Part I

Dimensions of language and creativity
Everyday language creativity

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Introduction and definitions

In the context of a wider preoccupation with creativity in everyday social life, there has been increased interest among linguistic and discourse scholars in everyday language creativity, for example playful and humorous discourse, wit and irony, and artful performance, both online and off. There is, however, no clear-cut agreement about exactly what counts as creativity in this context. Some researchers focus primarily on formal poetic techniques; some take more multimodal or dynamic approaches; others are most interested in the interactional functions of language creativity and its potential for social critique (see Jones, Chapter 3; Sawyer, Chapter 4). In this chapter, I trace the emergence of a number of distinctive traditions of work that conceptualise and define everyday language creativity in different ways. I start with early twentieth-century Russian formalist ideas about poetics, which were incorporated in two subsequent streams of work in the second half of the twentieth century: first, in work on performance and critique, mainly within linguistic anthropology; and secondly, in more recent, interactionally focused studies in linguistics. Both of these streams of work have addressed sociocultural factors, with some researchers drawing on the Bakhtinian sociohistorical approaches that emerged around the 1930s in Russia and which were disseminated in the West from the 1960s. More recently, the post-structuralist turn in language studies has stimulated interest in more fleeting traces of creativity and their sociocultural consequences, and in creative links across languages, media, and cultural traditions, especially in multilingual and online contexts.

In one sense, a trajectory can be traced from the formalist focus on individual texts, through more contextualised studies of language creativity in performance and situated interaction, to current interests in its processual, emergent, and intertextual manifestations. However, all of these approaches continue, in many ways, to underpin contemporary work, and researchers often draw on a combination of these ideas, according to their interest. For the formalists, language creativity is associated with novel, striking linguistic techniques that draw attention to language itself as a form and a medium (Jakobson, 1960). Within linguistic anthropology, poetic verbal performance is also seen as foregrounded and reflexive, but performances emerge through the interaction between performer and audience, and are evaluated emically in relation to local values. Interactional linguistic approaches to language creativity have also expanded formalist definitions to embrace its sociocultural effects, for example how creative uses of language foster intimacy, negotiate identity, or convey social
critique. Within more recent post-structuralist work, novelty and surprise are still important criteria, but here they are located not so much within the boundaries of individual texts as in processes of intertextuality, recontextualisation, and translation.

**Formal and sociohistorical roots**

This section will briefly review two very different approaches, which have both provided key reference points for work on everyday language creativity. First, the Russian formalists and the Prague school of linguistics in the early twentieth century laid the foundations for the linguistic analysis of language creativity. Secondly, while not explicitly framed as a discussion of creativity, the Bakhtinian sociohistorical approach to language, which emerged in Russia around the same time, has also provided foundational ideas and concepts.

It is perhaps not surprising that the formalists, who set out a powerful and enduring agenda for literary studies and stylistics in Europe and North America, should also provide a starting point for work on vernacular language creativity. Ironically, they themselves had little interest in everyday language, other than as a contrastive foil against which they identified the special devices that they saw as producing literary language. Their initial interest was in the process of ‘defamiliarisation’, whereby writers make objects unfamiliar or ‘strange’ through the artful use of comparison, imagery, repeated rhymes and rhythms, and the manipulation of story into plot. Shklovsky (1917) argued that these artistic devices interrupt and block the audience’s usual assumptions, surprising them into more challenging and lengthy acts of perception, which produce a new, fresh perspective on the subject matter. Ideas about defamiliarisation are echoed in the Prague schools of linguistics’ discussion of ‘foregrounding’, or the precise ways in which words or phrases are made to stand out through an intentional aesthetic distortion of sounds, rhythm, and rhyme (Mukařovský, 1932). Jakobson, a central member of both the Russian formalist and Prague school who later brought their ideas to the United States, developed work on defamiliarisation and foregrounding further in his analysis of parallelism and deviation, again focusing on the creative manipulation of text. Parallelism (unexpected regularity) is based on the principle of equivalence at various linguistic levels, and can involve word repetition, alliteration and rhyme, or parallel grammatical structures. Deviation (unexpected irregularity) involves some aspect of language diverging from what is expected, for instance unconventional punctuation, metaphor, or genre mixing.

