Chapter 2

Linguistic creativity in the 20th century

Between Croce (1902: 37) saying that "language is perpetual creation" and Ricoeur (1981: 340) saying that "language could extend itself to its very limits forever discovering new resonances within itself", the notion of 'linguistic creativity' has had a chequered history in twentieth century linguistics. The term **linguistic creativity** has various meaning attached to it, ranging from a folkloristic understanding of linguistic creativity as some kind of special gift or unusual way with words, to an exclusive use of the term for the verbal arts. In this chapter, the views on linguistic creativity that have been propounded in the 20th century within the discipline of linguistics will be explored and critically evaluated. After the critical review in this chapter, a new and enriched view of linguistic creativity will be proposed in Chapter 3. The review and critique of the current views on linguistic creativity will take the following working definition of linguistic creativity as a point of departure: By **linguistic creativity** or the **creativity of language** is generally meant the effortless ability to communicate and comprehend novel expressions and new ideas (Birnbaum 1990: 175, Zlatev 1999: 174), or if put in the form of questions: "How can a speaker know what a sentence he has never encountered before means? And how can such a finite mind come to know the meanings of infinitely many sentences?" (Fischer 1997: 290). Gerrig and Gibbs (1988: 2) "define creative language to be any utterance, phrase, or word whose meaning varies with the

context in which it is produced in a way that could not be predicted from the lexicalized [sic] meanings of its component words."

From these definitions it is clear that even though linguistic creativity in general terms is accepted as an uncontested property of human language as such (Gupta 1992: 13-17, McDonough 1993: 138-140), various linguistic researchers have various conceptions of what the term **linguistic creativity** actually refers to, i.e. there is no general agreement on the nature of this creativity. For some, there is a focus on the combinations of known elements in a new sentence (which we can call generative creativity), whilst for others there is a focus on the lexical aspects of creativity by which new concepts are created and named, for example through metaphor (which we can call lexical creativity). As Hudson (2000: 10) points out, the creativity of language is due to the openness of language (i.e. the ability to create new lexical items, i.e. lexical creativity), as well as to recursion (i.e. the re-use of syntactic patterns within larger patterns, as well as the re-use of syntactic patterns for new instantiations, i.e. generative creativity). After exploring (linguistic) creativity as a general human trait in Section 2.1, these two opposing but entrenched views of linguistic creativity in the twentieth century will be explored in Section 2.2. In Section 2.3, I will critically explore the notion of 'linguistic creativity' in terms of what *kind* of problem it is. This chapter (Chapter 2) forms the basis and the motivation for a new look at linguistic creativity (in Chapter 3) in all its various dimensions, which will culminate in a new definition of linguistic creativity at the end of Chapter 3.

2.1 Creativity as an essential trait of human beings

In this section, I will explore the notion of creativity as an essential trait of human reason. According to Gupta (1992: ii) *creativity* (which he defines as "the ability to create, to bring into being or form, to invent or design") as a domain of study often leads to confusion because of

- different points of departure in the definition of creativity
- different assumptions about creativity and about human beings, and
- different research strategies.

Creativity can therefore be viewed from various different perspectives, such as amongst others, an aesthetic perspective, a pragmatic perspective, and a philosophical perspective. From an aesthetic perspective, creativity is seen as a given talent of a select few artists that are able to express themselves in a form (be that visual, verbal or musical) that is regarded by a given culture in a given time frame as pleasing, appealing or symbolically significant.

From the pragmatic perspective, creativity is viewed as a kind of problem-solving skill that is special or gifted, and that is essential to survival and successful living. A survey of the literature on this kind of pragmatic creativity in education, science, information technology, business management, cognitive psychology and psychotherapy, for example, reflect

- X analyses of what creativity as a problem-solving activity is
- X what the typical phases in the creative process are
- X what types of thought processes are involved in the creative process
- X what the typical characteristics of the creative personality are, and
- X how to enhance, exploit, develop and teach creative problem-solving skills for pragmatic benefit (Ihlenfeld 1987, Gupta 1992).

