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**CREATIVE WRITING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING:  
NECESSITY OR ACCESSORY?****Aleksandra V. Hackett-Jones**

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**Abstract.** The present article is devoted to the notion of creative writing as an essential tool and an undervalued and underused scaffold in the process of second foreign language instruction and acquisition. The author aims at specifying such terms as scaffolded instruction and creative writing, in order to prove the point that numerous limitations that characterize the second foreign language teaching process make a constant search for optimal methods indispensable, and creative writing can become an extremely useful resource in this regard, serving not as an accessory but a necessity, adaptable to those limitations. To conduct the research described, mixed methods have proven most efficient, including but not limited to observation and analytical research of language models, descriptive research conducted individually, in pairs or in groups; and project-based creative flow implemented within the framework of the interpretative and communicative language teaching models. Research has shown that creative writing as a teaching technique can be fully aligned with the main principles of scaffolded instruction and may contribute to creating a conducive teaching setting in which academic, personal, and linguistic progress of a student is prompted by additional motivation and varied sources of support. The article promotes the idea that techniques and methods described do not require additional classroom time or any radical changes of existing syllabi but rather can help make learning more efficient within the current restrictive educational setting for the second foreign language due to their high flexibility and adaptability. The article contains practical suggestions and hands-on solutions for incorporating them into a present-day higher educational institution curriculum for language students.

**Keywords:** pedagogical universities; students; English language; methods of teaching English; methods of teaching English at university; second foreign language; education process; teaching methods; teaching writing; linguo-methodological support; multilingualism; creative writing; student's personality

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**КРЕАТИВНОЕ ПИСЬМО В ОБУЧЕНИИ ЯЗЫКУ:  
НЕОБХОДИМОСТЬ ИЛИ ИЗЛИШЕСТВО?****Хэкетт-Джонс А. В.**

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**А н н о т а ц и я .** Настоящая статья посвящена проблеме использования технологий креативного письма в лингвометодическом процессе и призвана привлечь внимание к нему как к важному инструменту и недооцененному источнику лингвометодической поддержки, чей потенциал в настоящее время не задействован в отечественной системе образования в полной мере. Автор ставит своей целью рассмотрение и уточнение таких понятий, как скаффолдинг и креативное письмо. Статья предпринимает попытку доказать, что те ограничения, которые характеризуют процесс обучения второму иностранному языку, требуют постоянного поиска наиболее оптимальных методов обучения и креативное письмо в этой связи может стать эффективным и продуктивным ресурсом, являющимся не излишеством, а необходимостью, благодаря своей уникальной гибкости и адаптируемости к этим ограничениям. Тезисы, выдвигаемые в статье, подкреплены описанным опытом практического применения данной методологии и интеграции креативного письма в существующие учебные планы в рамках обучения английскому языку как второму иностранному студентам Института иностранных языков Российского государственного педагогического университета им. А. И. Герцена. С целью проведения настоящего исследования были применены смешанные методы, включая эмпирическое наблюдение, аналитическое исследование языковых моделей, описательные методы исследования в применении к индивидуальной, парной и групповой работе с участниками процесса обучения, реализованной в рамках интерпретативной и коммуникативной моделей языкового обучения. Исследования показали, что креативное письмо как технология обучения находится в полном соответствии с главными принципами скаффолдинга и вносит важный вклад в создание такого образовательного контекста, который способствует развитию академического, личностного и лингвистического прогресса обучающегося. Описанные технологии и методы не требуют дополнительного аудиторного времени или радикальных изменений в текущих программах дисциплин, но, напротив, могут помочь достичь большей эффективности образовательного процесса в рамках заданного контекста обучения второму иностранному языку со всеми его ограничениями.

**К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а :** педагогические вузы; студенты; английский язык; методика преподавания английского языка; методика английского языка в вузе; второй иностранный язык; образовательный процесс; методы обучения; обучение письму; лингвометодическая поддержка; плюрилингвизм; креативное письмо; личность студента

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## Introduction

The second foreign language classroom is in its essence a model of plurilingual communication recreated in an educational setting. From the standpoint of plurilingualism, as opposed to multilingualism, all languages in which the speaker has some level of command (both native and non-native), coexist and interact in their language and culture mentality, producing a unique background for the teaching process. In line with this understanding, the current article will refer to the personal experience by the author of teaching English as a second foreign language to students majoring in a variety of Oriental and European languages at Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia in St Petersburg, Russia. All of them can be described as trilingual to various degrees.

Teaching a second foreign language has its specific characteristics that can both foster and hinder the educational process. On the one hand, the advantages of third language learners in comparison to second language learners are broadly described as “highly developed learning strategies, metalinguistic awareness and communicative sensitivity” [Cenoz, Hufelsen, Jessner 2001]. At the same time, there is no doubt that the second foreign language students require extra academic support due to the unique complications of the process, ranging from the reduced number of academic hours in the curriculum (in comparison to the first foreign language) to various kinds of interference that take place as languages come together in a learner's mind.

