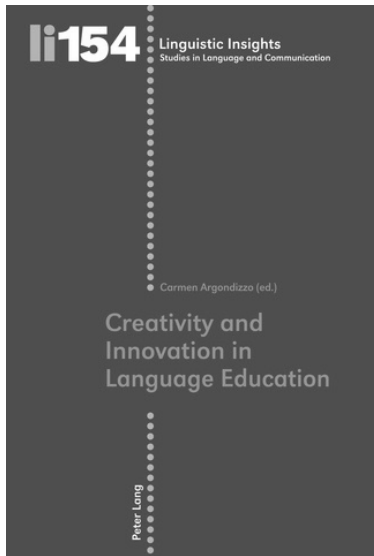




Creativity and Innovation in Language Education

Carmen Argondizzo (Ed.)

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As Carmen Argondizzo highlights in the Introduction, this volume stems from the 1st *Conference on Creativity and Innovation in Language Studies* that was held in 2009, the European year of Creativity and Innovation, at the University of Calabria. After the prefaces by Ronald Carter, Diane Larsen Freeman and Leonard Orban, the volume is divided into four main sections, each dealing with a specific area connected to creativity and innovation in language use, culture, language learning and teaching, business settings and technology. The chapters touch upon a broad range of topics and approaches, from more traditional media such as advertising and news, to new technologies, research in neuroscience, corpora, and CLIL. Innovative views are applied to several languages, setting forward creative solutions for language teaching and learning in today's increasing complex multilingual, multicultural and multimodal environments.

Section 1 - *Creativity, cultures and language use* – opens with Régine Laugier's "Languages, Cultures and the Discourse of Advertising", where several exemplifications in English, also intermingling with other languages, are discussed to show how linguistic changes and multimodality – that have become integral part of our 'linguistic landscapes' - are skillfully used in advertising to persuasive effects. The chapter concludes with some suggestions of how authentic samples from the language of advertising can be positively exploited in language teaching and learning in their cultural, oral and pragmatic characteristics.

In "Evaluating creativity and innovation in second language teachers' discourse" Marie J. Myers examines a teacher preparation course for French as a second language in Canada, specifically focusing on the advantages of learning from peers within a group-based, reflexive approach as to handling cultural (as well as individual) diversity in today's multilingual and multicultural composition of classes. After defining the specific cultural context and the theoretical background, mainly based on situated cognition and on the social action approach, peer interactions from the group simulations for oral and written message exchanges are analyzed according to the three key elements of innovation, community and feelings. Findings show an increased awareness on the trainee teachers' part of the complex factors involved in L2 classroom communication, and of how creative and collaborative reflective work can help teachers to "gain an understanding of how different cultures equip them with ways to make meaning" (p. 61)

In their contribution "Standard and Identity: two case studies" John B. Trumper and Marta Maddalon discuss the tension between globalizing and localizing forces on languages in relation to the current spread of English as a global means of communication. The authors first present a comprehensive historical overview looking into the relationship between the concept of 'nation' and the birth of national languages, comparing the French, the Italian and the British settings. As to the latter, Standard language over the last centuries is looked into, along with internal centripetal and centrifugal forces, its evolution in the growing decrease of RP, the more recent emergence of Estuary English and the revival of regional accents. The Italian scene, on the other hand, presents "a lack of any national prestige model at the spoken level" (p. 75) if not the one played by the media since the late 1960s. In more recent times, urban/country, North/South and age differences have developed, too, in a variegated scenario where dialects are still well present and often used as a symbolic (and ideological) mark of identity and localization. Globalization forces seem thus to act towards an increasing diversity in languages, in connection both to language contact and to a reevaluation of local linguacultures.

Section 2 - *Creativity and language teaching* – opens with Rosella Pugliese and Serafina Filice's "Plurilingual communication: a polyglot model for a polyglot world". In order to respond to an increasingly multilingual world, it is argued, an integrated approach to teaching languages is needed, one that can create "an alternative inter-linguistic

model that presents strategies of simultaneous learning by using linguistic affinities and transfer” (p. 87). Starting from an overview of theoretical foundations to plurilingual learning related to several key concepts, the main didactic objectives (linguistic, intercultural, personal and methodological competences) are illustrated, together with the sectors where such an approach can best be applied – internationalisms, lexis and grammar; exemplifications of activities are also provided. Taking into account that language learning is not a linear process, but a complex and dynamic one, where languages are integrated rather than separated entities, the main purpose of the approach is that of fostering learners’ language (and cultural) awareness and learning strategies through a learner-centred approach, so that languages can be used to “be and feel *citizens of the world*” (p. 102).

