



Creative writing teaching-learning practice in second language learning: a didactic study

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1. Creative Writing - 2. L'entre-deux : espaces, pratiques et représentations

1. Creative Writing

IV. Creative Writing and Didactics

Creative writing teaching-learning practice in second language learning: a didactic study

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RÉSUMÉS

ENGLISHFRANÇAIS

Dans cette contribution nous analysons d'un point de vue didactique un enseignement en critique littéraire et écriture créative, conçu autour d'un corpus de poésie transculturelle et d'activités d'écriture plurilingue fondées sur la notion de contrainte oulipienne. Dans un premier temps, les notions de *jargon* et de *style de pensée* (Sensevy, Gruson, et Le Hénaff, 2019; Bloor, 2020; Bloor, 2022) nous permettront d'identifier le potentiel épistémique de cet enseignement par rapport aux pratiques culturelles de référence dans le domaine de l'écriture créative et de la critique littéraire. Dans un deuxième temps, une approche clinique (Foucault, 1963) est dédiée à la description et l'exploration d'exemples empiriques étudiés en cours avec deux objectifs : d'abord, identifier la construction et les signes d'appropriation du savoir en jeu, ensuite situer ce savoir par rapport aux pratiques culturelles de référence. Grâce aux notions de *jargon* et de *style de pensée*, nous chercherons à expliciter comment les étudiant.e.s s'engagent dans des pratiques qui démontrent une parenté épistémique avec les pratiques savantes de référence. L'étude éclaire également la manière dont l'affect de la langue maternelle peut être mobilisé afin d'irriguer la langue seconde (Greaves & De Mattia-Viviès, 2022).

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Mots-clés :

apprentissage de langue seconde, jargon/style de pensée, écriture créative, poésie transculturelle, critique littéraire, langue maternelle

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1The objective of this paper is to present some preliminary conclusions on the defining aspects of creative writing, and in particular creative writing in second and foreign language learning, as a body of knowledge. It seeks to address a number of key questions in relation to the field with a view to offering some theoretical foundations and methodological tools for future research.

- 1 Poetry that explores the experience of living between languages and cultures, by poets from the Uni ([...](#))

2The study is interdisciplinary in origin and form as it applies analytical tools developed within the field of the Educational Sciences to research work – itself interdisciplinary as drawing on plurilingualism and psychoanalysis – developed in the field of English Studies. Sara Greaves has researched and practised creative writing in relation to translation studies, the plurilingual Skin-voice and the Mother tongue (Greaves and Schultze, 2012; 2015, Greaves, in press) over a period of several years. Using a clinical approach and the theoretical tools of a didactic analysis, Tracy Bloor seeks to offer some insights into the use of creative writing teaching-learning practice by examining a course developed by Sara Greaves. Based on transcultural poetry¹ and creative writing practices, this course was part of an English language degree programme in a French university.

3The use of the theoretical and methodological tools developed within the educational sciences to examine this programme sought to render visible how the teaching-learning practice analysed here, guided students to experience and experiment a creative use of the English language. This is a research question of particular interest: creative writing is a relatively new field which is difficult to comprehend as a teaching-learning practice. In some ways it still struggles for academic recognition, perhaps particularly in France.

- 2 Translation by Tracy Bloor. See « connaisseur pratique » : [http://tacd.espebretagne.fr/glossaire/?n \(...\)](http://tacd.espebretagne.fr/glossaire/?n (...))
- 3 « Preuves culturelles ». Translation by Tracy Bloor. « Vers une épistémologie des preuves culturel ([...](#))

4The effectiveness of the course, and the knowledge of the teacher as a *practical connaisseur*² of the practice, are taken as an *a priori*. The focus of the study was not so much to assess the success of the course in relation to a pre-defined set of objectives, but rather to gain insight into *how* creative writing works as a teaching-learning practice. In other words, to identify the mechanisms at work which made this programme an effective means of achieving linguistic and literary enrichment so as to gain some insight into creative writing language learning practices in general. In founding the study on the analysis of the teaching-learning didactic activity of a *practical connaisseur* in the domain, the study is situated within the *practice-based evidence* paradigm (Bryk, 2015), or more precisely that of *cultural evidence* and the paradigm of *accomplishment*³ (Sensevy, 2022). That is to say, in examining the course content, together with the teaching strategies and know-how required for the course content to work effectively, its findings present the *cultural evidence* of a *practical connaisseur's* practice. This expert practice, or *art de faire*, is itself founded on the skills and knowledge of the domain of creative writing and language learning acquired through research and experimentation over a period of several years using multidisciplinary sources; it is the source of the practical connaisseur's effective regulation of the teaching-learning practice.

- 4 In the sense used by Kuhn (1970/1996).

5The article is organised in the following manner. First, the hypotheses underlying the course content as well as the research questions of the paper are presented, followed by a general outline of the

epistemological underpinnings of the conception of language guiding the didactic analysis of the teaching-learning practice explored. A description of the theoretical notions of *jargon* and *thought style* used to model and analyse the “classroom” practice (the course was online) are next described. This includes the Oulipian writing constraints which are presented as an exemplar⁴ of creative writing practices as a body of knowledge. Detailed extracts of classroom activity, as well as examples of student productions, are then analysed using the notions of *jargon* and *thought style*. Finally, the findings of the study are reported: these are essentially a number of insights into how knowledge was constructed in the different teaching-learning situations analysed.