The general consensus that has emerged over the years from multilingual studies, is that speakers of multiple languages require more ‘scaffolds’ to support them in their acquisition of a further foreign language (as compared to their native and their first language). In agreement with the concept of scaffolded instruction, those scaffolds can be removed one by one as the development of skills progresses and the speaker becomes more and more independent in their linguistic behaviour. Based on Jerome Bruner's definition [Bruner 1983: 60], scaffolded instruction can be described as the process of “creating an academic setting aimed at making the student's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the student as they become skilled enough to manage it” (the original definition by Bruner was applied to ‘children’ rather than ‘students’).

The question remains as to what kinds of scaffolds prove to be most efficient for the second language teaching process. This paper is an attempt at proving that creative writing can achieve maximum results at minimum time costs and helps to unlock the potential of students not only in their linguistic ability but also a much wider range of competences essential for a 21st century citizen and language expert.

With those considerations in mind, the main objective of this article can be formulated as making a

case for creative writing to be used as a scaffold in second language teaching. In order to achieve this, the paper aims at resolving the following tasks:

- to specify the term ‘scaffolded instruction’ and its relevance to second foreign language teaching;
- to analyse the potential of creative writing as a scaffold;
- to cover the basic classifications of scaffolds and bring them into correlation with the notion of creative writing;
- to share real-life experience of the application of the methodology described, supplemented by relevant examples of scaffolding tasks for creative writing activities;
- to speculate on further advantages of creative writing practices going beyond linguistic instruction.

## Scaffolding in Second Foreign Language Teaching

As we have already established, speakers of multiple languages require a higher number and a wider range of ‘scaffolds’ in their acquisition of a further foreign language that are to be gradually removed. Before we look at the specific examples of scaffolding, let us briefly look at the origin and the essence of this notion.

The term ‘scaffolded instruction’ popularized by J. Bruner, originated from the sociocultural theory developed by the Russian psychologist & educator Lev Vygotsky on the so-called Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), interpreted as the central area in which all learning by an individual takes place. The main thesis of this theory stipulated that learning could only occur and be effective after the learner had formed the appropriate mental functions for that learning to happen. Everything that failed to comply with this principle could be dismissed as premature instruction, with no anticipation of any result. When defining the specific location of ZPD, Vygotsky described it as the space between an individual's independent activities and those that require interference (help) from a competent assistant [Vygotsky 1978: 91]. Lev Vygotsky died in 1934 but it wasn't until the 1980s that his ideas started revealing their full potential when incorporated into pedagogy.

An in-depth understanding of the nature of scaffolding as a teaching method is offered by Aida Walqui who suggests viewing scaffolding as a system of three interrelated axes underlying the instructional process. The researcher describes those three components as pedagogical ‘scales’ and names them simply Scaffolding 1, 2, and 3, where Scaffolding 1 refers to a planned syllabus (classroom work as designed for a given period of time), Scaffolding 2 denotes the relevant application of specific procedures to the activities set out in the curriculum, and Scaffolding 3 deals with the actualization of Scaffolding 2 and reveals itself in the ‘collaborative process of interaction’ [Walqui 2006: 164]. With this in action, learners are provided with a three-level support system, where the most overarching system

(Scaffolding 1) outlines the general structure within which target competences and skills develop on the basis of pre-planned learning activities; the specific scaffolds incorporated into the implementation of those activities make the second level of support (Scaffolding 2), and the third support system involves (in various combinations) all the participants of the learning process rather than just the learner and the task, or the learner and the instructor. Such a comprehensive scaffolding system ensures maximum involvement of the learners and optimal assistance provided to them and, despite requiring what seems to be a significant additional effort on the part of the teacher, produces the efficacy of results that fully compensates for that.

In more recent years, scaffolding was mainly viewed in research papers from the social and cultural perspective, describing various forms of the initiation – response – feedback (IRF) model, including the use of their native language as a scaffold to facilitate “the joint construction of learning opportunities” [Mahroof 2017: 301]. This agrees with the emerging notion of translanguaging pedagogy, which is a shift in teaching that aims at approaching the learner’s linguistic repertoire holistically, as an integrated system rather than a combination of languages [Barratt 2021: 171].

