

## **Creativity in English Writing Instruction: Tracing the Discursive History of the Key Word**

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Since the 1970s the field of English writing instruction has given a broad welcome to the term *creative/creativity*, which has been used without any strict definition and has taken on the features of a cant word. Presented in this paper is an attempt to provide a comprehensive description and explanation of various uses of the term found in this specific context.

A historical review of *ELT Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly* and *The English Teachers' Magazine* reveals that the introduction of the term *creative/creativity* into pedagogical discourse had a close connection with the development of post-behaviouristic linguistics and humanistic education from the 1970s on. Three types of creativity are identified: generative linguistic creativity, influenced by the work of Chomsky; humanistic creativity, originating in humanistic psychology; and hybrid creativity, a mixture of the two. Since the 1990s there have been some critical views; the future of the term is to be carefully observed.

英作文指導を巡る議論においては「創造性」という概念がしばしば持ち出されてきたものの、従来その定義が明確な形で提示されたことはない。この用語の歴史的変遷とそれにかかわる理念的要因を明らかにすることが本論の目的である。

イギリス・アメリカ・日本の各国における代表的な英語教育関連雑誌をその創刊号から通読すると、「創造的」「創造性」という用語が英語教育の言説に導入されてきた背景には、1970年代以降の脱行動主義的言語学と人間主義的教育の発展があったことがわかる。こと英作文指導の分野に限って言えば、そこに見られる創造性の概念は三つに分類することができる。第一にチョムスキーの研究に影響を受けた生成言語学型創造性、第二に人間性心理学に端を発する人間主義型創造性、そして第三にその二つの概念が混合した混成型創造性である。1990年代以降はこれらの概念に対する批判的な議論も登場しており、今後も動向を注視していく必要がある。

### **1 Introduction**

In the beginning when somebody first used a certain term, it had an identifiable sense. Then somebody said, 'Let it be a catchword'; and there was chaos.

Things are not so simple, but there still seems to be some truth captured by this

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parody: as a short review of the history tells, when the trend of a field is driven by a term with an attractive ring, it is often overused in an uncritical manner and thus brings about a confusion. *Creativity* might, unfortunately, be included as an example of such terms.

As is widely known, and is also guaranteed by *OED*, *creation* originally appeared in the Western world as a religious term directly related to the divinity; later the term was gradually connected to a gifted, inspired human genius, thus taking on an artistic sense, which led to the coinage of *creativity* at the end of the nineteenth century (Williams, 1976, pp. 82-84). Since these classic periods *creativity* has now taken its place in various different fields such as business, politics, education and sports, in each of which, it must be noted, the term has already made a different departure from its original meaning.

This is the case even inside the specific field of English language teaching/learning; as Kramersch rightly points out, foreign language education has been involved in a tangle of ‘divergent interests and spheres of influence’ and, ‘because each discourse domain has its own metaphors, its own categorisations, its own way of relating the parts to the whole, the broadened intellectual agenda now available to teachers and applied linguists has made it more difficult to communicate across historically and socially created *discourses*’ (Kramersch, 1995, p. 46; my emphasis). Thus various instances of the term *creative/creativity*, although the same in appearance, may be loaded with various discourse-specific views and values, each of which could not always be treated by the same standard.

This is the challenge faced by the present paper, which attempts to provide a comprehensive description and explanation of different uses of *creative/creativity* found in the particular context of English writing instruction.

## 2 Research methods

This paper attempts a comparative analysis of three periodicals each chosen from the field in Britain, America and Japan: *ELT Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly* and *The English Teachers’ Magazine*.