Anila R. Scott-Monkhouse’s contribution “Learner autonomy and multiple intelligences in vocabulary learning: a student-centred approach” focuses on vocabulary learning by combining Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) and studies on learner autonomy: vocabulary is generally learnt through lists, but alternative individualized techniques can foster the development of both areas. In order to creatively devise different and more effective ways to learn vocabulary, in the case study the author discusses some practical activities organized into four main stages: in the first - Organising notes - didactic techniques such as spidergrams, collocational grids, scale ranking are employed, to be then shared (peer teaching), reflected upon in terms of advantages and disadvantages, first individually (self-reflection) and then collectively in the follow-up discussion. The students’ direct involvement, together with activities based on different learning styles and intelligences, has proved an effective way also to foster learner autonomy and sensitivity to differences in learning.

In the following chapter – “Corpus linguistics and fairy tales” - Ian Michael Robinson explores connections between creativity and corpus linguistics through EFL classroom activities. After an overview on the literature on creativity in language learning and corpus linguistics, the corpus of the study is illustrated: Grimm’s Fairy Tales were scanned with WordSmith 5.0 as to top-frequencies and word clusters, which were then compared with the CANCODE spoken corpus and the Cambridge International Corpus of Written English. During the didactic project the students (CEFR levels A2/B1) were asked to write a story using these top-words and word clusters; they worked individually or in small groups, and successfully produced 28 stories, mostly fairy tales. The project thus well exemplifies how corpora can be used in the language classroom to provide authentic language and vocabulary, particularly in certain areas, to be then creatively and actively re-employed.

Fabrizia Venuta’s contribution “The use of films as a second and foreign language acquisition resource” deals with different aspects related to using films in language teaching, in connection with an experience at the language centre of the University of Naples Federico II. After an overview and some useful hints on how to exploit film sequences and subtitles, two examples of structured activities are provided, one for English as a Foreign Language (*Across the Universe*) and one for Italian as a Second Language (*La vita è bella*). Although time-consuming in terms of teacher preparation, audiovisuals can certainly engage students and teachers alike in creative and enjoyable activities and discussions aimed to explore linguacultural elements, boosting student motivation in language learning.

In “The Role of grammar teaching: a proposal for Chinese students of Italian L2” Anna De Marco and Eugenia Mascherpa provide a detailed overview of the role of grammar teaching in literature, from the processing (Van Patten & Williams 2007) to the ‘noticing’ hypotheses (Schmidt 2001), to Focus on form / Focus on forms (Long 1991), including studies on implicit and explicit learning and cognitive psychology in relation to declarative and procedural knowledge. These notions are then related to Pienemann’s Processability theory and Teachability hypothesis (1984, 1998). The characteristics of Chinese learners of Italian as a L2 are outlined in terms of distance in language typology and culture of learning – the latter privileging memorization and repetition, while in the teaching of Italian a global approach is generally preferred. The experimental case study involved a group of Chinese learners and a control group of Spanish, German, Czech and Slovenian students, and was focused on the *passato prossimo*; findings point to the importance of corrective feedback and of the teacher’s guiding role in the application of the linguistic form, moving from declarative to procedural knowledge.

Section 3 - *Creativity in business settings* – opens with “Intercultural communication in academic and professional settings: voices from two European projects” by Carmen Argondizzo, Anna Maria de Bartolo, Lydia Gómez García, Martiña Piñeiro de La Torre and Isabel Figueiredo-Silva. Even though the global spread of English as an international language of communication in most domains remains undisputed, multilingual competence is increasingly recognized as a valuable skill, not only with major European languages but also with Mandarin, Arabic and Russian. Furthermore, minority languages are increasingly seen as a way to improve localized communication with customers in business transactions. The *Communication in Multilingual Contexts* (CMC, www.cmcproject.it) and *Communication in Multilingual Contexts meets the Enterprise* (CMC_E, www.cmceproject.it) projects were jointly developed by an international partnership involving seven universities to provide an online learning environment in Dutch, English, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak and Spanish aimed at improving the language skills of mobility students at a tertiary level. While the first focuses on more general areas and academic skills, the CMC_E includes materials to develop professionally oriented language skills in a multilingual and multicultural perspective. The careful design and the free online availability of the project modules, together with the range of business areas and language skills covered by the five modules, make the Project an outstanding example of blended learning within a multilingual perspective. The exemplification reported for Portugal shows how such a pedagogical approach effectively works both in promoting learner autonomy and in enhancing plurilingual and intercultural communication skills in multilingual and multicultural European settings.