1. Hypothesis and Research Questions Explored

⁶The approach presented in this paper raises some questions regarding the social aspect of second language learning and the kinds of didactic activity that would be effective in its acquisition. A principle underlying the didactic analysis of this work is that meaning is constructed in social spaces, and that language is not a uniquely individual phenomenon (Vygotsky, 1934; Mead, 1931; Dewey, 1938/1997; Halliday, 1978; Maniglier, 2016; Sensevy et al., 2019; Bloor, 2020; Bloor & Santini, 2022). This principle was coherent with the underlying principles embedded in the teaching-learning practice analysed. The major tenets of the course developed by Sara Greaves were that poetry, and in particular transcultural poetry, is a fruitful genre for exploring personal expressions of a language; that in conjunction with creative writing activities, it facilitates the construction of teaching-learning situations that allow for the exploration of creative expression in communication with others. This objective was not intended as an invitation for students to write autobiographical texts, but rather to present them with an opportunity to explore the links between the personal and the universal and, ideally, to embark them on a journey of linguistic enrichment and transcultural emancipation.

⁷The first hypothesis explored in the course, which emerged from Sara Greaves’s work on its development over a period of several years, is that one of the reasons the plurilingual creative writing activities are of interest for second language learning is that they enable students to explore and extend their own boundaries. In exploring multiple identities in interaction with others, students are encouraged to seek insight into the links within poetic language between the personal and the universal, the private and the public, the primary *lalangue* (Lacan, 1975) and the epic voice. The second related hypothesis of the course was that in exploring different ways of being, students might overcome the limitations of cultural determinism through artistic expression. The third related hypothesis of the course was that linguistic enrichment becomes possible in environments that provide students with the opportunity to explore the source of language itself; that is to say, in environments where the sense of self is developed in communication with others, where language takes form.

⁸To apprehend better the mechanisms at work in this course, the following questions are addressed in this paper. What can be posited as a useful epistemological underpinning for the study of creative writing, in particular as a language learning practice? What epistemic potential does this relatively new field hold? What criteria can be used to identify the knowledge at stake in creative activities undertaken in classroom practice and how can effective learning be identified? Finally, how might these criteria shed light on the hypotheses underlying the course analysed.

2. Methodology

⁹The didactic analysis of the classroom practice presented in this article will be undertaken using a clinical approach (Bulterman-Bos, 2008; Foucault, 1963; Santini, Bloor & Sensevy, 2018). The course took place during a period of Covid restrictions in January-April 2020, and consequently in-person lessons were not possible. For this reason, recorded videoconferences played an essential role in documenting the main features of “classroom” activity. They provided a representation of the teaching-learning practice which included a maximum of detail without any additional commentary or interpretation. The recordings were then transcribed and carefully described (Ryle, 1968/2009; Sensevy, 2011, Bloor & Santini, 2022) before any attempt was made to analyse them. This was to provide an initial source of empirical data which was as close as possible to the actual practice.

¹⁰Extracts from the recorded activity were then chosen as emblematic examples (Kuhn, 1977) to provide clues (Ginzburg, 1979) to identify signs of activity pertinent to the questions explored in this research. This required identifying the language explored by students in class in relation to the culturally-constructed targeted body of knowledge of literary criticism and creation. The notions

of *jargon* and *thought style* were used to model aspects of the didactic activity so as to situate the language explored by students in relation to that of literary criticism and creation as a specialist practice. This required some understanding of literary criticism and creation as a culturally-constructed body of knowledge. To that end, the practices of the Oulipo community are presented as an exemplar of this body of knowledge so as to lend some insight into the *jargon* and *thought style* inherent in poetry as a culture and creative writing as a body of knowledge.

3. Epistemological Underpinnings and Theoretical Notions

11 Identifying what might constitute the creative use of a target language is a complex task as it raises the question as to the nature of language itself. Depending on the field of research, language might be viewed as linguistic phenomena that can be studied as an abstract system (Bloomfield, 1933/1984; Chomsky, 1957), or as a semiotic system (Peirce, 1878), or as being inherently context sensitive (Foucault, 1969; Halliday, 1985). In the case of this study, being able to progress to a creative use of a target language implied the necessary condition of accessing the source of language itself. However, the question regarding the origin of language is complex. It involves questioning where the transition from thought to language might occur: in people's heads or in some form of interpersonal space in a meshwork of semiotic systems? (For the latter view, see Vygotsky, 1934/2012; Mead, 1931; Dewey, 1938/1997; Halliday, 1978; Maniglier, 2018; Bloor, 2020).

12 Wittgenstein's conception of the nature of language is a useful starting point for a didactic analysis, and it is the view of language adopted for the analytical aspect of this study. From Wittgenstein's perspective words, gestures, expressions and so on, come alive within a language game, a culture or a "form of life": "For a large class of cases —though not for all— in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." (Sect. 43 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953). In other words, the meaning of a word can be understood by an investigation of the different uses to which it can be put. As with the diversity of functions of different tools in a toolbox, words can be used in a range of functions.

13 Wittgenstein introduces the concept of language games in his activity-oriented perspective on language. He doesn't give a strict definition of the term but rather a long list of examples as an illustration of how words have meaning in the context of different activities (*Philosophical Investigations* 23). He states "... the word 'language-game' is used here to emphasise the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations* 23).

14 Thus, in this study language is seen as being composed of *language games* within forms of life which produce certain *thought styles* (Fleck, 1935/2008; Bazerman, 1988; Sensevy, Gruson, Le Hénaff, 2019; Bloor, 2020; Bloor and Santini, 2022) together with an associated *jargon* (Sensevy *et al.* 2019; Bloor, 2020; Bloor and Santini, 2022). Based on a Wittgenstein conception of the nature of language, the notions of *jargon* and *thought style* are proposed as useful tools for modelling and analysing didactic practice (Bloor, 2020; Bloor, 2022). These notions are described in detail below; they will be used to analyse the teaching-learning practice explored in this transcultural poetry/creative writing course.

3.1 Jargon

15 In general usage, the term *jargon* tends to have a somewhat negative connotation and can be associated with an obscure, even pretentious use of language. However, there is no negative connotation in the notion of *jargon* as used in this study. Its use is akin to a dictionary definition of the term, for example, that of the Cambridge Dictionary: "special words and phrases that are used by particular groups of people, especially in their work". Our use of the term goes beyond this definition of specialised vocabulary to include an understanding of how the skills and crafts of a domain can literally be embedded in the language of its associated practice: it thus denotes more than vocabulary as it includes an understanding of the background to the practice which also gives it shape. In the case of this transcultural poetry/creative writing course it can therefore be understood as a system of expressions specific to this cultural practice; it both produces and is produced by that same cultural practice and its accompanying *thought style*.