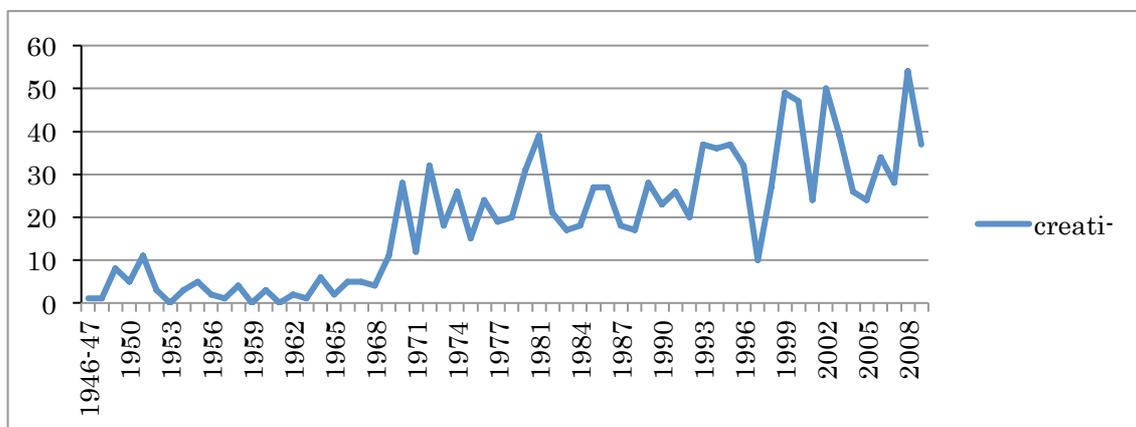


Figure 1: The number of terms starting with *creati-* in each volume of *ELT Journal*.

Each of these long-lived, influential journals is representative of the discursive history of English language teaching/learning in each country, and in this sense they can serve as chronological axes in the research; through a parallel analysis of these three selected journals, the discursive trend of each country in a specific period of time can be viewed as a constituent part of a world-wide organic network, which makes possible a precise description of the dynamism of discourse.

Although analysis of the sample collection basically depends on the simple labour of intent reading, it is partially complemented by using electronic texts; fortunately almost all issues of *ELT Journal* are available in computer-readable form,<sup>1</sup> and as far as this specific journal is concerned my intuitive judgements about frequency or distribution can have support from the quantitative data obtained by the more accurate work of a computer (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

### 3 *Creativity* in discourse

#### 3.1 Britain, America and Japan, 1960s: before *creativity*

The British and American literature before the sixties manifests a conspicuous absence of arguments about writing instruction (as shown in Figure 1), which implies that writing had not been treated as a topic worthy of serious discussion by those involved in English language teaching. Dominant approaches to language teaching at that time had a primary focus on speech and thus gave writing only a secondary position; it was either neglected as the last of the four skills or deferred as a culmination of the other language skills (Paulston, 1972; Zamel, 1976).

This apparent lack of consideration, nevertheless, should not necessarily be interpreted as a total lack of orientation towards teaching writing in the English language. For instance, Lott (1964) explicitly shows that there were at least two accepted types of writing exercise: on the elementary side were writing exercises with sentence-level structural control, which was thus called ‘controlled composition’; on the other, more advanced side were those aiming at writing an English text without any grammatical restriction, which was thus called ‘free composition’.<sup>3</sup>

Here is an obvious problem: the mastery of English writing may start from a good

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<sup>1</sup> Except those of Volume 34 published in 1979 and 1980.

<sup>2</sup> A possible weakness must be mentioned in advance: *ELT Journal* and *The English Teachers’ Magazine* started their history at times relatively close to each other (in 1946 for the former and in 1952 for the latter), whereas the first issue of *TESOL Quarterly* came out considerably later (in 1967), which means that the comparison between these three periodicals in a strict sense can only be possible with the issues published after 1967. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily a fatal defect as far as *creativity* (and its Japanese counterpart, *sōzōsei*) is concerned: a review of the periodicals, supported by electronically generated data about *ELT Journal*, shows that it is not until the 1970s that *creativity* visibly emerged as a catchword in the discourse, often with specific focus on writing.

<sup>3</sup> A similar situation seems to have been found also in America, as Carr describes it by the contrast between ‘sentence-building exercises’ and ‘composition exercises’ (Carr, 1967, p. 30).

understanding of sentential grammar and may in the end culminate in the ability to write one's ideas and thoughts freely, but there is much in between to be learned or overcome. However, what actually prevailed in the field was a kind of optimism: on the one hand, the controlled composition usually consisted of 'a set of twenty or more sentences, related in structure but unconnected in theme' (Spencer, 1965, p. 156), from which it would have been impossible to expect any development of suprasentential awareness; on the other hand, there seems to have been no systematic instruction for the free composition, the usual procedure of which was simply 'throwing him [i.e. the learner] in at the deep and hoping he will swim' (Moody, 1965, p. 148).

Thus, when several new methods for English writing instruction started to be proposed in the 1960s, the proponents were pioneers who for the first time attempted to attract attention to English writing as a possible object of systematic instruction. In the high era of behaviouristic, structural approaches to language teaching, many of them searched for possible ways to apply the concept of habituation to producing extended written texts of English. For all the problems concerning what they termed their methods (most often called 'guided composition'), most of the suggested approaches similarly aimed at freeing learners from sentence-level restrictions and raising an awareness of rhetorical or organisational patterns.