Erwin Snauwaert’s contribution – “Intercultural competence and CLIL as a way to business orientation in Spanish Foreign Language” illustrates how CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) can be effectively combined with an intercultural approach in business curricula. The approach illustrated in the case study, a Spanish Course in the Commercial Sciences and Commercial Engineering curricula at the Hogeschool Universiteit Brussels, combines

business language and intercultural competence in several topical areas, with a focus on business matters. Through Hofstede's (1991) power-distance keys, students are guided to reflect on differences and on potential intercultural problems in dealing with Spanish and Latin-American settings. The course is then complemented by a practice section where students are actively and creatively engaged: the Commercial Sciences students visit companies in Spain in the "Travel Course Madrid", where they are directly immersed in the professional linguistic and intercultural settings of Spanish life, then compiling a portfolio for their experience. The Commercial Engineering students can participate in the "Doing business with Latin America" project, composed of a cultural-linguistic, a macroeconomic and a business economic module, the latter taught by specialists and guest lecturers respectively. CLIL is here integrated with a project-based approach, since students are required to actively and cooperatively work on projects on specific aspects related to Latin American countries.

In "From reality television to reality performance: the use of authentic non-didactic materials" Claire Elisabeth Wallis discusses how metaphors can be effectively included in language teaching for business and economics through authentic materials. After an overview of literature related to the role of metaphors in business and economics discourse, and to the lack of appropriate coverage in B1-C1 level textbooks, also investigating the possible motives for this shortcoming, Wallis sets forward a set of authentic resources, drawn from her teaching experience, that can be exploited to this aim. *The Economist Newsletter Summaries* can provide valuable linguistic and visual input in didactic terms, and two reality television programs – *The Apprentice* and *Dragon's Den* (BBC) – can equally be exploited for language practice and spoken metaphors; furthermore, such authentic materials can gradually introduce the students to the specific discourse community they will belong to in their professional future.

Y.L. Teresa Ting in "Into the business brains of learners: how neuroscience research can guide the development of language learning materials" discusses how effective FL learning materials addressed at students attending non-linguistic faculties can be developed taking into account recent developments in the neurosciences by focusing on the processes of learning (*how to know*) rather than on content alone (*what to know*) (p. 225). Making use of new technologies, it is argued, is not sufficient to develop appropriate linguistic academic skills; rather, an approach based on implicit learning, within a constructivist framework, where activities are scaffolded and focus is set on a "concept-first and terminology-later approach" (p. 231) can be much more effective for scientific disciplines. The several exemplifications provided well illustrate how carefully designed activities can support understanding of conceptual knowledge first, which can then be elaborated and merged with the development of (academic) language skills, particularly as to 'cohesion in written discourse'. Such an approach is in line with the CLIL and ICLHE (Integrated Content and Learning in Higher Education) framework, too, where effective learning requires an active involvement of the learner in the construction of knowledge, that can be fostered through a brain-compatible approach.

Paola Gaudio's "Creativity from the familiar to the foreign: learning business English with the help of Anglicisms" focuses on how previous knowledge of Anglicisms can be fruitfully exploited in Business English courses. Given the current spread of English, many non-adapted Anglicisms are commonly employed in the business discourse community; this can constitute a valuable starting point both for awareness-raising activities as to their (changed) meaning and use in the Italian context, and to reflect on morpho-syntactical rules. Stemming from a teaching experience at the University of Bari School of Economics, the materials and techniques presented focus above all on the second area, taking into account a series of non-adapted Anglicisms in business Italian and looking at their characteristics as pre-modifiers, verbal nouns, phrasal verbs, (un)countable nouns, syntactic roles and the *-er* suffix.

The first contribution of Section 4, dedicated to *Creativity and technology*, is Teresa Gonçalves' "The usefulness of a blended learning module in Erasmus intensive language courses". The massive increase of EU-funded mobility over the last decades, and with the Erasmus program at a tertiary level, entails that very often the language of the hosting country is learnt to be used alongside English in its international role of lingua franca; to respond to this need, the EU promotes preparation Erasmus Intensive Language courses (EILC). The chapter deals with an innovative approach to an EILC course for Portuguese, whereby face-to-face learning has been integrated with an online module and a local culture immersion one. Given the diversified linguacultures, motivations and individual characteristics of the students attending EILC courses, it was felt that a blended approach would better prepare them both in linguistic and cultural terms; the online module in particular allowed participants to develop their competencies through autonomous language learning on several topics, with both authentic and adapted materials. The case study illustrates how the 20 sample students of five different nationalities highly appreciated the blended approach, the majority stating they improved their language skills, positively evaluating the activities and their usefulness.