Other researchers, such as D. K. Lascotte, focus on more specific scaffolds, for example the use of writing as a scaffold for academic discussions. Scaffolding academic language development with pre-writing tasks, according to the author, lessens the speaker’s anxiety and increases the levels of grammar accuracy and vocabulary precision [LaScotte 2018: 31]. The author mostly refers to rush-writing, which presupposes continuous writing for a limited time (5 minutes) in response to a given prompt, but other techniques are also mentioned: mind-mapping, brainstorming, clustering, journaling – all of which are essentially creative writing tools [Ibid: 30], very much in accordance with some of the essential techniques to build up creative thinkers, as listed in the seminal work on teaching creative writing by B. Lucas and E. Spencer [Lucas, Spencer 2022: 49].

Even a brief overview of academic research in the field of scaffolding over the last five years, both abroad and at home, attests to the fact that the academic interest to its application to the teaching process does not diminish over time, as papers abound on how scaffolds of various types can be deployed in an educational setting – the sheer number of scaffolding strategies and subjects to which they can be applied present almost limitless research opportunities.

### Scaffolds Classified

The further nature of scaffolding as a teaching method can be indicatively reflected in the classifications of the types of scaffolds described and identified in research literature. Without going into much detail unnecessary for the current purposes, let us state the main three types into which scaffolds have been traditionally divided [Echevarria, Vogt, Short 2010: 86–87]:

(1) Verbal Scaffolding, which focuses on language development, includes various verbal techniques for assisting the learning and covers a wide

array of verbal prompts, starting from reinforced articulation, using rhythm and rhyme and continuing to more complex methods such as paraphrasing, giving synonyms and opposites, providing corrective feedback, elaborating on student responses, etc.

(2) Procedural Scaffolding, which refers to grouping techniques and activity frames, involves the most efficient ways to pair and group learners for various activities, including discussion, role plays, simulations. A special significance here is attributed to creating a classroom setting where more expert students work with less expert colleagues. For obvious reasons, depending on the type of activity, the level of expertise across the classroom can change quite drastically, and a student who might have established themselves as more knowledgeable in academic debate, can turn out to be less of an expert when it comes to role playing or team projects.

(3) Instructional Scaffolding, which denotes a range of learning support tools, can refer to visual and material resources available in the classroom, from imagery and prompt cards to more interactive facilities at hand.

Among Russian writers, an extensive attempt to classify a wide range of scaffolds was undertaken by K. M. Inozemtseva [2015]. The main three groups of scaffolds according to her classification can be identified as:

- visual (word walls, charts, schemes, diagrams);
- verbal (writing frames and prompts);
- operational (joint writing projects, classroom games and activities).

Even a brief surface overview of the classifications mentioned above allows the reader to see that they are not inconsistent with each other and refer to the same three levels of classroom action and similar sources of support that make the essence of scaffolding: verbalized support (‘this is how you do it’ sort of a prompt), activity-based support (‘this is what we’ll do to help you’), and interactive support (‘this is who you do it with and for what purpose’).

### Reassessing Creative Writing as a Scaffold for Language Teaching

With those general ideas of scaffolded instruction in mind, where does creative writing fit in? First of all, let us start with a working definition of Creative Writing as a discipline. An Oxford definition borrowed from their summer courses website describes creative writing as “the process of crafting original and imaginative works of literature, poetry, prose, or scripts”<sup>1</sup>. Following this logic, creative writing as a teaching method is an academic tool aimed at crafting (and drafting) creative texts for specific academic purposes.

While a distinct academic field with its vast research legacy in the Western world, creative writing (unless applied to professional writers and literary

<sup>1</sup> A Look into Creative Writing: Oxford Summer Courses. URL: <https://oxfordsummercourses.com/articles/what-is-creative-writing/> (mode of access: 22.10.2025).

critics) remains somewhat of a hobbyist activity, an accessory, if not a 'folly', from the point of view of Russian academia, and does not seem to have found its way even into the curricula of language specialists at the university level. The contrast could not be more striking between the general attitude to creative writing as a domain of very narrow application in Russia and ideas expressed in such foreign publications as for example, Elena Traina's 2021 paper on teaching creative writing in Europe, stating, "We are living in a golden age of creative writing studies, which seems to suggest that anglophone academia is moving past the historical conflict between creativity and research" [Traina 2021: 1].

An overview of the most recent Russian research papers on creative writing seem to reflect the general consensus on creative writing not being employed to its full potential in the system of linguistic education. The current federal standard, as pointed out by the authors, does not single out creative writing as a compulsory discipline, however, the skill set future linguists are expected to exhibit, can be fully mastered and showcased in creative activities, from critically analyzing foreign language texts and producing your own to making confident choices among the variety of linguistic means at your disposal [Zabolotneva, Kozhuhova 2023: 109]. Additionally, the National Doctrine on Education and various national projects proclaim the necessity of producing specialists capable of creativity and initiativeness [Kizrina 2022: 271].