Turning to the situation of Japan around the same period, it looks predictably different from the above-mentioned circumstances of Britain and America. In most classrooms in Japan both teachers and learners usually shared an assumption that English classes were taught using the common medium of their first language, Japanese. This led to a conclusion that both their comprehension and production of the English language could most conveniently be achieved by translative operations: as such *eibun wayaku* (English-Japanese translation) for reading and *wabun eiyaku* (Japanese-English translation) for writing constituted the two most important skills to be mastered by learners.

However, remarkable is an unexpected similarity: despite apparent methodological differences, the sixties' critics in Britain, America and Japan were all seeing at least one common weakness in their previous approaches to English writing. As Nakamura (1963) indicates, typical *wabun eiyaku* exercises were concerned exclusively with sentential grammar and could in this sense be categorised as an advanced kind of controlled composition, whose 'control' was given not directly through certain grammatical forms to be imitated, but indirectly through certain Japanese sentences to be translated. This is further evidenced by the fact that the Japanese critics often contrasted *wabun eiyaku* with *jiyū eisakubun* (free English composition), which many of them regarded as an ultimate goal to be achieved by Japanese learners of the English language (Ozawa, 1961; Hasegawa, 1965). This thirst for a release from restrictions seems to have played a role in directing the later discursive trends in which the term *creative/creativity* came to prominence.

### **3.2 Britain, America and Japan, 1970s: the rise of *creativity* (1)**

The new approaches in the sixties were intended not to replace the old ones, but rather to provide some steps forward following the accepted preliminary stage of controlled

composition; the shift was happening within the same paradigm, whose basis lay in structuralism and behaviourism and whose primary issue was how to form good habits in sentential grammar (i.e. controlled composition) and then extend this to the advanced stage of, for example, paragraph writing (i.e. guided composition).

In contrast, what happened in the seventies could be seen as a more profound shift between different paradigms, accomplished by a rejection of the older one: in Britain, America and Japan alike, the previous structural concerns were gradually replaced by those relating to other factors involved in language learning, and this change of trends started to be indicated in the discourse by an increase of new terms which were sometimes put in dichotomous opposition to old ones or those coined to refer to older approaches. Along with these discursive movements the term *creative/creativity* also showed a notable change of position: the previously minor word in the discourse was now welcomed into the mainstream (see Figure 1 again), in which it was given some specific nuances by those leading the paradigm shift. A close reading of the articles at that time shows that there seem to have been two main undercurrents which may have promoted the use of the term *creative/creativity* as a building block of arguments: one of them originated in theoretical linguistics, while the other was concerned with general trends in education.

What constituted the paradigm shift in the seventies' pedagogy was the movement away from teacher-centred towards learner-centred education, which laid the greatest emphasis on the learner and thus valued learners' own involvement in and contribution to learning. There may be something misleading about this dichotomy: the issue was not to choose between the teacher and the learner, but rather to reconsider every aspect involved in the enterprise of education for the benefit of developing learners' human capacity (Jakobovits, 1973); thus the movement may better be generalised under the heading of human-centred, or humanistic, education.

In fact this upsurge of humanism in the seventies brought a visible change in the discourse more specifically relating to the field of English language teaching/learning, which started to witness a remarkable increase of arguments which concerned themselves with newly introduced issues including 'learners' autonomy' (Yoshida, 1972), 'individualised teaching/learning' (Clarke, 1973) and 'motivation for learning' (Nation, 1974). It is among these arguments that the term *creative/creativity* emerged with an interesting role.

This does not mean the term was pushed to the forefront of the discourse; in many cases it was juxtaposed with other different key words with more discursive prominence. The following extract is an example in which the term *creativity* is used to support the main argument about 'autonomy' and 'autonomous learning':

[C]reativity could be a key factor in opening up the possibility of autonomous learning of the English language. . . . Previous approaches to English language teaching were based on structural linguistics and aimed at habit-formation of sentence patterns. . . . Learning on this theoretical basis inevitably involves only passive and repetitive activities, which are unlikely to make any contribution towards learners' autonomy. (Yoshida, 1972, p. 26; my translation)

On the one hand this parasitic proximity to other terms may imply that *creative/creativity* was widely favoured in humanistic/learner-centred language teaching; on the other hand its secondary position in the discourse seems to suggest that the term was used with no significant meaning. In fact the proponents did not usually present any explicit definition of the term; it vaguely referred to something inside each human learner, which could be the biggest potential resource for learning and should thus be drawn out as much as possible from him/her. For the purpose of differentiation this type of creativity will hereafter be called *humanistic creativity*.