Laura Capitani's "Wikis in language teaching: creativity and technology" explores the contribution Web 2.0 based applications can give to the language classroom within a collaborative, constructivist approach. Focusing specifically on wikis, the author highlights their positive potential and discusses an experience with *Wikispaces* as a "virtual 'coffee corner' outside the classroom" (p. 277) for Italian classes at the Maastricht University Language Centre. The pages and activities are illustrated, with a particular focus on the 'Debate pages' where students at B1-C2 levels can choose a subject to develop and post their contributions, which are then collaboratively discussed in a forum-like manner with other participants, and even taken up for class debates by the moderator. Students can also participate in other collaborative creative writing activities such as song and poem writing, and use the wiki reference sections (video and music pages, pages for special purposes) all along their learning process. Despite the initial preparation work required on the teacher's side, wikis are certainly a flexible, adaptable and user-friendly tool that can foster a learner-centred, motivating, creative and collaborative approach to language learning, especially for reading and writing skills.

In "Online creative tasks to enhance the intercultural value of a multilingual group of students of Italian" Cristiana Cervini explores how blended forms of learning can positively enhance language learning with heterogeneous groups of students of Italian as a second language. The case study relates to a Moodle-based self-learning course,

integrated with face-to-face lessons and a laboratory tutored module, which was proposed to beginners of several different linguacultures. The wealth of materials and activities proposed in the nine units composing the Moodle course *Nove Passi* were attentively mediated by the tutors to sustain motivation and facilitate learning, guiding the students by providing information and scaffolding, and encouraging participation. From a linguistic point of view, a balance was sought between the use of English as the shared lingua franca and the target language, Italian, through the use of a simplified language and code-switching between the two languages. The set of communicative and learning tasks proposed in the forum were variegated: 'Curiosity and Wonder: the learning journal' for new words students met in their everyday life; 'Now it's up to you', with several activities, from the description of famous characters and monuments to an ideal day and the meaning of colors and symbols in the students' and in Italian culture; in these creative tasks the main focus was on content rather than on linguistic accuracy in order to encourage communicative interaction and "raise curiosity and awareness of mutual comparison" (p. 296) of differences and similarities, thus fostering intercultural skills, too.

Maximilian Maurice Gold's "Online news as a didactic course" deals with institutional news and information websites as a resource for language learning. An overview of literature related to reading skills and the opportunities offered by technology to access authentic reading materials introduces the chapter, which then illustrates the value of authentic news in didactic FL practices, both in paper and in electronic formats. Activities are then illustrated, such as jigsaw cooperative reading, telling stories, 'stop speaking and start chatting', and pros and cons are outlined for each activity. The GoogleWave collaborative communication platform is also presented, where the "combination of an email message and a chat message" (p. 313) can be positively exploited in language learning communicative terms. Feedback from the participants in these activities has been positive, particularly in that they have contributed to improve their confidence in perceiving English not merely as a subject, and in using it in real life contexts, not least creatively.

Cesare Zanca's contribution "Online learning and data driven learning in translation training and language teaching" discusses how technology in language learning and Data Driven Learning - aimed at the exploration of regularities in the target language through corpora - can be fruitfully integrated as part of the tools available to create online activities. After introducing the relevance of new technologies in language learning and outlining the Data Driven Learning approach in its discovery, inductive learner centered and task-based features, the author discusses the problematic points related to the use of corpora with students, who tend to underestimate the value these authentic data can have as an important (autonomous) language learning tool, focusing rather on the technical abilities their use requires. The way in which e-learning, the Web and corpora can be positively integrated is then discussed, and some practical exemplification activities addressed at B2-level students of English provided: online corpora's (BNC, COCA, OPUS) usefulness in translation of idiomatic expressions is illustrated, with reference not only to English but to other languages, too. Therefore, the author concludes, "*ad-hoc online DDL activities*" can enhance "awareness, critical understanding, autonomy and accuracy in foreign language learners" (p. 332) better than traditional tools.

The last contribution by Maddalena Toscano, Graziella Acquaviva and Flavia Aiello, "An on-line course for autonomous learning of Swahili through literature", illustrates an online course run at the Oriental University of Naples aimed at familiarizing students with Swahili literature. Organized in 22 teaching units presenting several Kenyan and Tanzanian authors and works, each unit comprises preliminary information, selected texts in Swahili with an audio file, a glossary and notes, together with a French and an Italian translation, an assessment section and additional materials; grammars and dictionaries can also be accessed as external resources. Two teaching units are described in some detail in the chapter. This online material represents a further opportunity for students to improve their competence in Swahili through a user-friendly and flexible tool.

The volume, in the broad range of settings, languages and approaches taken into consideration, represents a valuable tool for language teachers, particularly in higher education, to deal with the increasing complexities of language learning in a changing and globalized world. The composite linguistic and professional skills required in today's societies, characterized by virtual and physical mobility, require the development of plurilingual and intercultural skills to be used alongside English in its role of lingua franca. The creative and innovative solutions proposed by the authors, together with the attention to learner-centred approaches, to the active involvement of students within a constructivist perspective, as well as the promotion of autonomous learning, represent indeed a valuable and variegated perspective for language educators.

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