description of a particular reality is concerned should constitute significant facilitation in terms of its always-performing linguistic functions. It is to be assumed that it is from this perspective i.e. the perspective of the objectively estimated level of topic attractiveness that Krashen's

key hypothesis discussing the position and role of the affective filter in the acquisition of the target language is to be observed. Here too, one can notice close congruence with the basic postulates of Feuerstein's theory of mediation, especially with the view that one of the basic options on which the whole system of voluntary learning is based is the option of the language learner's acceptance of the techniques and cognitive methods proposed to the learner by the teacher. The attractiveness of language classes, appropriately shaped and introduced in the contents of the lesson, becomes important for the learner as they begin to understand both the meaning of the particular lesson-included task, as well as the overall meaning of the pro-educational long-term activity proposed by the teacher. This approach will apply not only to children but also to younger students (although there is certainly a lot of room for the deliverance of effective pro-educational activities found in it), and to every participant of language classes regardless of age.

The issue of attractive language learning organization seems to be quite closely related to the issue of creativity. Creativity, as such, generally involves individual human activity, which means that at the moment when they have been personally appointed to carry out a particular activity, it becomes a task-related point of reference for them – that is, the activity that is to be thought out, analyzed, programmed – and finally performed. In order to avoid learner's individual exposure, i.e. a situation that is a significant stressor for many people, it is important to introduce attractive ways of organizing the resolution of tasks; this is where group task activities, task-based teaching, and/or various forms of contact with the target language, based on (mostly solved with other participants in a given group) quizzes, tests or other forms of group-based learning activities aimed primarily at creating a common answer to the task, based on a logical constructional basis (e.g. a project targeted to design a supermarket flyer, information on air connections, possible railway travels to some other city or country, etc.) should be introduced. In addition to meaningful language immersion activities learners, while remaining under the education-potent influence of creativity factor, must perform a number of other activities, such as the required language for the – specified above – folder or flyer, the semantic validity of the terms used, the search for relevant phrases and linguistic structures and such like. In this way, the learners themselves decide to fit into the rhythm and requirements of the task that is to be performed in order to finally show others the effects of their activity and get their opinions on what they have accomplished.

In his essay on the principles and rules of school-based creativity Maley (2015) explicitly remarks that one of the basic tasks of a language lesson is to provide learners with the feeling that their efforts will be appropriately appreciated by the other participants of the course, e.g. by publishing the final effects of their class activity on the class website, or in the wall newspaper. This kind of behavior not only makes it very clear to the students that the end goals of a particular task have been met, but also – being socially attractive – suggests that they participated in an exchange of views on the subject that – as it seems – is currently most relevant to them.

Tomlinson (2014), while pointing to the fact that the vast majority of books intended for foreign language learning are unfortunately not appropriately inclined towards creative activities (in this way being, in principle, adapted to strictly diagnostic activities introduced during a language lesson), observes that most of them can be changed to foster creative activity in the classroom. In this way, according to the main postulate found in this article, teachers promoting the creative functioning of their learners are the people who remember that this type of activity must remain an open-based one so as to encourage the learners to take risks and express their own opinions (each of which having the same didactic relevance in the moment of its

production); in this way, a creative task must promote authentic communication, based on the desire to present a learner's own original opinions on a particular topic; additionally, it must also be able to help learners personally discover the meaning of statements and descriptions of a particular reality.

Conclusion

It is clearly indicated by many authors promoting foreign language learning based on creative activities and – in this way – clearly shaping the contours of the picture belonging to the autonomous learner that the beginning of the sequence that creates the foreign language creative class still remains in the hands of a language teacher. It is mainly up to them whether a learner, initially unaware of the obvious and clearly seen differences between the lessons devoted to FL learning and the ones spent on the education of other subjects, can later understand that language learning does not depend on their persistence in senseless cramming of the structures and phrases in question, but on the concrete, authentic use of the known terms, even at the price of numerous errors in their use. This is – as it seems – the only way to let the learner become infallible in numerous activities that aim to describe a particular reality in words. The authors make an attempt to help language teachers adjust the vast majority of the currently functioning course-books into ones that can stimulate the creative activities of their users, promoting their self-directed, cognitive, and affective activities.

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