16The *jargon* of a cultural practice is thus its linguistic system: a network of terms, expressions and various discourses that might occur within the forms of life specific to that cultural practice. An example to illustrate this point, taken from this study, is the critical literary analysis of a poem and the way it might be described and discussed within a literary community sharing that form of life. Such discussions would entail specific language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) associated with literary criticism. These would then be both the source and the result of the *jargon* related to the practice. This point will be illustrated with specific examples in 4.1.1.

- 5 Cf. Christine Collière-Whitehead's contribution to this issue.
- 6 Cf. the Skin-voice (« Voix-peau ») in Sara Greaves, *Côté guerre côté jardin : excursions dans la po* (...) [\(...\)](#)
- 7 For instance: Scottish poets Jackie Kay and Tom Leonard, Guyanese poets Grace Nichols, Fred D'Agua ([...](#))

17As it is in acquiring and mastering the *jargon* of a particular form of life that individuals ultimately come to be integrated into the *thought style* of a community of practice, evidence was sought in classroom activity of students' use of the *jargon* of critical literacy as a sign of developing knowledge. Similarly, evidence was sought in student productions of the style and content (the *jargon*) of poems analysed in class. The creative aspect of poetry as a cultural practice is more complex to illustrate due to its inherent, and even ideal unpredictability. As Craig Raine writes in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, "Often language tells us what to think. Poetry, though, can use language to help us escape this tyranny of language" (Herbert & Hollis 178-9). Poetry might be seen as the crucible in which language is melted and re-moulded, a language that reaches back to what Lacan terms *lalangue* (1975) with its insistent sound patterning and wordplay. As such it explores our most intimate relationship with language.⁵ At the same time, poetry often pertains to what might be seen as the collective, rallying point of the epic voice. For this reason, it offers the potential to explore intimate language in relation to wider social, political or existential themes. It is a genre that straddles the gap between the epic and the lyrical, in which public, even political, and personal voices often meet; the language of intimacy and sensual pleasure that transports the reader back to the early experiences of language, while challenging the norms and representations of language and society or frames of thought.⁶ There is no space here for an in-depth discussion of the specifics of poetry and prose, but contemporary, transcultural poets such as those used on this course⁷ often engage in fairly direct terms with the private/public divide, thus providing inspiring models for students.

18Based on this understanding of poetry, didactic activity in which students used their second language creatively, was seen as evidence of the creative aspect of the *jargon* of poetry and of students engaging in the culture of poetry and creative expression. That is to say, use of language in which students seemed to capture something of the pleasurable dimension of the Mother tongue thereby irrigating their second language expression with the affect it often lacks. The conception of the Mother tongue relevant here is as a plural, not monolithic, entity that as theorised by Monique De Mattia-Viviès:

In fact, all children are at least bilingual, and most often trilingual within their Mother tongue, which can be broadly subdivided into three categories:

- lalangue, body and sound oriented, a private language shared by mother and child;
- language of the interior, articulated language, at once sociolect, idiolect, and language of affect, the language of the child's close family circle, of their people; and

- 8 Cf. Monique De Mattia-Viviès's original article, in French: « Entrer dans la langue ou dans les lan ([...](#))

- language of the exterior, including the language used at school, of varying degrees of sociological and idiolectal discrepancy with the interior language. (Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès 22)⁸

19The Mother tongue spans the spectrum from intimate to public varieties of language, just as transcultural poetry straddles the private/public divide.

3.2 Thought Style

20A *thought style* refers to the intertwined perception and conception developed within a particular form of life. What one sees is not an action that is independent from the conception of the “object” of one’s gaze: there is an organic relationship between perception and conceptualization. A few common optical illusions to exemplify this disposition are the rabbit/duck and older/younger woman images: one sees a rabbit but in the next instant a duck; the wizened contours of an older woman’s face and in the following second the smooth profile of a young woman’s face and shoulders. These experiences of our own cognitive processes teach us how strongly our existing disposition to ‘see’ in a particular light will determine our take on reality: realities constructed not as individuals, but as communities in the meshworks of semiotic systems that make up the interpersonal spaces of the forms of life within which we exist (Vygotsky, 1934; Mead, 1931; Dewey, 1938/1997; Halliday, 1978; Sensevy, Gruson and Forest, 2015; Maniglier, 2016; Bloor, 2020). From this perspective, language is not separate from culture, nor an abstract tool to be used, but rather an environment in which we live (Wittgenstein 1953/2014; Maniglier, 2016).

21This moulded disposition of any given community to perceive/conceive in a particular light is denoted in this study by the term *thought style* (Sensevy *et al.*, 2019; Bloor, 2022). What might be considered to be the appropriate *thought style* of literary criticism and creative expression? This is a complex question and it is beyond the objective of this paper to provide a complete answer. However, the following phenomena are posited as useful indications of students developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to this cultural practice.

- 9 This includes the impact of criticism on writers (the example of Keats comes to mind, with the nega [\(...\)](#)

22First, based on the premise that there is a fundamental relationship between criticism and creation⁹ and that critical insight is enhanced by creative expression and vice versa, signs of students developing literary critical skills in relation to the transcultural poetry material were considered to be evidence of students developing an appropriate *thought style*.

- 10 <https://www.ouliipo.net/>.

23Second, student engagement in *Oulipo*-inspired creative practices, described below. The Oulipo workgroup are posited as specialists of the creative process. As such, their methods can be seen as an exemplar, in the sense used by Kuhn (1970), of the *thought style* of a creative community. Many of the plurilingual writing practices explored in the course were loosely based on Oulipian constraints¹⁰ in that they sought to jolt students out of their natural, habitual train of thought and mode of expression. Therefore, signs of students not writing “as themselves”, were also considered to be evidence of students developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to creative expression.