Staying on track with the technological challenges and changes of today, many researchers address the issues of integrating AI into creative writing processes, and enhancing the latter through AI-generated texts, captions, and images [Zabolotneva, Kozhuhova 2023: 118–119]. A conservative mind would object to this strongly, claiming that AI-involvement would kill rather than help evolve anyone's creativity, especially that of a learner. To counteract this thinking, a group of researchers from Bangladesh examined 600 students from 10 universities across the country to put to test the hypothetical issue of the potential harm of AI (namely ChatGPT) on creative capacities of students and came to the following conclusion: while it does harm creative expression, it significantly improves academic writing skills and critical thinking [Niloy et al. 2024: 919–921]. The complex relationship between AI and creativity is described in some works as being in direct opposition to each other: creativity is the foundation of our critical and lateral thinking, helping build the skills to find non-standard solutions, so creative intellect might be the last resource we could have over AI, while competing with it on the cognitive level will become ever increasingly impossible [Hackett-Jones 2025: 852].

So why is creative writing so underused and undervalued in the Russian educational system? S. Pitina and A. Shcherbov sum it up very well in four short reasons: 1) lack of time; 2) lack of a specially designated course; 3) discrepancy in language levels within one group of students, and 4) lack of motivation [Pitina, Shcherbov 2021: 87–88]. It would only be fair to add to these that the discrepancy in language levels is more

prevalent in groups studying English as a second foreign language than anywhere else, and that the lack of motivation refers to students as much as it does to teachers.

Positive implications of scaffolding on the learner's writing skills in general and creative writing specifically, have been amply discussed and described in research literature. One of more recent surveys by G. Sidky who staged an experiment to trace the progress of her students mastering three various genres through such scaffolding techniques as writing workshop and peer editing, came to the conclusion that the participants showed noticeable improvement in all criteria assessed, and that the results of her experiment confirmed those drawn by generations of researchers before her, and that conclusion was reinforced by an impressive list of references, from Pearson, 1996 to Nguyen, 2013, who studied the positive influence of scaffolding on all language levels, to more specific research papers aiming at analysing the effect of peer editing and writing workshops, where again, authors from Avery, 1993 and Calkins and Graves, 1994; to Barnard, 2002 and Kelly, 2009, have all drawn the same conclusion [Sidky 2019: 968]. So, seemingly, it really does not need any further proving: it works. So where is the potential for further research? In our understanding, further research must be aligned with the idea that creative writing is not an accessory but a necessity for the language learning process, especially in the restrictive setting of the second foreign language teaching.

### Materials and Methods

Creative writing is a natural consequence of creative reading, which makes it essential to use a selection of fictional texts that also serve as 'scaffolds' in the teaching process, as they can be used as models, sources for inspiration, and material for interpretation with a further intention to implement some of those patterns in the student's original work. It is essential to mention the possible limitations to the observation and analytical research of language models, namely the critical importance of taking into account the academic background of the student, extending to both their previously learnt languages and their previously acquired learning skills, when selecting such scaffolding materials. However, as this article has striven to prove, creative writing techniques are characterised by their flexibility and adaptability to any level of language competence of the learners.

The fact that research methods encompassed both individual work as well as working in pairs or in groups held in itself further implications for the effectiveness of using creative writing as a scaffold; while the use of interpretative and communicative language teaching models implemented have attested to the efficiency of creative writing as a scaffolding technique for learners of the second foreign language.

### Integrating Creative Writing into Existing Curricula: Experience of Practical Application

Relying on the understanding of the essential nature of integrating creative writing as a component of scaffolded instruction into the second foreign lan-

guage teaching process, as described earlier, and the conclusions drawn from earlier research, practical steps were undertaken to put these ideas to test and, most importantly, see if integrating creative writing is feasible within the restrictive hours of the study programmes aimed at teaching English as a second foreign language at Herzen university, St Petersburg, to students of the Institute of Foreign Languages specialising in Oriental (Chinese and Korean) and European (German and Finnish) languages as their first foreign language. Over the academic years 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 creative writing methods were introduced and implemented as a scaffold to their formal syllabus.

The three levels of a scaffolding support system, as described earlier, were taken into account when planning the integration of creative writing methods into the teaching process and produced the following component structure.

(1) Verbalized scaffolding: based on reading.

The famous maxim states that there can be no writing without reading, and this is more relevant in a classroom setting than anywhere else. The early 19th century English writer Charles Caleb Colton in his work 'Lacon: or Many Things in Few Words', first published in 1820, states that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" (a quote often mistakenly attributed to Oscar Wilde) [Colton 1824: 114]. Later G. B. Shaw very cleverly retorted, "Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery – it's the sincerest form of learning", and this maxim gained such immense popularity in educational circles of various kinds that it became virtually impossible to trace back the original quote<sup>1</sup>. The idea that imitation has a vast potential for both learning and self-development has firmly established itself as a given. To further expand this thought, imitation is all of the above, and also the main mechanism of language acquisition. In order to create their own material, students should be exposed to a wide assortment of linguistic models, carefully selected samples that are both inspirational and reproducible.