The formalists acknowledged that defamiliarisation and foregrounding can occur outside literature. For example, Shklovsky (1917) stated that defamiliarisation could be found in riddles and nonsense language, and indeed wherever there was language form. This point is more fully theorised in Jakobson’s (1960) functional theory of language use. Jakobson identified six language functions, including the poetic function, which he suggests is potentially present in all language use, but dominant in poetry, in which the signifier – language itself – is foregrounded through the sound and shape of words, syntactic patterning, or striking semantic connections. The poetic function can also be obvious in other contexts. For example, Jakobson discusses the use of rhyme and alliteration in the political slogan ‘I like Ike’, but on these occasions there is always some other, more important, language function foregrounded and the poetic function remains secondary. The other five functions of communication include the emotive function expressing the addressor’s attitude towards what he or she is speaking about (foregrounded in the ‘I like Ike’ example), and the conative function orientated towards the addressee, expressed in the vocative or imperative forms.
The referential function orients towards the subject matter and context; the metalingual function focuses on the code (for example questioning the meaning of a word); the phatic function establishes or prolongs communication. Jakobson’s argument that all language, including literature, is amenable to linguistic analysis and that the poetic function is always potentially available could be seen as opening the door for the study of vernacular language creativity. Moreover, as Pratt (1977) points out, the six functions themselves are not purely linguistic: the referential and emotive functions carry additional information, respectively, about the context and about the inner state of the addressor. Thus, although Jakobson himself did not develop this point, his functional model also seems to suggest a need for a more contextually sensitive approach.

In contrast to the mainly textual focus of formalist accounts, the work of Jakobson’s Russian contemporary Bakhtin provides a much more sociohistorical theorisation of the inherently responsive and many-voiced nature of language use. Bakhtin, who both reacted against and was influenced by formalism and Marxism, argued that the aesthetics of language must have a social dimension. In the same way as an utterance is always co-authored by a speaker and listener, so a text or event becomes an aesthetic object through its contemplation as such by an author and a spectator, and is thus always essentially co-created (Bakhtin, 1923). Linguists seeking to develop more dynamic and sociohistorically grounded accounts of language creativity have drawn on Bakhtin’s view of language as a tumultuous, conflicted phenomenon, whereby opposing centrifugal and centripetal forces continually open up possibilities for change (Bakhtin, 1935). Creativity emerges here not so much through linguistic deviation and parallelism, but through the exploitation of the heteroglossic dynamics of language use (see Jones, Chapter 3). Thus, for instance, speakers and writers may manipulate the intertextual connotations of particular words or phrases, or recontextualise voices from one context to another, or animate a struggle between an authoritative narrator and the viewpoint of a character. Significantly, this Bakhtinian conception of language creativity necessarily takes the researcher beyond an analysis of the immediate spoken or written text to pursue a more sociohistorical understanding of indexical associations and intertextual connections of voices, genres, and languages.

Bakhtin’s (1935) insistence on the deep-reaching formal and semantic effects of intrinsic responsive and addressive impulses within the utterance is particularly relevant to what might be termed ‘dialogic creativity’ (see Sawyer, Chapter 4). For Bakhtin, meaning is not transmitted through language, but dialogically created between speaker and listener. Speakers may be creative in the manner in which they respond to a previous speaker, existing texts, or a prevailing genre, and they also display creativity in the ways in which they anticipate and pre-empt the response of an actual or implied audience. Dialogic relations are also evident between a speaker and the other voices that they may report or appropriate in creative ways, for example through what Bakhtin calls ‘stylisation’ whereby a voice is reproduced almost as if it were the speaker’s own, but with a ‘slight shadow of objectivation’ that signals the presence of another voice (Bakhtin, 1984 [1929]: 189), or through more distinct separation of a reported voice in irony or parody. Between the two poles of explicit separation and complete appropriation, Bakhtin (1935) suggests there are a number of hybrid forms in which speakers signal evaluative accent (that is, stance or perspective) through various kinds of double voicing.

Bakhtinian ideas have influenced strands of work on creativity in the West since the 1970s and are particularly influential in more recent post-structuralist work discussed below. Before considering recent studies, however, I will examine two streams of work that emerged in the
second half of the twentieth century: first, the study of vernacular verbal performance; and secondly, research on the functions of creativity in everyday conversation.

Performance and critique

Reacting against the structuralist linguistics that had dominated the first half of the twentieth century, a movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s led by anthropologists and linguists who wanted to develop a broader, multidisciplinary approach to the study of language in society. This approach involved a shift in attention from the linguistic system to the study of language in use, situated in ‘the flux and pattern of communicative events’ (Hymes, 1977: 5). In this section, I focus on work by Hymes and other anthropologists on verbal performance, also referring to Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of everyday interaction and Labov’s linguistic account of conversational narrative. While these scholars were not focusing directly on creativity as a phenomenon, their work on performance and narrative has been foundational for researchers looking at creativity in everyday language.