24What does it mean to write or not write as “oneself”? This question touches on issues at the heart of creative practices. When Roland Barthes claims “Language is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech” (1977), he is decrying the coercive, socially imposed laws of language which, it might be argued, distance us from the Mother tongue. When learning a second language, this distancing effect may be increased. We have all forgotten how we learned to speak; disrupting students’ habitual writing style with the oulipo-inspired plurilingual, creative writing activities was a strong feature of the course. The intention was to invite students to regress back to the early stages of language learning and to plunge them into situations where they would be required to imitate and improvise, copy and create, like an infant. This was based on the hypothesis that they would in this way recapture something of the pleasure of the Mother tongue as they creatively mixed languages, irrigating their sometimes overly formal second language speech. This is what is meant by students not writing “as themselves” and why it was considered to be evidence of students developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to creative expression.

3.3 An Exemplar of Creative Practice: the Oulipo Workgroup

25The creative writing processes developed within the workgroup known as *Oulipo* (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) are the inspiration for many of the activities developed in this course. A

description of the processes will thus serve as a useful reference for defining aspects of creative writing as a body of knowledge.

- 11 Our translation of "L'auteur oulipien est un rat qui construit lui-même le labyrinthe dont il se pr ([...](#))

26The group was founded in Paris in 1960 by the mathematician François Le Lyonnais and the writer Raymond Queneau and would go on to include writers and poets such as Jacques Roubaud (also a mathematician), Italo Calvino and of course, Georges Perec. Oulipo takes a firm stand against the myth of the divinely inspired writer-creator and promotes a materialist demystification of the Platonic tradition. Oulipians draw attention to writing constraints – meaning rules or structures derived from maths, music, board games such as chess or Go, outmoded literary forms etc. – and underline their often under-exploited yet highly efficacious creative power. Writers often impose formal or organisational constraints upon their writing, such as writing at certain times of the day, or a certain number of pages per day, or use rhyme and metre according to pre-existing forms. Oulipian constraints tend to act on the materiality of language – its letters, words, sounds, sentences etc. – in unexpected ways in a spirit of novelty and playfulness. The constraints are self-imposed: Raymond Queneau famously described the Oulipian author as "a rat that constructs its own maze then tries to find a way out".¹¹

27Two firm principles underpin the Oulipo-inspired activities explored in this work. The first is that of *indirection* or *distancing* that is to say, whatever subject the students' poems may end up being about, it is not tackled frontally but via a circuitous route. The second is that of *decentering*: as explained earlier, the writing tasks are designed to prevent the participants from writing "as themselves", and to jolt them out of their natural, habitual train of thought. Oulipian writing derives from the paradox that literary potentiality is found to spring from linguistic constraint. In the approach undertaken in Sara Greaves's course, creative potential was encouraged to arise from the constraint of alterity – using other people's words and ideas.

4. The Transcultural Poetry Course Investigated

28Following the above presentation of the hypotheses of the course, the research questions of this study, its epistemological foundations, the theoretical and methodological tools used to investigate classroom practices, as well as the Oulipo principles as an example of the body of knowledge at stake, the remainder of this paper will be devoted to presenting examples of classroom data and their analysis.

4.1 Description of a Cultural Literacy Activity: Analysis of "Half-caste"

29In this activity, students were introduced to the Afro-Guyanese poet John Agard, who lives in Great Britain. Several of his poems were explored, including "Half-Caste". A partial transcription of this poem is presented below and readers are invited to follow the link ([Half-Caste](#)) to view John Agard performing the poem.

30Class Documents John Agard (1949-): "Half-Caste"

Excuse me standing on one leg I'm half-caste. Explain yuself wha yu mean when yu say half-caste
--

yu mean when Picasso
 mix red an green
 is a half-caste canvas?
 explain yuself
 wha yu mean
 when yu say half-caste
 yu mean when light an shadow
 mix in de sky
 is a half-caste weather?
 Well in dat case
 chaiko weather
 nearly always half-caste
 in fact some o dem cloud
 half-caste till dem overcast
 so spiteful dem don't want de sun pass
 (...)

Half-Caste and other poems, 2004.

4.1.1 Description of the Didactic Activity in Relation to “Half-Caste”

- 12 Standard English is to be understood here as a variety of English.

31The students view John Agard's performance of his poem "Half-Caste". They are asked by the teacher to take notes during the viewing and given access to the poem's text. The teacher then separates the group into pairs and asks them to discuss the poem. She gives them a number of instructions: to compare the language in the poem to that of standard English; 12 to look at the rhythm of the poem, the prosody and how the words are organised on the page; to think about the way the poet is addressing his readers and the way the reader is positioned in the poem; to think about what is meant by "half-caste" and how the poet uses the word.

32Included as appendix no.1 is an extract of the transcription of the exchange between the teacher and the students following this pairwork activity.

4.1.2 Analysis of the Didactic Activity in Relation to « Half-Caste »

33A common epistemic background emerged within the group as a result of the interactions between the teacher and the students.

34**Finding One:** In encouraging the students to share their reflections on the poem (e.g., What do you think is going on? What's going on with language? Speech Turn 1), the students are guided by the teacher to contribute a number of pertinent observations: Meg introduces the idea that the language is more orally based than written ("... his writing, he wrote in a very oral way" Speech Turn 4); Elise introduces the fact that the language has phonetic particularities ("th" becoming "d's" and the "you" becomes "yu" Speech Turn 8); Ahmed and Marie notice there is a word play on the word "cast" with half-caste, and the word shadow ("...there's another with the word shadow" Speech Turns 12-15).