### 3.3 Britain, America and Japan, 1970s: the rise of *creativity* (2)

The nucleus of humanistic creativity lies in its message that previous approaches to English language teaching unduly neglected and suppressed learners' inner resources which could be a crucial factor in successful learning. In addition to this, the discourse in the seventies saw the rise of another use of *creativity* which had a different origin and constituted a part of the criticism of behaviouristic approaches voiced from a different viewpoint. Its conceptual basis was strongly influenced by emerging post-behaviouristic theories of second language acquisition (or SLA), which were further rooted in a thesis originally advanced by Noam Chomsky; this type of creativity will hereafter be called *generative linguistic creativity*.

Chomsky's conception of creativity was that usual speakers of a language are 'able to understand an indefinite number of expressions that are new to [their] experience, that bear no simple physical resemblance and are in no simple way analogous to the expressions that constitute [their] linguistic experience', and also that they are 'able, with greater or less facility, to produce such expressions on an appropriate occasion, despite their novelty and independently of detectable stimulus configurations, and to be understood by others who share this still mysterious ability' (Chomsky, 1972, p. 100).<sup>4</sup> Chomsky himself has denied the applicability of his theory to pedagogical issues; nevertheless, his ideas and concepts, including 'creativity', were also introduced to and favoured in the discursive field of SLA and foreign language teaching, in which they had a strong influence on newly proposed theories and methods (e.g. Dulay & Burt, 1974; Krashen, 1977). The following passage illustrates how generative linguistic creativity was used to justify the arguments against such behaviouristic elements as 'mimicry-memorisation' and 'mechanical exercises':

[T]he aim of language teaching is to enable a learner to invent utterances as he wants them. . . . Teachers tend to overlook the creative aspect of language learning because the language has to be given entirely to learners. But it is the use of what they are given that matters. . . . There can be little interest in mimicry-memorisation or mechanical exercises with uncontextualised sentences. (Pattison, 1976, p. 291)

Although both humanistic creativity and generative linguistic creativity came from

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<sup>4</sup> It was not until the sixties that Chomsky began to make a conscious use of the term *creative/creativity* as the one describing a fundamental feature of human languages (Chomsky, 1964, 1965, 1972).

an attention to human factors neglected by behaviouristic approaches to language teaching/learning, their criticisms of behaviourism were different from each other: humanistic creativity pointed out that behaviourism made an excessive generalisation by ignoring affective variety among human beings, while generative linguistic creativity argued that it gave a wrong explanation by regarding human language behaviours in the same light as those of the simple stimulus-response type.

### 3.4 Britain, America and Japan, 1970s-1980s: *creativity* de/stabilised (1)

Probably the difference between humanistic creativity and generative linguistic creativity could only become visible with the benefit of hindsight; the fact seems to be that many of those who used *creative/creativity* had little interest in drawing a clear distinction. In the seventies' discourse it was not unusual to find examples of the term which appeared to waver between the two senses, as illustrated in the following:

[The context-centered approach] will make a great contribution towards improving learners' communicative competence: they are put in a situation which inevitably invites them to go beyond fixed sentence patterns and vocabulary and naturally promotes creative expressions . . . The approach will enhance learners' motivation and thus lead to organic development of communicative competence. (Koike, 1976, p. 20; my translation)

When Koike mentions 'creative expressions' in this extract, they can on the one hand be interpreted as the product of learners' innate ability to generate an infinite number of novel sentences (i.e. generative linguistic creativity), to the extent that they are contrasted with 'fixed sentence patterns'; on the other hand, Koike's argument also relates such 'creative expressions' to 'learners' motivation', thus implying a connection between activating learners' cognitive faculty and appealing to their affective factors (i.e. humanistic creativity). Likewise the following argument by Zamel about 'the expressive and creative process of writing' has similar ambiguity:

The act of composition should become the result of a genuine need to express one's personal feeling, experience or reaction . . . While this instruction might still entail some indirect teaching concerning particular structural problems . . . the primary emphasis should be upon the expressive and creative process of writing. (Zamel, 1976, p. 74)

She claims that writing that is beyond an exclusive focus on 'structural problems' (that is, writing with generative linguistic creativity) should result from the purpose of 'communicating genuine thoughts and experiences' (that is, communicating with humanistic creativity). Thus these examples make it possible to see through to the assumption underlying this hybridised use of *creative/creativity*: (generative linguistic creativity in a second language was considered to be best developed by (humanistically) creative approaches. For the present purpose this type of creativity will hereafter be called *hybrid creativity*.