Goffman (1959, 1967), who was primarily a sociologist, uses ‘performance’ as a dramatic metaphor for people’s presentation of themselves in a particular light to others, and to themselves, in the course of everyday social routines. His notions of ‘framing’, ‘face’, and ‘frontstage and backstage behaviour’ all involve speaker creativity. In terms of framing, Goffman argued that people tacitly agree (or may, on occasion, misunderstand) what is going on in a particular interaction, for instance, whether it constitutes a declaration of love, an argument, or an apology. Speakers may then strategically transform one frame into another, for example reframing an insult as a joke. Face refers to speakers’ images of themselves and others as, for example, knowledgeable, clever, brave, or competent, and is projected by means of the way in which they take up a particular position, or ‘line’, in an ongoing interaction. People experience strong feelings connected with face and may be creative in defending their self-image or those of other people, for example through the use of indirectness or ambiguity, hedging claims, joking to neutralise an offensive remark, or ridiculing themselves to repair a social gaffe. Shifting his attention from individuals to groups, Goffman extended his dramatic metaphor in studies of the contrast between carefully managed collaborative frontstage behaviour by professional teams, for example in a hotel or hospital, and their backstage behaviour when the team relaxed, talked ‘off record’, and prepared the frontstage show.

Within anthropology, the notion of performance was more linguistically theorised as a particular kind of creative language event. For anthropologists, the aesthetics of verbal performances are contextually anchored, indexing local traditions of poetics and narrative, and so have to be researched within their cultural context. In Bauman’s (1987: 8) definition of performance, there is an echo of Jakobson’s poetic function, but also more emphasis on the evaluative role of the audience:

In this sense of performance, the act of speaking is put on display, objectified, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. Performance thus calls for special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of speaking and gives licence to the audience to regard it and the performer with special intensity. Performance makes one communicatively accountable; it assigns to the audience the responsibility of evaluating the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s accomplishment.
Ethnographic work on verbal performance during the 1960s–1980s included Hymes’ (1975, 1981) ethnopoetic research into Native American folktales, through which he hoped to make audible the voices and culture of disempowered people, and also studies by linguists and anthropologists of African American displays of oral virtuosity, such as sounding, signifying, and ritual insults (for example Abrahams, 1974; Kochman, 1973; Labov, 1972).

Emerging in the context of everyday language, oral performances mobilise culturally contingent interpretative frames (in Goffman’s sense), within which they are understood and evaluated. These frames signal a particular genre (for example a ‘shaggy dog story’) and they also operate to set up the event as a performance, ‘keyed’ in conventional ways by specific features: figurative language; a special code (for example an archaic language); formal features, such as parallelism; special prosodic patterns and paralinguistic qualities; assertions; formulae such as ‘once upon a time . . . ’; appeals to tradition; and disclaimers such as ‘I’m not good at telling jokes, but . . . ’ (Bauman, 1975). Paralleling Jakobson’s description of the poetic function, Bauman (1992) argues that the potential for performance is always present within communication and that it may be more or less salient among the different functions of a communicative act, depending on how far the performer takes on responsibility for a verbal display. Particularly significant for research on everyday creativity is Hymes’ (1975) notion of ‘breakthrough into performance’, which he describes as the moment when a speaker switches from ordinary everyday language into a more stylised, personally committed, and emotionally immersed genre. These switches may be brief, ranging through jokes or anecdotes to a ‘fleeting breakthrough’, as when a child shows off an esoteric word in talk with peers (Bauman, 1992: 44).