35In discovering the way language is used in this poem the students can be seen to be acquiring specialised terms (the *jargon*) to describe and discuss poetry; this was seen as a sign of their developing the critical literacy aspect of poetry as a practice. It was also seen as a sign of their gaining an insight into literary and cultural issues in transcultural poetry as a genre. That is to say, issues of in-betweenness, bi-culturalism and identity, which can be seen as inherent in the *thought style* of transcultural poetry as a body of knowledge.

36**Finding Two:** The students have not as yet identified some key aspects of the poem. Following this preliminary exchange, the teacher strongly encourages the students to go beyond their

observations to interpret the tone of the poem ("he goes further than that, doesn't he?" (Speech Turn 17), "Yes, sending people back to their contradictions" Speech Turn 19). She also asks them to focus on dialogue as a technique ("Can somebody say something about the dialogue?" (Speech Turn 19). The group recognise that by addressing the reader or listener by "you", the message of the poem is more powerful ("One of the ways poetry avoids being overtly political is by setting up this personal "explain yuself" (Speech Turn 21). A student (Jean) suggests that this forces the reader to question their own position on racism ("we have to wonder ourselves if we are racist" Speech Turn 22). The teacher ends with a general description of the style of the poem "a satirical poem, it provides a critique of society" (Speech Turn 23).

37The following ways in which language is used in this exchange were seen as signs of the students acquiring the *thought style* of the culture of poetry: discussion of the dialogue, the provocative stance of the poem, the satirical strategy of the poem, its use of metaphor and polysemy ("cast"), and technique (addressing the reader personally), or dialect (creolised English). These can be considered as examples of the *jargon* of the practice; it was in acquiring and practicing the *jargon* of the practice that students could be seen to gain insight into the *thought style* of the culture of poetry, thereby expanding their understanding of poetry as a creative practice and potentially empowering them to use the culture as a model in their own productions.

38The poem explored also provided the students with a poignant illustration of the private/public divide (the ending reads as follows: "I half-caste human being / cast half-a-shadow / but yu must come back tomorrow / wid de whole of yu eye / an de whole of yu ear / an de whole of yu mind. / an I will tell yu / de other half / of my story"). It provided an example of a very strong voice and the power of poetry as a model, so that whilst acquiring the *jargon* of literary criticism to interpret the message of the poem, the students potentially became aware of the poem, and poetry in general, as a means to empower individuals through the creative use of language. Evidence of a student becoming empowered by the model of a poem to find a strong voice can be seen with the student production inspired by a Jackie Kay poem in Example 1 below.

5. An Example of a Creative Writing Activity

39Interspersed between the critical literacy activities such as that described above, a range of plurilingual, creative writing activities were introduced to the students as opportunities for them to stretch their own boundaries and explore language and identity. An example of such an activity is presented as appendix no.2.

5.1 Analysis of the Creative Writing Activity

40In this optionally plurilingual activity, students were encouraged to delve into each other's language repertoire. Seeing and hearing their own words or phrases woven into someone else's signifying chain, or writing a text that incorporated other students' signifiers which, in the process, had become their own – these creative acts sought to enable students to step back from a certain self-image in the direction of a more fluid, self-confident, plural identity. As Mikhail Epstein states, "Transculture is a freedom that cannot be proclaimed, but only sought and partly realised through the risky experience of one's own cultural wanderings and transmutations" (2009). This transcultural, translanguaging (Williams, 1980; Garcia, 2009) aspect to the creative writing activities also broadened the spectrum of possible senses of self that were opened to the students, inviting them to explore a kind of "supra-cultural" creativity. After this plurilingual practice, the final version of their poems was often monolingual (many of our students take great pleasure from writing in English) but, we would contend, in a style enriched by the plurilingual experience.

6. Findings

41The following poems were produced as a cumulative result of the activities described, as was the example of a self-reflexive comment on the work undertaken. The productions were analysed in relation to the epistemic potential inherent in the course using the notions of *jargon* and *thought style*. This enabled the identification of signs of an emerging *thought style* of poetry as creative expression in student productions.

6.1 Example 1: Personal theme of family conflict

42In our first example (appendix no.1) which apparently contains autobiographical elements, the author's reflexive comment indicates the way reading poetry dealing with family conflict enabled them to use the word-building process of poetry, the *jargon*, to explore conflict in his own family. Certain elements from the Jackie Kay poem may have been transformed and reused by the student: "so part I must,/and quickly" might be discerned in "I am hungry to free myself from you", and the punning phrase "Father, your breath/smells like a camel's and gives me the hump" possibly suggested the following metaphor: "I saw all the changes/How years smoked your soul like a cigarette" (the camel in Kay's poem leads to the famous cigarette brand).

43In this way the extracts can be seen to be inspired by the style and content (the *jargon*) of poems analysed in class; this can be seen as evidence of the student exploring the fundamental relationship between criticism and creation and in doing so developing not only literary critical skills in relation to transcultural poetry as a genre, but also a strong voice of creative expression, inspired by the model. It was thus considered to be evidence of the student acquiring the *jargon* of poetry as a creative writing practice and in doing so developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to this body of knowledge.

6.2 Example 2: From the personal to the universal

44The second example (appendix no.2) is a production that resulted from the writing assignment presented above (5). The everyday activity evoked, with references to "click on the goddamn link" and "This computer my only friend/My only tutor until the end", conjures up student life and online teaching during lockdown. The student chose the protection of national health as the overarching norm that the class were asked to identify as part of the assignment.

45In this poem, the author moves into the public sphere and explores feelings of injustice and rebelliousness with respect to the doxa concerning safety; he propounds a new cultural entity and sense of belonging – the "lost generation" of COVID 19. As presented in the description of the writing activity, students are invited to write collaboratively. The poem thus takes off with words and phrases provided by another student and expands thanks to a strong rhythmic scheme (tetrameters and rhyming couplets) reminiscent of the English nursery rhyme. The poem is an example of how personal frustration ("Oh I miss that brown-eyed girl") and recalcitrance can translate to political dissidence, and offers variations on the theme of identity, from individual to generational.