In order to inspire and motivate students to try their own skills at creative writing, it is crucial to provide them with texts ('samples') displaying instances of a successful use of specific techniques and skills, such as character building, writing compelling dialogues, narrating from a specific point of view, and others. One such example often quoted in creative writing handbooks is the short story by Dave Eggers called 'After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned' [Eggers 2005], written from the point of view of a dog. It is this attempt at thinking outside the box, looking at things from an unusual perspective and speculating on what it would be like to have an entirely different perception, that stimulates imagination and prompts students to experiment with the means available to them.

Another source of literary material that has proved to be both engaging and digestible, is the type

of poetry that has established itself in the West as a full-fledged genre of Instagram\*-poetry (\*belongs to Meta Platforms Inc., which is currently banned in Russia). The personal favourite of the author of this article is the deeply emotional while seemingly (deceivingly!) simplistic poetry by Rupi Kaur [2018], a Canadian poet of Indian origin, whose short verses accompanied by deliberately primitive drawings have gained the love of multi-million audiences all over the world. Her poems can be used in the classroom to illustrate how much can be said in very few words and very basic grammar structures. The truly magical effect of such poetry is what happens between the words, between the lines, between the sounds. To students it feels like a breath of fresh air and a true source of empowerment. Suddenly, instead of being dictated what to say and how to say it and getting reprimanded for not complying with the precise requirements stipulated by the teaching process, they get the freedom to choose their own means of expression for the meaning they want to create. This newly acquired freedom often surprises themselves even more than it does the teacher, when students arrive at the discovery that they are able and skilled in doing a lot more than they were willing to concede, and, what they do not yet have the capacities for, suddenly becomes a much more urgent and desirable study objective.

This type of activity is more time consuming than others due to the necessity of familiarising yourself with the sample first and then coming up with the creative imitation so it is best used as homework. When preparing the homework and checking their work in class, students are grouped in accordance with the mechanisms described later (see point 3, "Interactive scaffolding: based on grouping").

(2) Activity-based scaffolding: based on prompting.

'Prompting' in this context refers to specific creative writing activities, such as 10-minute writing prompts (to be further explained in detail), linguistic models to imitate and experiment with, and students' own ideas. These can include short texts in prose and verse and be as complicated or simple as necessary for a given academic purpose.

A critical point to be made in this regard is the virtually endless adaptability of creative writing techniques to any target audience, any topic under discussion, and, most importantly, any level of linguistic competences and abilities of learners. To illustrate this thesis, let us look at how creative writing can be used as a scaffold even at the most elementary level. Alan Maley, a British ELT specialist with dozens of years of expertise in creative writing, suggests the so-called 'Hello/Goodbye poems' activity where students follow a very rigid and limited language sample: two lines, two words in each line, the first word in each line is prerequisite by the task itself. A prompt card to this task would have a simple look as follows:

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

Goodbye \_\_\_\_\_.

Even such a restricted choice of creative expression can produce quite unexpected results, with humorous or even dramatic undertones:

<sup>1</sup> Viera Ch. 2024 New Year's Resolutions for Researchers. URL: <https://www.aje.com/arc/new-years-resolutions-for-researchers/> (mode of access: 22.10.2025).

*Hello smoking,  
Goodbye health.*

*Hello paper,  
Goodbye trees [Maley 2012].*

Other examples that have proven their efficiency in the process of teaching English as the second foreign language to students majoring in linguistics and methodology at Herzen State Pedagogical university of Russia (St Petersburg, Russia), are summarized in the table below. To illustrate the point of extreme adaptability and adjustability of creative writing techniques, the author of the current article has selected several specific topics dealing with various language aspects to be covered in accordance with the curriculum. In the left column you can see the language as-

pect and the specific topic under consideration, the middle column presents the creative writing prompts that can be used in support of issues studied, and the right-hand-side column offers an extract of a sample for what sort of text could be produced to the prompt given. The full-text sample can serve as a scaffold for beginner-level groups or weaker students, and as their competence progresses and they become more independent, such prompts could be offered as a text with gaps to be filled in. At more advanced levels, samples become unnecessary and can be discarded by students as they freely create their own texts to prompts without having to rely on scaffolds.