For Bauman and Briggs (1990), culture not only provides resources and reference points for performers, but also is itself emergent through performance. Performances, and their indexical links with other past speech events, draw attention to speech as social action: ‘performances move the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically’ by performers, the audience, and the researcher (Bauman & Briggs, 1990: 60). Thus performances distil and highlight cultural practices and values, at the same time reflexively and critically driving the emergence of new knowledge and perspectives. Briggs and Bauman (1992) focus particularly on the intertextual aspects of performances and the dynamic process of entextualisation (identification of a stretch of discourse as an extractable text), transposition, and recontextualisation in a new setting. Such processes raise questions about the sociopolitical dynamics of creative language use, for example about people’s differential access to texts and the different kinds of legitimacy to use or reuse them, how individuals gain these rights to particular modes of verbal display and to their transformation, and the social value attached to the texts themselves. Thus researchers working on verbal performance have addressed the possibilities it opens up for social critique: by the performer, in the context of the intensity and heightened awareness associated with such language events; by the audience, which evaluates the performance; and by the researcher, who is interested in sociopolitical dynamics. Thus, for example, Alim (2004) argues that hip hop’s synergistic combination of speech, music, and art (closely linked to the African American oral tradition) serves to bind community, and reverses standard definitions of correctness and appropriateness to express resistance towards dominant culture (see also Morgan, 2009).

In addition to this substantial stream of work on verbal performance, the shift to functional approaches also produced seminal research in conversational narrative (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Creativity here is involved both in turning an experience into a story and in utilising what Labov calls ‘evaluative devices’ to ensure that the story achieves...
maximum impact. Labov suggested that conversational narratives fulfil both a referential function through their temporally sequenced framework of abstract, orientation, complication, resolution, and coda, and an evaluative function, conveying a particular point. Through the evaluative function, the narrator presents a particular perspective, which is then also evaluated by the audience response. For example, when Labov asked adolescent African Americans to tell him about a dangerous situation that they had experienced, they portrayed the danger as impressively as possible, highlighting their own courage. The narrator achieves these evaluative effects by adding an explanation or additional description to stress a particular point (external evaluation), putting evaluative comments into the mouths of characters within the narrative (embedded evaluation), or using a variety of comparisons and intensifiers (gestures, sound effects, quantifiers, repetition), which provide emphasis and build up suspense within the story. As Labov (1972: 371) puts it: ‘Evaluative devices say to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, wild, crazy; or amusing, hilarious and wonderful; more generally that it was strange, uncommon or unusual – that is, worth reporting.’

**Interational approaches**

Towards the end of the twentieth century, a stream of work by linguists emerged that examines uses of literary-like language in everyday conversation, focusing on its interactional and cognitive effects. Tannen (1989) provides an early argument that techniques traditionally thought of as quintessentially literary are, in fact, ubiquitous in conversation (although see also Pratt, 1977, who challenged the distinction between poetic and everyday language, and Gates, 1988, on connections between the African American literary tradition and vernacular practices of signifying). Tannen (1989) focuses on conversational patterns of repetition, reported dialogue, and imagery, arguing that these contain the seeds of the more fully developed techniques found within poetry and literature. For instance, she draws on Bakhtin (1935) to argue that ‘reported dialogue’ is never simply repeated, but is essentially recreated by the new speaker, to put across a particular point, just as playwrights, filmmakers, and novelists create dialogue for their characters. For Tannen, the function of this vernacular creativity is to create various kinds of involvement. At the level of the music of language, repetitions of sounds, words, and phrases across conversational turns draw speakers into a rhythmic ensemble. At the same time, imagery and reported speech provide evocative detail that invokes scenarios and emotions, and draws speaker and listener together into meaning-making. She argues that this mutual involvement produces an aesthetic experience of coherence for speakers and listeners: an emotional sense of connectedness (through sharing the same world of discourse), and intellectual and emotional insights. Sawyer (2001; see also Chapter 4) also integrates interaction, affect, and aesthetics in his view of everyday conversation as collaboratively improvised (like theatre or jazz music) and potentially producing a peak experience pleasure, or ‘flow’, when skills and challenges are perfectly balanced (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Tannen’s ideas about the connections between vernacular and literary creativity are developed more fully by Carter (2004) in his argument that literary language can best be viewed as a series of clines, stretching from everyday usage and fleeting performance through to canonical literature. Carter builds on research by Crystal (1998) and Cook (2000), who suggested that popular verbal play such as jokes, riddles, or punning helps to establish rapport (Crystal, 1998), or can be used to create solidarity or antagonism, and to subvert the social order (Cook, 2000). Carter (2004), in his analysis of the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) comprising around 5 million words of
spoken interaction, found copious examples of repetition, wordplay, metaphor, idiom, and hyperbole. He suggests that such creativity falls into two categories: first, ‘pattern-reforming’, whereby people play with language in puns and invented words, and use metaphor and metonymy (the replacement of a word or phrase by another closely associated with it) to reshape ways of seeing; and secondly, language creativity can be ‘pattern-reinforcing’, for example in various forms of repetition and converging. While pattern-reforming echoes formalist foregrounding techniques, pattern-reinforcing may be more covert, emerging across related conversational turns in which speakers use each other’s words and parallel syntactic structures, generally to signal affective convergence and a common viewpoint (cf. Tannen, 1989). Carter (2004) argues that both of these forms of creativity, which often occur together, facilitate rapport and are associated with more informal interactions between equals.