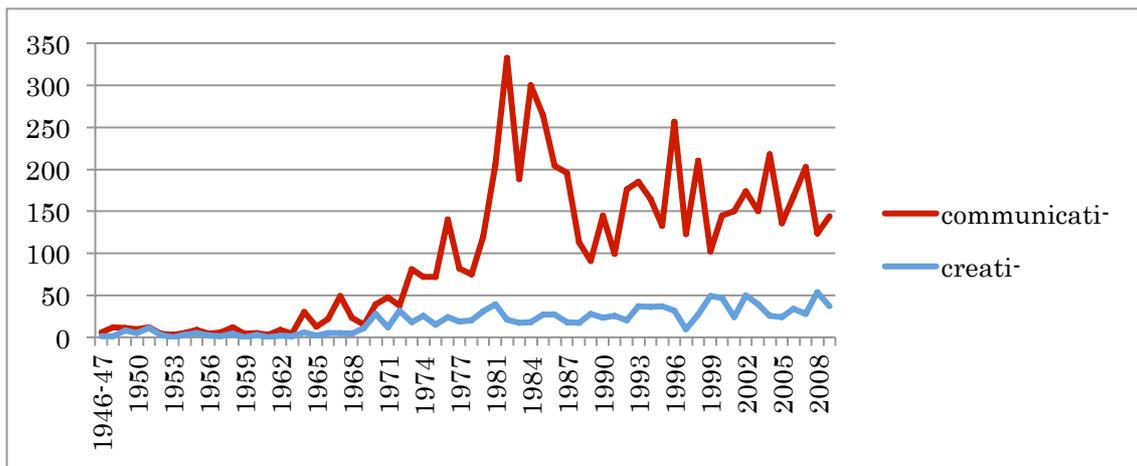


Figure 2: The number of terms starting with *creati-* and *communicati-* in each volume of ELT Journal.

It must be added here that this was not a phenomenon limited to the term *creative/creativity*. From the mid-seventies onwards the whole field of English language teaching/learning was strongly influenced by humanistic education and post-behaviouristic linguistics, both of which, as mentioned above, shared a common ground of anti-behaviourism; around this pivot they were gradually merged together and started to exert a combined effect on the field. Significantly, as could be seen in Koike's argument above, the effect of this conceptual mingling even extended to the then emerging pedagogical concept which is now widely known: i.e. communication. Stemming from the notion of 'communicative competence' put forward by the sociolinguist Dell Hymes as a critical response to Chomsky's 'linguistic competence' (Hymes, 1971), the concept of communicative language teaching was originally characterised by its emphasis on social aspects of language and had little to do with humanism as such. Nevertheless, considering the fundamental nature of human communication, it may have seemed unreasonable to ignore the affective involvement of its human participants. In fact the early 1980s could feasibly be characterised as a period in which new approaches based on this mixed concept burgeoned (e.g. Baddock, 1981; Taylor, 1983; Sano, Takahashi, & Yoneyama, 1984).

In such a context hybrid creativity could easily find its place: *communication* and *creativity* were among the children brought up by the same conceptual parents, with the only difference that the former was the much better-beloved child than the latter (Figure 2 shows a sharper increase of the former in discourse). Thus the term *creative/creativity* came to bear a hierarchical relationship to *communication* and play a role as a constituent part of the arguments for communicative language teaching.

### 3.5 America and Japan, 1970s-1980s: *creativity* de/stabilised (2)

Among all these trends prevailing in the whole field of English language teaching/learning, there started to emerge a clear sign of change in the discourse specifically concerning English writing instruction. The key word characterising this movement was *process*, which was often in connection with *creative*. One of the

representative figures leading the movement was Vivian Zamel, the writer of the second extract discussed in the last section, whose arguments, first advanced in the mid-seventies' American discourse, made a significant contribution to the later development of the 'process approach'.

The theory of the process approach was based on a dichotomy between 'writing process' and 'written product', the latter of which had been given a high value in the previous structuralistic (or product) approach. As its antithesis the proponents of the process approach shed light on the act of writing, for which they used the term *creative*. Spack characterises it as a 'creative process for exploring and communicating meaning' (Spack, 1984, p. 651). Raimes further argues that 'language and the ideas expressed in that language emerged out of the student writers' own creativity, not out of textbook instruction or teacher-supplied input' (Raimes, 1985, p. 248). Again this characterisation of writing was based on the hybridisation, on the one hand, of the assumption of generative linguistic creativity as opposed to mechanical manipulation of memorised knowledge and, on the other hand, of the emphasis on humanistic creativity as the motivation driving the process of composition.