Table 1

*Activity-based scaffolding for creative writing activities*

| Objectives according to the university curriculum (Language Aspect / Specific Topic) | Creative Writing Prompts                                                                                                                           | Creative Writing Samples                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phonetics: Interdental and fricative sounds                                          | 1. One-word poems or stories: writing a poem or a story consisting of one-word sentences only                                                      | <i>Things. Thieves!<br/>Theft.<br/>There.<br/>Sigh. Sad.</i>                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                      | 2. One-sound poems or stories: writing a poem or a story focusing on a sound in question                                                           | <i>This or that?<br/>Here or there?<br/>Now or then?<br/>Thanks. I think.<br/>The choices.</i>                                                                        |
| Grammar: Past Indefinite Tense                                                       | 1. One grammar form poems or stories: writing a poem or a story using the same grammar form throughout                                             | <i>He woke up late. He was tired. He drank a coffee. He drank another coffee. It didn't help. He went back to sleep.</i>                                              |
|                                                                                      | 2. Focus on the grammar form: writing a poem or a story focused on the action (simple sentences only)                                              | <i>He left.<br/>She stayed.<br/>They ended.</i>                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                      | 3. Question and answer poems and stories: writing a poem or a story in a form of an 'interview'                                                    | <i>– Did you love him?<br/>– I did.<br/>– Why did you love him?<br/>– Because he loved me back.<br/>– Why did you leave him?<br/>– Because he loved himself more.</i> |
| Vocabulary: Travelling                                                               | 1. Noun poems or stories: writing a poem or a story consisting of topical nouns or noun phrases                                                    | <i>A suitcase. An empty station. An old man. A lost man. A kind look.<br/>– Do you need help, sir? Here, my hand. Your platform. Your train. Your seat.</i>           |
|                                                                                      | 2. Metaphor or idiom-based poems or stories: writing a poem or a story inspired by a single topical idiom or metaphor, e.g. 'off the beaten track' | <i>'Off the beaten track', she heard her mother's voice in her head. Yes, she was going to take the road less travelled by.</i>                                       |
|                                                                                      | 3. '10-minute writing prompts' without the time limit                                                                                              | See table 2 for examples of tasks                                                                                                                                     |

The very flexible multi-purpose '10-minute prompt' is an instructional scaffold of a great potential for second foreign language teaching. The advantage and the defining feature that makes this scaffold so universal is its strict time limit, which makes this task easily adaptable for both independent work and classroom work purposes. The idea behind a writing prompt is a suggestion to speculate (in writing) on a question or topic, often of a surprising, shocking or

dramatic nature, for 10 minutes maximum. This sort of time pressure, while stressful at the first encounter, later proves to be quite liberating and conducive to a free-flow writing process. However, to achieve this, this skill needs to be practiced and polished on a regular basis. Specific examples of such prompts developed by the author of the present article specifically for the third and fourth year students at Herzen university can be found in the table below.

Table 2

*10-minute writing prompts for third year students of English as the second foreign language*

| Vocabulary topic according to the course syllabus | 10-minute writing prompt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Travelling                                        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write a story or a poem about that time you went travelling with your best friend.</li> <li>2. What do you imagine when you hear 'The worst journey of my life'?</li> <li>3. Think about your dream holiday. Feel the excitement, describe the feelings, the anticipation.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                      |
| Environment                                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write a story or a poem starting with this line: 'People forgot that nature is their home'.</li> <li>2. Write a story or a poem from the point of view of an animal of an endangered species.</li> <li>3. 'Climate change is a myth, he said'. Continue the story.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                              |
| Health                                            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did you have for breakfast? Was it healthy? Describe the flavours, textures, colours.</li> <li>2. Write a letter to yourself from your future self. Focus on healthy body and mind.</li> <li>3. Write a love poem to your body.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Sports                                            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe that time when you started a new sport and hated it.</li> <li>2. Write out ten items of sports equipment. Write a poem using all of them.</li> <li>3. Write a love story about two people who met while doing sports.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Education                                         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Imagine you are only a guest at this university. Look at it as if you see it for the first time. What do you see? How do you feel about it?</li> <li>2. Remember the last time you smiled or felt happy in a classroom. What happened there?</li> <li>3. Write down the first word that comes to your mind when you hear 'Education'. Now write a short story or a poem about that word and its meaning to you.</li> </ol> |

(3) Interactive scaffolding: based on grouping.

Creative writing traditionally is an activity that requires the audience, which is why group work offers a lot of advantages here. Support groups, assigned mentors or buddies for specific tasks, and expert

groups ('councils') can provide constructive feedback and deepen the quality of interaction not only at the academic but also personal and interpersonal level, developing students' soft skills and fostering mutual support in a classroom as a very welcome side effect.