A number of other studies have focused on the effects of verbal creativity in everyday interaction to enhance solidarity and social identity. Norrick (2000) reports that repeated family stories serve to foster rapport and to confirm shared values. Maybin (2006) suggests that older children’s heteroglossic conversational narratives explore and confirm age-appropriate practices and perspectives, and Mendoza-Denton (2008) reports how language games, ritual insults, and storytelling, together with the circulation of poetry notebooks, photos, and drawings, create shared memory in a Latina girls’ gang, thus consolidating group identity. Drawing on a corpus of workplace talk, Holmes (2007) examines how the use of humour can foster workplace relationships, and can facilitate collaborative creative responses to challenges and problems. Holmes’ reference to the enhancement of cognitive activity (in group problem solving) echoes the argument of Crystal (1998) and Cook (2000) for the potential of verbal play to enhance learning in educational contexts. Studies of second language acquisition have also pointed to the importance of verbal play in drawing attention to linguistic form and as a necessary part of advanced language proficiency (for example Bell, 2005; Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Lantolf, 1997; Tarone, 2000).

Consideration of the cognitive effects of language creativity has been influenced by Cook’s (1994) argument that its ‘schema refreshing’ potential provokes creative speculation and encourages people to break out of established ways of thinking. Indeed, Cook (2000: 47) asserts that the most important evolutionary function of language may be ‘the creation of imaginative worlds: whether lies, games, fictions or fantasies’. Cognitive functions of vernacular language creativity have been studied in particular through the examination of metaphor (see Hidalgo-Downing, Chapter 6). Linguists have drawn on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) influential argument that fundamental ways of thinking are reflected in idioms and habitual systems of metaphorical expression that map one conceptual domain onto another. For example, happiness, health, and control are associated with an upwards trajectory, and their converse with a movement downwards (for example sinking spirits, peak of health, fall from power). The tension between what they call the Topic (what the metaphor is about) and the Vehicle (the incongruent word or phrase used to refer to it) in less conventional mappings surprises the audience into a fresh, but cognitively patterned, perception. Cameron (2006) suggests that the use of metaphor draws both on a cognitive capacity for mapping similarities between different entities, and on an affective capacity for enjoyment in play with language and ideas. It is particularly useful, she argues, in tackling communication problems such as in mediating technical explanations for students or medical patients, or in managing highly sensitive communication, for example supporting the development of empathy in reconciliation talk between perpetrators and victims (Cameron, 2011). While cognitive approaches tend to focus, as the term suggests, on cerebral activity, Semino (2011) brings together cognitive work on metaphor with sociocultural approaches.
to language creativity in her argument that the value, or ‘success’, of a particular creative use of metaphor can be discussed only in relation to its appropriateness in a specific text, genre, and communicative context.

Current and emerging research

The post-structuralist turn from structure to practice and, in studies of language creativity, from creative products to creative processes is evident in some of the more recent research discussed above, for example the work on intertextual processes of entextualisation, transposition, and recontextualisation (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). This shift is extended in current work on the creative connections that are made between and across texts, genres, languages, and different media. Researchers have also more recently turned their attention to micro-level, fleeting instances of creativity, which are nevertheless seen as highly socially and culturally significant. In this section, I consider a number of examples of current work on ‘crossing’, translanguaging, and cross-cultural flows, and on the significance of offline and online micro-level creative processes.

Rampton (1995, 2006) is one of a number of sociolinguistic researchers who focus on speakers’ styling of the self and others in everyday life through style-shifting, code-switching, and crossing (see also Coupland, 2007; Eckert, 2000). In one study, Rampton (1995) analysed recordings of teenagers of Indian, Pakistani, and Anglo descent, arguing that their language crossing – that is, strategic, exaggerated use of each other’s accents and idioms – served to challenge dominant notions of ethnicity. In a more recent study on the changing dynamics of classroom language, Rampton (2006) draws on Bakhtin’s work on voicing, Goffman’s work on interaction rituals, and Bauman’s conception of performance to examine teenagers’ manipulation of imagery invoked by hyperstylised performances of English Cockney and posh accents. These fleeting performances are used by students to negotiate the reception of a personal story, keep down powerful girls, and juggle between school and peer values. ‘Cockney’ indexed solidarity, vigour, and passion, and ‘posh’ was associated with social distance, superiority, and constraint. Through such language practices, argues Rampton, ethnic and class divisions are symbolically recreated at a local level. His study of the interactive dynamics between students, and between the teenage students and the teacher, also includes the examination of teenage students’ mini-performances of extracts from popular culture. He argues that their recycling and reperformance of lines from songs or television, in which the aesthetics of sound play are foregrounded, play an important role in the pupil-initiated comments and exuberance that are subverting the traditional teacher domination of talk in class.