Notably *creativity* was again not the most foregrounded term in the discourse. Nevertheless, because of its secondary position, hybrid creativity had the freedom of skipping around in the eighties' discourse; one of the ironic results was that the term *creative/creativity* could stay in a steady position of being 'everybody's friend' in the discursive field, as long as it was dominated by the mixed principle of humanistic education and post-behaviouristic linguistics.

The story is similar in the case of Japan, where the same major trends had shown a discursive convergence; as a part of this movement the term *creativity* was given a hybrid sense and played a secondary role. Slightly different from America is the fact that the Japanese *creativity* had a rather stronger tint of humanism presumably under the direct influence of its discursively more conspicuous partner, *expression* (*hyōgen*) or *self-expression* (*jiko hyōgen*), which was used to characterise the most significant pedagogic element urgently needed for making a corrective change to English writing instruction (e.g. Fujikake, 1974; Hatori, 1977)

In the discourse neither *creativity* nor *self-expression* was a term defined with academic strictness; both reflected the orientation away from the traditional *wabun eiyaku* towards the long-awaited reformation of English writing instruction, with the slight lexical difference that the former (which was often used in its noun or adjective form) referred to the internal human factor to be developed and the latter (which was often used in its verb form) to the external human act to be promoted. Maybe this was no small difference, considering the overwhelming popularity of the latter; it can be seen as evidence that the reformers placed a strong emphasis not on merely possessing the ability (i.e. creativity) but on using it (i.e. expression).

### 3.6 Britain, America and Japan, 1990s-: critical views

In the case of Japan, only recently in the twenty-first century have a few critical views begun to be posed about the concept of self-expression. What is shared by the critics is an awareness of the danger in sticking to one specific principle. Kanatani points out

that the self-expressive approach cares more about having learners write ‘about the learners themselves’ and less about having them acquire the knowledge and skill they need in the first place to express anything (Kanatani, 2002, p. 8).<sup>5</sup> Although there has not been any sign that definitely tells the future, it is at least true that the current trends of the discourse are getting less favourable than before to the use of *creativity* in its hybrid self-expressive sense.

In the British and American discourse, on the other hand, it was earlier in the 1990s that there started to appear some movements towards reconsidering the seventies’ and eighties’ pedagogical principles, in which *creativity*, among other concepts, became a target of criticism. The critics did not discuss the same kind of *creativity*. For example, Cook is concerned with the generative linguistic creativity which had been dominant in the whole field of applied linguistics and had contributed to the exclusion of such aspects as ‘repetition of form, learning by heart, and imitation’ from the field of language teaching/learning, associating them with ‘the misguided behaviourist past’. (Cook, 1994, pp. 135-136) Gadd considers *creativity* to be an element reflecting humanistic aspects of process writing and further argues (as the title of his paper suggests) that too much emphasis on humanistic aspects has the danger of the students remaining ‘trapped within the prison of the self’ (Gadd, 1998, p. 232).<sup>6</sup>

The target of these criticisms is not *creativity* in itself; in the process of reviewing previous approaches to language teaching/learning, each of the critics happened to notice in a slightly different fashion that some kind of *creativity* was contained as a building block. These cases of indirect problematisation of the same term from different viewpoints provide proof of the above-mentioned conceptual hybridity and instability concerning the seventies’ and eighties’ *creativity*. Furthermore, the commentative attitudes seen in those criticisms seem to show that *creativity* has now already become an object to be observed at a distance; the day of hybrid creativity appears to have passed, although nobody could deny the possibility of its coming back to the discursive field in the near future.

#### 4 Concluding remarks

Just as it is difficult to predict the future of the above-mentioned types of *creativity*, it is no easier to negate the likelihood that there will appear types other than generative linguistic, humanistic and hybrid ones. Thus for the present no one could declare the end of genesis. The only thing to be surely stated for now is that this paper has only described the first 40-year history of the term in the discourse of English writing instruction, and its future is to be carefully observed through further research.

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<sup>5</sup> Ōi also suggests that ‘the narrow limits of “self-expression”’ may sometimes prevent the learners’ development in writing from an objective standpoint (Ōi, 2005, p. 31). For other criticisms see Shizuka (2000) and Oguri (2005).

<sup>6</sup> For a similar argument see Tin (2013).

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