Table 3

*Overview of the creative writing scaffolding techniques implemented and the feedback received*

| Type of scaffold           | Example & format of task                                                                                                                                                          | Resistance factors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Positive outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Verbalized scaffolding     | Write a 180–200 word piece in the style of... (homework)                                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– difficulty understanding the original text;</li> <li>– shyness to share personal work;</li> <li>– unwillingness to receive personal feedback;</li> <li>– feeling that your product will never be as good as the original;</li> <li>– 'writer's block'</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– a developed habit of reading and analysing short authentic texts;</li> <li>– improved readiness to share personal work;</li> <li>– improved self-esteem due to praise / compliments received;</li> <li>– better acceptance of criticism;</li> <li>– finding creative ways of overcoming 'the writer's block' (including those involving AI*)</li> </ul> |
| Activity-based scaffolding | Set a timer for 10 minutes and write a short piece to the given topic. (classwork/ homework)                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– time pressure;</li> <li>– absence of ideas;</li> <li>– relying on search engines and AI for ideas;</li> <li>– feeling that the desire to produce 'quantity' kills the quality of writing</li> </ul>                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– feasibility of the task due to the time limit;</li> <li>– an improved skill of brainstorming and developing an idea;</li> <li>– acquiring skills of preserving quality of writing under time pressure (e.g. starting by brainstorming suitable topical vocabulary/ complex grammar structures)</li> </ul>                                               |
| Interactive scaffolding    | Share your work with your mentor, consult them on any possible difficulties / Prepare feedback for your mentee, remember to stay constructive and positive (classwork + homework) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lack of experience in giving positive feedback;</li> <li>– reluctance to give criticism to your peers;</li> <li>– inability to meet deadlines when it comes to peer-to-peer interaction</li> </ul>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– improved skills of giving positive feedback;</li> <li>– overcoming fears and resistance in criticising peers due to the classroom's overall positive nature;</li> <li>– better discipline in keeping deadlines due to peer pressure</li> </ul>                                                                                                          |

\* A number of students admitted to using AI for different purposes, such as:

- summing up the contents of the authentic text;
- pointing out the main features of the original text;
- analysing language mistakes and style deficiencies of the produced text;
- brainstorming ideas for their writing.

When discussing verbalized support in point 1, it was mentioned that scaffolding based on reading is best implemented as homework, however, in the context of scaffolding, it is not a traditional task, done individually and checked by the teacher, but an activity in which every learner is supported and assisted by numerous members of their classroom. Depending on the learner's level, they can be assigned a 'mentor', that is a stronger classmate who will help them see the task through and pre-check it. In class – again, depending on the class's size and time allowed for this activity – creative texts can be read out in groups or in the whole class, with an obligatory discussion by the members of those groups giving their feedback.

To avoid any conflict situations and preserve a healthy, conducive learning environment, before discussing their colleague's work students are explained the basic principles of 'sandwich feedback' where constructive criticism is framed between positive statements, pointing out the advantages of the work completed.

After performing each of the tasks described earlier, students were asked for their feedback regarding the inner resistance they experienced in the process, the objective difficulties they encountered, and the positive changes they could trace over time. In the table below, you will find an overview of potential creative writing tasks application as scaffolds in the foreign language classroom and the results of those discussions based on the learners' self-reflection and the teacher's observations.

For considerations regarding AI stated earlier (see 'Reassessing Creative Writing as a Scaffold for Language Teaching'), students were not banned from or criticised for using AI to perform their tasks. On the contrary, AI was discussed and positioned as a new learning scaffold that needs to be used in a way that does not slow down but rather propel one's learning progress.

### **Additional benefits of integrating creative writing into language teaching**

Researching the use of creative writing in a language classroom has produced generous food for thought with regard to the numerous advantages going beyond the learners' linguistic skills and directly affecting their second language identity (L2 identity) linguistically, culturally, and academically. Here we refer to the understanding of the identity of a second language learner as being inextricably linked to their learning experiences, which means that every learning experience contributes to the development of L2 identity, and L2 identity affects the learner's perception of the language learning process [Wu 2024: 5]. This theory relies heavily on Ph. Benson's definition of L2 identity as "any aspect of a person's identity that is related to their knowledge and use of a second language" [Benson et al. 2013: 17].

When learning to express their creative self and attempting to do so in the way that best reflects their language and culture identity, students come to reassess their learner's identity, which could have significant beneficial implications for their academic ad-

vancement. The learner's identity is generally understood as a collective metacognitive notion of how the learner perceives themselves in the learning process, including but not limited to the habits, the opinions, the attitudes that support their academic development. In the Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning A. Y. Kolb and D. A. Kolb define 'learning identity' as "a key aspect of metacognitive knowledge about how one learns, particularly their views about their ability to learn" and go on to claim that "people with a learning identity see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn" [Kolb, Kolb 2012: 1889]. The authors then proceed to prove that the belief in the ability to learn is a crucial prerequisite for the ability to learn, and, consequently, the absence of such belief will result in a learner's inability to learn. This correlation between believing in your ability to learn (i.e. between your learner's identity) and the actual ability to learn (i.e. academic performance) seems to hold a great potential, not fully unlocked yet, for improving academic results by means of addressing the learner's identity in the educational process, and this is where creative writing might have important implications.