This focus on fleeting, fragmentary performance is echoed in recent work in narrative studies, in which the post-structuralist shift has opened up analysis to include more emergent, incomplete, and sometimes ill-formed conversational stories. In her study of talk among a group of Greek teenage female friends, Georgakopoulou (2007) uses the term ‘small stories’ to describe brief, fragmented narratives about projected events, breaking-news stories told at the same time as the events themselves were unfolding, and ‘references’ – that is, one-liners or quotations that index stories already shared within the group. These three subgenres of small stories frequently co-occur in talk, and Georgakopoulou argues that although this kind of almost hidden meaning-making could easily escape the researcher’s notice, the narrative fragments are actually highly significant in enabling the young women to confirm legitimate particular versions of past events, to strategically manage the present, and to imagine the future. The interactive performance of these small stories also
confirmed group intimacy, and constructed gendered and friendship identities, through the teenagers’ habitual representations of themselves and each other within the stories and in talk around them.

Small stories have been particularly associated with the explosion of social media (for example see Page, 2013). Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer users opportunities to post brief narratives and to comment on their lives on a minute-to-minute basis. Users now have access to multimodal resources that previously would have been available only to professionals, and storytelling often involves embedding and hybridising old and new media. Stories in this context can be updated, re-embedded on different platforms, and evaluated by unforeseen audiences through processes of ‘like’, ‘share’, and ‘follow’. The unparalleled possibilities for processes of connection and convergence between individuals, institutions, platforms, and genres (Jenkins, 2006) also facilitate creative indexicality, recontextualisation, and reconfiguration in social media language use more generally. For instance, hyperlinks and hashtags can express generic and identity commitments and alignments with other writers, while text, images, and video can be reconfigured and recycled for striking, humorous, or thought-provoking effects.

It could be argued that computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media are now key sites for everyday language creativity, especially among young people (see Goddard, Chapter 23). There are clearly rich possibilities for multimodal creativity, for example through configuring and reconfiguring relationships between words, images, sound, and movement in original and recycled texts. The opportunities for ordinary individuals to sample and remix commercial media (see Knobel & Lankshear, Chapter 25) also provide opportunities for critical activity: globally dominant resources may, for example, be subversively appropriated and reinterpreted in grass-roots activity (Androutsopoulos, 2010). However, Androutsopoulos (2014) argues that much of the creativity in social media is still carried through verbal language. He suggests that people frequently employ poetic tactics to gain attention, for example through unusual language use, or the combination of different elements and registers of language in unusual ways, in performances that are often playful and strongly oriented towards potential evaluation by audiences who will read and comment on the posts. The semiotic materials used in online creativity, and their links, also carry strong messages about the performer’s aesthetic taste, social values, and politics. In this sense, online creativity is part of a ‘networked’ identity, intricately linked to and dependent on individuals and groups in online networks, as well as on networked resources (Tagg, forthcoming).

Ideas about creative connectivity across texts and sites are extended in current work on transcultural flows and translanguaging. Pennycook (2006) analyses how flows of hip-hop music and lyrics across space and time are combined with their ‘fixing’ in location, tradition, and cultural expression. The meanings of performances emerge through particular configurations of fluidity and fixity, as performers recycle and transform activity and material from elsewhere. In parallel with these ideas about transcultural practice, and following Rampton’s notion of language crossing, researchers have also been examining language behaviour in which speakers draw on and bring together structures and features from across different languages. Jorgensen (2008), for example, found that such ‘polylanguaging’ among Danish/Turkish/English-speaking teenagers involves verbal play, including the recycling of media fragments, and Wei (2011) describes interactively constructed ‘translanguaging spaces’ in which Chinese/English multilingual students draw from across their multilingual sociocultural resources to construct and modify sociocultural identities and values. Wei (2011: 1223) argues that such moments of translanguaging are both creative and critical: speakers make
creative choices to follow or flout the rules and norms of language and other behaviour, and, in the process, are ‘pushing and breaking the boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging’. This creativity involves translingual punning and stylised crossings into local Chinese dialects, and is closely linked with criticality, defined by Wei (2011: 1223) as ‘the ability to use available evidence appropriately, systematically and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social and linguistic phenomena, to question and problematize received wisdom, and to express views adequately through reasoned responses to situations’.