46The use of language in this poem (the *jargon*) was seen as an example of a student recapturing the pleasure of the Mother tongue in their production and not writing automatically "as themselves"; that is to say, not writing using a socially-imposed form of language, but one infused with something irrigated by the primary relationship with language. It was also seen as an example of a student finding a strong voice to express the frustration of their generation; a nuance of something of the epic poem, expressing the sense of a sacrificed generation. This was considered to be evidence of the student developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to creative expression as a practice.

6.3 Findings: Conclusions

47In the didactic activity in 4.1.2. students could be seen to use specialised terms (the *jargon*) to describe and discuss poetry. This was seen as evidence of their acquiring the critical literacy aspect of the *jargon* of poetry, and of their thus engaging in the culture of poetry and creative expression. In this way they were considered to be developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to this body of knowledge.

48In the student production on family conflict presented in 6.1, traces of the model of the Jackie Kay poem studied in class were discerned. These were considered to be signs of the student becoming empowered by the model of a Jackie Kay poem; that is to say, as evidence of their finding a strong voice of creative expression through exploring the fundamental relationship between criticism and creation. In this way they were considered to be developing an appropriate *jargon* and *thought style* with regard to literary criticism and creation as a body of knowledge.

49In the student production on the COVID-imposed social restrictions presented in 6.2, the student was seen to explore a strong voice with something of the pleasure of the Mother tongue. They were also observed to be writing not automatically, not “as themselves”. In this way they were considered to be developing an appropriate *jargon* and *thought style* with regard to creative expression. This example would appear to confirm the hypothesis that poetry is a fruitful genre for exploring the links between the personal and the universal, the public and the private, the original *lalangue* (Lacan) and the epic voice.

50These examples are potentially useful exemplars, in the sense used by Kuhn, for the foundations of a better understanding of creative writing and second and foreign language learning as a body of knowledge.

7. General Conclusion

51This article is an interdisciplinary contribution to a growing body of research which explores creative writing practices in second and foreign language learning. The study sought to identify the mechanisms at work in the teaching-learning practice of a creative writing and second language learning university course so as to contribute to this emerging field as a body of knowledge. The following conclusions were reached in answer to the questions addressed at the outset of the paper.

52First, as an epistemological underpinning for the study of creative writing, in particular as a language learning practice, a Wittgenstein conception of the nature of language was posited as a useful starting point. In this analysis, language is seen as being composed of *language games* within forms of life which produce certain *thought styles* (Fleck, 1935/2008; Bazerman, 1988; Sensevy, Gruson, Le Hénaff, 2019; Bloor, 2020; Bloor and Santini, 2022) together with an associated *jargon* (Sensevy *et al.* 2019; Bloor, 2020; Bloor and Santini, 2022).

53Second, the notions of *jargon* and *thought style* were thus posited as useful tools to explore the knowledge at stake in the creative activities undertaken in classroom practice, as well as the knowledge appropriated in effective learning during the course. The notions were the means used to identify the epistemic potential of this relatively new field, from which it became possible to define the criteria of the knowledge at stake. That is to say, the notions served to identify the linguistic and cultural aspects of poetry, particularly transcultural poetry, as a culturally constructed body of knowledge in didactic activity in class and in student productions. They also served to identify what were considered to be the recognisable features of creative writing, thereby making it possible to discern the epistemic value of student productions: students not writing “as themselves” was considered to be evidence of students developing an appropriate *thought style* with regard to creative expression.

54Third, with the use of these theoretical notions in a clinical approach, evidence was sought of students acquiring the style and content (the *jargon*) and appropriate apprehension (*thought style*) of literary criticism/creative expression as a cultural practice. The analysis of classroom practice identified effective learning where students were seen to be engaged in the *jargon* and *thought style* of critical literature. In the discussion of the poem “Half-Caste”, an example of frequent teacher-student discussions of this kind on the course, students were seen to be acquiring the critical literacy aspect of the *jargon* of poetry. In the student production presented in Example 1, traces of poetry-inspired creative writing were identified. The author could be seen to be inspired by the style and content (the *jargon*) of poems analysed in class in their creative expression, possibly illustrating a link between literary criticism and creative expression. In the student production presented in Example 2, the author could be seen to recapture something of the pleasure of the Mother tongue in their poem. They could also be considered to have reached a mode of expression straddling the private/public divide by means of a creative process involving writing not “as themselves”, not following their natural bent, but by decentering themselves and adopting other private spheres. In expressing the frustration of their generation, they appeared to gain insight into the links between the personal and the universal, the *lalangue* and the epic voice. These findings were considered to be signs of students developing the *jargon* and *thought style* of poetry and creative expression as a cultural practice and body of knowledge.

55Fourth, the results shed light on the hypotheses at the origin of the course. They appear to confirm that opportunities in a target language to explore identity in creative writing teaching-learning practice is an effective means for learners to develop a more authentic voice in that language. They

also suggest that, in this kind of work, learners can potentially harness something of the affect of the Mother tongue in their written expression.

56Future research exploring creative writing teaching-learning practices will help to clarify to what extent these results and the course hypotheses are valid. It will also serve to determine more precisely the mechanisms at work in these kinds of practices. The examples presented in this study, resulting from the analysis of the didactic activities which enabled learners to acquire the *jargon* and *thought style* of critical literacy and creative expression, are potentially useful exemplars, in the sense used by Kuhn, in this emerging field of research and practice. It is hoped they will contribute to the foundations of a better understanding of the field so as to contribute to its visibility as a body of knowledge.

57Many questions remain to be explored: how might such practices be shared? What potential do they offer for other educational environments? Research work based on similar interdisciplinary collaboration offers potential for further reflection. In exploring and defining the mechanisms at work in other examples of creative writing practice in second and foreign language learning, a more comprehensive view of this emerging field should emerge. In this way it will be possible to lend further insight into the potential of the practice, in particular with regard to their impact on the confidence and motivation of the learner, the learner's quest to find a style (Lecerle, 56), and finally, their impact on overall language proficiency.