Research from all corners of the world points out numerous psychological benefits of creative writing: Iraqi authors underline that in a creative setting the learner can express themselves where other means might be lacking, develop their creative thinking, learn to understand their own emotions and those of others. In other words, soft skills undergo a rapid development alongside hard skills of future professional linguists [Azeez et al. 2023: 347–349]. Building of a "thoughtful and reflective community" is also put to the forefront by a group of Asian researchers studying advantages of creative writing, who establish that it allows to improve reflection and self-reflection skills and increase the learner's motivation while seemingly being focused on developing linguistic skills [Mardiningrum et al. 2024: 547].

To apply these findings to the domestic context, as part of this research students were asked to complete a feedback form at the end of each semester, consisting of five simple questions:

- 1) On the scale of 1 to 5, where would you place your emotional wellbeing in this class (1= highly negative, 5= extremely positive)?
- 2) Did you feel good about yourself when hearing positive feedback regarding your creative work?
- 3) Were you hurt by any of the criticism you heard regarding your creative work?
- 4) Do you feel that working together on creative projects has improved the quality of your relationships with your groupmates?
- 5) Do you feel more confident now about your language skills and means of linguistic expression at your disposal?
- 6) What would you change in the structure and nature of our creative tasks this semester?

A summary of results collected as part of English as a second foreign language courses at Herzen university, St Petersburg, over the academic years 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, are presented below.

The respondents are 55 students of the Institute of Foreign Languages specialising in Oriental (Chinese

and Korean) and European (German and Finnish) languages as their first foreign language.

Table 4

| Question No.       | 1                 | 2                 | 3                 | 4                 | 5                 |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Most common answer | > 4               | Yes               | Yes               | Yes               | Yes               |
| Number of students | 87% (48 students) | 95% (52 students) | 25% (14 students) | 80% (44 students) | 93% (51 students) |

As for question 6, the majority of students voiced their wish for more freedom in choosing the tasks, such as being able to select authentic text samples to imitate, and compose their own prompts. These requirements seem reasonable if the students' suggestions are pre-approved by the language instructor and aligned with the current syllabus of the course.

### Results and Discussion

Creative writing proves to be a logical fit for many aspects of language teaching, from phonetics to grammar and vocabulary work. In accordance with the scaffolding principles, the sample patterns which the students can use as a starting point for their own creative work can be as simple or as complicated as required by the stage of the development of the language skill in question, which allows for flexibility and a lack of restraint that would go against the principles of free-flowing creativity.

In the practical experience described above, we employed creative writing methods that relied on three important levels of scaffolding support – verbalized scaffolding, activity-based scaffolding and interactive scaffolding – and their efficiency as instructional tools was proved by students' progress and feedback.

When planning classroom activities in alliance with scaffolding principles it is important to bear in mind that creative writing should rely on multiple sources of scaffolding support, and not limit itself to one (which is very easy to slip into) – starting from the teacher and stronger (or similarly competent) group-mates and proceeding to team projects with weaker students (i.e. becoming the source of scaffolding support) and extensive independent work. Depending on the objectives and the time availability, creative projects can be done individually, in pairs, and in groups, at home and in class, and be presented to the entire classroom, to the teacher only, to a student partner, or a group of students, with the ensuing constructive feedback for the work presented.

Apart from reinforcing the competencies tradi-

tionally acquired through more formal approaches, the creative flow of writing has some additional, vitally beneficial psychological consequences for the classroom as it contributes to a more positive and conducive learning environment, an atmosphere of mutual trust and support, and an increase in the students' motivation and self-discipline.

When seeking ways of creative expression, students are pushed to reassess their learner's identity – not only by striving harder for improvement in the areas that they deem deficient but sometimes even by assuming a renewed identity free of prejudice, fears, bias, and hindrances that might have held them back previously but become redundant in the process of creative self-expression.

### Conclusion

Scaffolded learning of the second foreign language can be significantly improved by integrating some creative writing techniques in the teaching process. The great advantage of this technique is its adaptability to various language aspects and flexibility in adjustment to different levels of language competence. Despite a common misconception, creative writing does not require numerous additional classroom hours as, we hope, was demonstrated by the results of the described practical experience.

Most importantly, the general attitude to creative writing as an accessory to language learning at the most advanced levels, needs to be changed, and numerous research quoted in this article makes it increasingly hard to ignore the unambiguous benefits of integrating creative writing into language learning. It is time to admit that creative writing is an educational necessity, helping to build linguistic skills as well as a number of soft skills for a new generation of language learners and specialists, increase their motivation, and enhance their learning experience by creating a more welcoming classroom environment, conducive not only to creative but also co-creative processes.

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