**Critical issues and topics**

In this section, I briefly discuss the continuing lack of agreement over how to define ‘creativity’, the affordances of different kinds of data for conceptualising its various dimensions, and the lack of attention to affect in work so far.

While everyday language creativity is now an established area of ongoing linguistic research, there is a continuing lack of clear agreement about the precise definition and scope of creativity itself. The starting point for analysis is often some striking reflexive manipulation of language form, but, depending on a researcher’s approach and area of interest, discussions of creativity can also include its intertextual connotations, its interactional affects, its cognitive functions, its connections with identity, or its propensity for social critique. Thus creativity may be located at the level of textual poetics, or in relationships across texts, or in the purposes and effects of language use. Indeed, many researchers whose work I refer to do not use the term ‘creativity’ at all, focusing rather on performance (Bauman, 1992; Hymes, 1975), narrative (Georgakopoulou, 2007; Labov, 1972), style (Coupland, 2007; Eckert, 2000; Rampton, 2006), translanguaging (Wei, 2011), and so on. The terms used by researchers signal their commitment to different disciplinary traditions and different definitions of creativity. Thus references to ‘literariness’, ‘poetics’, and ‘language play’ often signal a focus on text, while ‘performance’ and ‘ritual’ suggest more situated approaches, with ‘performance’ often indexing the linguistic anthropological tradition and ‘ritual’, Goffman’s dramaturgical approach.

A number of researchers have presented various ways of mapping the different approaches. Carter (2004) suggests that there are three possible models underpinning the identification of what he terms ‘literariness’ in everyday language: an *inherency* model (represented in formalism); a *sociocultural* model, in which literariness is seen, as the term suggests, as socially and culturally determined (represented in anthropological work on performance and some interactional approaches); and a more recent *cognitive* model, in which literary language is related to mental processes, as in Cook’s (1994) notion of schema refreshment and Cameron’s (2006, 2011) work on metaphor. Alternatively, Maybin and Swann (2007) place a greater emphasis on the association of creativity with criticality in their development of an integrated analytical framework to address textual, contextual, and critical dimensions of everyday language creativity in empirical data. Jones (2010), however, argues that neither Carter’s set of theoretical models nor Maybin and Swann’s analytic framework attend sufficiently to how people use language creatively, along with other modes, to accomplish material goals and stimulate social change. Overall, there are continuing tensions in the field between the use of textual form as a key reference point, interest in the less easily empirically identifiable sociocultural dynamics with which it is associated, and speculations about its cognitive functions.

Within the various different approaches, a range of language data are used with different affordances for analysis and theory building. For instance, the formalists’ reference point is
written literature, and their definition of creativity is textually oriented, with assumptions about the effects of literary devices on the reader. Crystal (1998) and Cook (2000) draw on publically available texts to discuss language play, and although they comment on its pragmatic functions, they do not use empirical data to look at its effects in actual conversations. Carter (2004) and Holmes (2007) use empirical corpora of spoken language, which enable them to study how creativity emerges in naturally occurring language and to look across large amounts of data for patterns of usage between speakers and contexts. The notion of context in corpus work, however, is necessarily limited and can be rather static, although attention to the interactional functions of creativity also suggests a more dynamic model, in which it is both contextualised and contextualising (Maybin & Swann, 2007). More prosessual and culturally sensitive notions of contextualisation underpin work by Bauman and Briggs (1990), who analyse live performances in relation to their interactional dynamics and sociocultural effects. These approaches are associated with different degrees of theorisation of textual detail, interactivity, contextualisation, intertextuality, and so on. Characteristics of research participants also influence directions for theorisation: ethnographic researchers such as Georgakopoulou (2007) and Mendoza-Denton (2008), who focus on teenagers and young adults, often comment on the connections between creative practices and identity, a particularly salient issue for this age group.