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ANNEXE

Appendices

No.1

1. **Teacher:** Who'd like to comment? What do you make of this poem, "Half-Caste"? What do you think is going on? What's going on with language? What's the poet doing in this poem? (...)
Anyone like to set the ball rolling?
2. **Meg:** – Er, Yes
3. **Teacher:** Meg
4. **Meg:** We just talked about the fact that it was... erm, very oral, like his writing, he wrote in a very oral way.
5. **Teacher:** Yes, absolutely. To the extent of altering the spelling, the grammar, it's a sort of transcription – it reads like a transcription of speech. Yes.
6. **Elise:** – Can you hear me?
7. **Teacher:** Yes.
8. **Elise:** In this idea of spelling words. When you read the poem, even before listening to the poet reading it, you can hear his accent and almost guess that he is black but because I think that's all the way he uses to change words. It's usually regarded in linguistics black speakers with the "th" becoming "d's" and the "you" becomes "yu" or the disappearing of the last (...) at the end of words and I think usually in linguistics its linked to black speakers... he reclaims it...
9. **Teacher:** That's right, particularly Caribbean – he's a Caribbean speaker, the poet himself comes from Guyana. Caribbean Creole mixed with English. That's right.
10. **Ahmed:** There's a wordplay on the word cast...
11. **Teacher:** Sorry I didn't catch that...
12. **Ahmed:** There's a wordplay on the word cast – erm, there's two meanings for this. There's one meaning half-caste which is racist, and there's the meaning of cast as something you put on your leg when it's broken. Cast you put on something broken.
13. **Teacher:** Yes, a plaster cast. That's right.
14. **Marie:** ... and then at the end there's another with the word shadow.
15. **Teacher:** To cast a shadow, yes in English we say to cast a shadow, don't we? The speaker jokily says "cast a half-shadow".
16. **Ahmed:** (inaudible) ...and then there's the meaning of cast as something mixed and applied to other examples. Value ... (inaudible) mixed is not necessarily bad. It can also result in art and something.
17. **Teacher:** Yes, exactly, he goes further than that doesn't he? It's not simply saying that it's not necessarily bad. He goes a little bit further than that doesn't he, as you say, mixing can also result in art. ... it's a very provocative poem.
18. **Ahmed:** He's actually – this is how I understood it – he claims that people who are racist they basically put them into a lower place then they don't really understand the things (inaudible) they value Picasso, they value Tchaikovsky but they don't understand that these things are also part of a cultural process. So, he basically says you are racist when it's me but, er, that doesn't make sense.

So, look at yourself and look at the things you like and the things you value and it's all basically mixed.

19. **Teacher:** – Mixed, hybrid, yes that's right. Yes, sending people back to their contradictions. (...) Yes, everything you said is absolutely right. The white man's culture, the white man's values are shown to be mixed and hybrid. So, he is provoking white British people, sending them back to their contradictions – revealing contradictions in the white attitude. How does that – can somebody say something about the dialogue in the poem – it's a one-sided dialogue isn't it?

20. **Meg:** Maybe it's like confronting people because he's addressing to them "explain yuself what yu mean", so it's like he's talking to them actually.

21. **Teacher:** Yes, that's right. It's er as I say it's one side of a dialogue and er the speaker doesn't address a whole group, does he? He actually addresses an individual, there's a specific – there's an addressee who is a singular – "explain yuself" – it's not explain yourselves – he addresses an individual so that makes it more powerful. Makes it into a personal, one-to-one exchange. Even though we understand this addressee is more than one individual and that he or she represents white people, Brits generally. The fact of setting it up as a dialogue makes it more powerful, otherwise it would be like a speech, a political speech, or something. One of the ways poetry avoids being overtly political is by setting up this personal "explain yuself" – you do the explaining. The tone is mock aggressive. And mock apologetic: "excuse me standing on one leg" – it begins in an apologetic tone and then becomes more challenging and confrontational, with "explain yuself wha yu mean".

22. **Jean:** Maybe the use of 'you' also invites the reader to ask themselves the question – invites the reader to ask yourself a question as we live in a racist society. Here we are asked the question we have to wonder ourselves if we are racist.

23. **Teacher:** Absolutely – that's another aspect of the power of "you", the "you" in a literary text. A way of including the reader, putting the reader in that position of addressee having to look at themselves in the mirror. So this is a satirical poem, it provides a critique of society. When you read the poem you might feel uncomfortable and be forced to consider your own prejudices...

No.2

24. **Teacher:** Now, a creative writing exercise. (...) I want you to think of an everyday activity – cooking, shopping, sporting, cultural activities. Describe it in a few words – using just a few words: the sounds the sights, any other sensory perception that you associate with that activity. Just a few lines using prose not poetry, just describing an everyday activity. It can be doing the washing, cleaning the house, walking down the street. This is the first stage in building up a piece of poetry writing. An everyday activity. You can use English and French and you can use words from other languages too, mix the languages. (...) I'd like you to use the private chat to send your description along to the next person on the screen, so you should all end up with somebody else's activity and words and sense perceptions. The concept is to write down a chosen activity and then to pass it on to someone else. (...)

25. **Teacher:** Next stage. Read the sentence or the words you have received. Now think of the norms that surround that activity, as it is practiced in contemporary society – the language, the equipment, the accessories – think of an overarching term to describe it. Something akin to "slimness", as in Grace Nichols's poem. [13](#) I don't know how easy that will be. The conventions, norms, gear, clothing, equipment – try and think of an overarching abstract term to represent all of that, like "fitness" or "healthy eating".

26. **Student Ninon:** Is the norm supposed to be in opposition with the activity or not at all?

27. **Teacher:** No not at all – the overarching norm for that activity in our society.

28. **Student Emeline:** I'm sorry I don't really understand

29. **Teacher:** Think about the last poem (this is a reference to "The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping" by Grace Nichols) – the pretty-faced sales girls, thin – the social norms the woman encounters when she goes shopping. I'm trying to get you to do something similar. On the one hand you should have sensory perceptions related to sounds, sights, smells, on the other hand the norms

that go with that activity, and then the idea is to put them together as a poem, but without being part of it, with a feeling of unbelonging – a poem in which you somehow manage to challenge those social norms...

No.3

<p>Student's Poem</p> <p>Father, I am hungry to free myself from you I would like you to disappear To breathe and feel my heart full To jump into life like a deer I hate everything you've done From the old world you represent From this nightmare I resent All my love is gone I saw all the changes How years smoked your soul like a cigarette As life left me heartless I must escape from your threat</p>	<p>Student's Commentary on the Course</p> <p>I really appreciated working on the art of Jackie Kay, through "Divorce" (Kay, 2007) and the other poems.... In her poems talking about family, I really read some poems with my heart, feeling what was described. This is in this spirit that I also wanted to write my creative writing. Inspired by "Divorce" and other poems, I have put in a little bit from my own experience, inspired by Jackie Kay's words and treatment of this kind of conflictual relationships</p>
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No.4

Insanity		
<p>Rise at eight or nine "clock, Embrace this mere lifeless block, This computer, my only friend, My only tutor, until the end, Sit at the chair, Already full of despair, Act like nothing could go wrong, End up sitting all day long, I click on the goddamn link, In pain and depression I sink, I could't care less what the teacher</p>	<p>Oh I miss that brown-eyed girl, And the outside world, I long to see the southern air, Gently caressing her silky hair, Oh I long to see her beautiful smile, Stretching from mile to mile,</p>	<p>I'm the bird in a cage, A'd I'll die of old age, If I remain a slave, Locked in this lonely cav', I'm the politician in exile, Running from tyranny evading trial, A'd I'll die with the herd, If I won't spread my wor',</p>

said, But if this course persists 'd rather be dead, ““Show me your beautiful face”” Said the teacher with grace, But I give her a black screen, And 'm nowhere to be seen, In the meanwhile I go serve myself a drink, Stop for a moment and think, If humans were meant to be free, Then wher''s my right to be?	Singing her song, And lighting my heart along, Online education is a joke, Mr president please stay off the coke, You mus''ve been strung out, Thinking this would ever work out, Judge where are you taking uI. Our unsteady rocky bus, Is on the brink of collapsing, And the damage is surely ever-lastin'	I'm the poet in pain, Creatively in chains, A'd I'll die forever, If a't I'll never, My identity d'esn't matter, When the governor is getting fatter, Sucking on the blood of the youth, Distorting the bounds of the truth, All join now to pay the price, Our youth our life we sacrifice, On the altar of humanity, Lies the key to insanity
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NOTES

1 Poetry that explores the experience of living between languages and cultures, by poets from the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland...) or with a Commonwealth country childhood or heritage (Guyana, Nigeria, Jamaica...).

2 Translation by Tracy Bloor. See « connaisseur pratique » : http://tacd.espebretagne.fr/glossaire/?name_directory_startswith=C#name_directory_positi on.

3 « Preuves culturelles ». Translation by Tracy Bloor. « Vers une épistémologie des preuves culturelles », Gérard Sensevy, Education & didactique, 2022/2, p.149. Pour le terme « accomplissement », Art de Faire Ensemble, Collectif Didactique pour enseigner, in press.

4 In the sense used by Kuhn (1970/1996).

5 Cf. Christine Collière-Whitehead's contribution to this issue.

6 Cf. the Skin-voice (« Voix-peau ») in Sara Greaves, Côté guerre côté jardin : excursions dans la poésie de James Fenton, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2016.

7 For instance: Scottish poets Jackie Kay and Tom Leonard, Guyanese poets Grace Nichols, Fred D'Aguiar and David Dabydeen, Jamaican poet Kei Miller and Benjamin Zaphaniah, Anglo-Nigerian poet Patience Agbabi, Indian poet Sujata Bhatt...

8 Cf. Monique De Mattia-Viviès's original article, in French: « Entrer dans la langue ou dans les langues : de la langue maternelle à la langue mat-rangère », E-rea, 16.1, 2018. See also Sara Greaves's contribution to this issue, "Transports of Translation".

9 This includes the impact of criticism on writers (the example of Keats comes to mind, with the negative reviews of Endymion in 1818) to the auctorial knowledge provided by authors on the mechanisms at work in literary writing, as discussed for instance in Florent Da Sylva, Les ressorts narratologiques et stylistiques de la Young Adult fiction et leur redéploiement dans l'écriture créative à l'université : les cas de Veronica Roth, Sabaa Tahir et Tomi Adeyemi, PhD thesis defended in November 2021.

10 <https://www.ouliipo.net/>.

11 Our translation of "L'auteur oulipien est un rat qui construit lui-même le labyrinthe dont il se propose de sortir", Raymond Queneau, Oulipo, *Abrégé de littérature potentielle*, <https://www.ouliipo.net/fr/abrege-de-litterature-potentielle>.

12 Standard English is to be understood here as a variety of English.

13 The poem that inspired this writing exercise was "The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping" by Guyanese poet Grace Nichols, taken from *The Fat Black Woman Poems*, Virago Press, 1984.
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POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

Référence électronique

Tracy BLOOR et Sara GREAVES, « Creative writing teaching-learning practice in second language learning: a didactic study », *E-rea* [En ligne], 20.1 | 2022, mis en ligne le 15 décembre 2022, consulté le 31 janvier 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/erea/15504> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.15504>
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- [Daniela Hăisan \(coord.\), Atelier de traduction N°24.](#) [Texte intégral]

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