While there has been extensive work on poetics, and some interest in the association of creativity with criticality, there has been scant treatment of the role of affect, which tends to be addressed tangentially rather than in any depth. It is hinted at in references to the functions of everyday language creativity in creating rapport and a sense of group identity (for example Carter, 2004; Mendoza-Denton, 2008), and in the sense of connectedness and emotional insights produced through ‘involvement’ (Tannen, 1989). There is very clearly a sense of participants’ enjoyment of language play and performance in a lot of the data: Carter (2004) searched for ‘laughter’ in his corpus to find instances of language creativity, and Labov (1972) estimated the success of the ritual insults he studied by the amount of laughter that they generated in the audience. The idea of a peak pleasure ‘flow’, which Sawyer (2001) argues is produced through creative conversational improvisation, has also been used to characterise hip-hop performers’ experience of personal artistry, complete immersion in performance, and intense sense of community with their audience (Morgan, 2009). In recognition of the importance of affect in creative activity, some researchers are starting to replace ‘creativity’ with the term ‘aesthetics’, which, while traditionally associated with the appreciation of beauty, is etymologically rooted primarily in feeling (its opposite being ‘anaesthetic’, or non-feeling). For instance, Pratt (2014) suggests that aesthetics should encompass the evocation of powerful feeling alongside ‘the display of skill and virtuosity with a medium’, and ‘the estrangement or defamiliarization of the world’.

**Future directions**

Two prominent areas of currently emerging work seem set to continue developing in the future. First, there is burgeoning interest in creative language use in social media sites, where humour and play are particularly prevalent, often used as part of the delicate interactional work to manage participants’ face (Goffman, 1967). In addition to research on sites such as Facebook and Twitter, recent studies have also addressed creativity in text messaging, examining its cohesive and evaluative functions (Tagg, 2013), and elements of verbal display whereby global texting features are recontextualised through local multilingual practices (Deumert & Lexander, 2013).
Secondly, in the context of research on everyday language practices in multilingual contexts, models of language use have shifted from those stressing the combination of separate languages (such as in the notion of code-switching and the term ‘bilingual’) to a more heteroglossic conception of people’s strategic deployment of language resources from across their repertoire (Bailey, 2007; Blackledge & Cress, 2014). As Wei (2011) points out, by its very nature multilingualism is a rich source of creativity and criticality, entailing conflict and change across historical and current contexts, practices and ideologies, and there would seem to be rich opportunities for examining the performativity, skill, and artfulness involved in creating value and status in the ‘languaging’ practices of multilingual speakers.

There is also scope for continuing to refine conceptions of language creativity, and its effects, in the context of the shift away from ideas of creativity as novelty or originality, towards processual accounts of intertextuality and improvisation. Hallam and Ingold (2007) argue that definitions associating creativity with innovation imply a backwards-looking, post hoc definition of creativity as product. They point out that people are constantly having to improvise as part of their ongoing engagement in social and cultural processes, and that creativity should therefore be seen as a generative, future-oriented, socially embedded, and culturally contingent process. This process, they suggest, recalls medieval understandings of wonder and novelty as combining and fusing disparate elements, processual and unfinished. These suggestions echo work on demotic creativity within applied linguistics, which is used to challenge conceptions of timeless artefacts and exceptional individuals, invoking instead a more democratic, contextualised conception of creativity and associated constructs such as literariness, art, and aesthetics (Swann, Pope, & Carter, 2011). Within this climate of interest in widespread, processual creative practices, future research may further challenge the traditional binaries of performer and audience, and of creator and critic, reconceptualising these as dynamically interdependent. Research in social media creativity, in particular, is recasting reception as reproduction, reading as rewriting, and redefining notions of audience and context.

Related topics
creativity and dialogue; creativity and discourse analysis; creativity and Internet communication; humour and language play; language, creativity, and remix culture

Further reading

Carter provides detailed examples of wordplay and other forms of ‘literary language’ from his corpus data, arguing for the importance of their situated interactional function and for a series of clines linking vernacular creativity with canonical literature.


This edited collection of work explores how different approaches to discourse analysis conceptualise the concept of creativity in a range of diverse domains, including everyday vernacular activity.


This undergraduate textbook provides a collection of teaching chapters and short readings on everyday creativity in wordplay, narrative, children’s activity, performativity and style, and online and offline literacies.
Everyday language creativity


Extending work on the relationship between everyday and literary creativity, this edited collection brings together chapters by creative practitioners and academic researchers working across disciplines, to explore ideas about creativity, language, and literature.

**References**