From a philosophical perspective, creativity is seen primarily as a distinctive characteristic of human beings that can be expressed in various ways. Den Ouden (1975: 103) states: “Human nature is that distinct capacity and ability to respond with appropriate and meaningful novelty.” Ward et al. (1997: xiii) says that “humans are distinguished from other animals by our imaginative gifts”. Although we may have many biological characteristics in common with animals, our minds function differently in that we think creatively, and we can transform our thoughts into tangible, novel creations or innovations. It is this perspective that I will focus on in the rest of this section, although the aesthetic and pragmatic perspectives will be re-visited in appropriate sections where they may be relevant to linguistic creativity.

In his study of the limits of mechanistic explanation, Descartes (as quoted by (Chomsky 1966: 3) comes to the conclusion that “man has unique abilities that cannot be accounted for on purely mechanistic grounds, although, to a very large extent, a mechanistic explanation can be provided for human bodily function and behaviour”. Descartes (as quoted by Chomsky 1966: 5) therefore concludes that,

in addition to the body it is necessary to attribute ‘mind’ and ‘thought’ to humans. Human reason is viewed by Descartes as ‘a universal instrument which can serve for all contingencies’ whereas the organs of an animal or the parts of a machine are only the purposeful adaptation for specific action. Chomsky (1966: 6) summarises Descartes’ views as follows:

> In summary, it is the **diversity** of human behavior, its **appropriateness** to new situations, and man’s **capacity to innovate** - *the creative aspect of language use providing the principle indication of this* - that leads Descartes to attribute possession of mind to other humans [sic], since he regards this capacity as beyond the limitations of any imaginable mechanism. Thus a fully adequate psychology requires the postulation of a ‘creative principle’ alongside of the ‘mechanical principle’ that suffices to account for all other aspects of the inanimate and animate world and for a significant range of human actions and ‘passions’ as well [my emphasis - BEZ].

Chomsky (1966) therefore uses Descartes’ views as a motivation and a philosophical basis for giving a certain kind of prominence to ‘linguistic creativity’, which Chomsky then re-interprets in the context of his own theoretical framework. This re-interpretation by Chomsky will be critically evaluated in Section 2.2. under the generative view of linguistic creativity.

It is important to note that novelty and creativity in language have to be both appropriate and interpretable. Linguistic creativity is therefore not randomly unique or arbitrary (Den Ouden 1975: 18). The literature on creativity suggests that creativity is often interpreted as some kind of ‘freedom’. Herder (quoted by Chomsky 1966:14) writes, human beings are “Free to reflect and to contemplate, man is able to observe, compare, distinguish essential properties, identify, and *name*”. For Chomsky as well, human reason is therefore free from stimulus control

and habit. Freedom of thought, self-expression and imagination are therefore essential human qualities (Chomsky 1966: 29). As Gupta (1992: 17) states, “to create is one of the basic human tendencies, which is manifested in different ways at many levels”.

In Chomsky’s discussion of the history of the philosophical views on the *creative principle* as an aspect of human nature, it is clear that there is an intimate link between the general creative capacity of human beings and their linguistic ability. Chomsky (1966: 26) states, for example,

> It is clear, then, that Humboldt’s emphasis on the spontaneous and creative aspects of language use derives from a much more general concept of “human nature” ...

According to Chomsky (1966: 4) it was apparently simple for Descartes to imagine a machine as uttering words and giving limited responses,

> ... but it never happens that it arranges its speech in various ways, in order to reply appropriately to everything that may be said in its presence, as even the lowest type of man can do ... and
> ... There are none so depraved and stupid, without even excepting idiots, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts, while on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect and fortunately circumstanced it may be, which can do the same (Descartes quoted by Chomsky (1966: 4).

Chomsky’s consistent use of the term ‘language <u>use</u>’ and ‘speech’ is problematic since Chomsky particularly does not have anything to say about language <u>use</u> or performance, but wants to focus on the potential, or competence, of an ideal speaker-hearer to create an infinite set of sentences.

Not only is the *creative aspect of language use* an indication of the more general human *creative principle*, it is also closely related to artistic creativity (Chomsky 1966: 18). Chomsky (1966:17) quotes Schlegel in associating the creative aspect of language use with 'true' artistic creativity:

> Language is "die wunderbarste Schöpfung des menschlichen Dichtungsvermögens ..." and, " ein immer werdendes, sich verwandelndes, nie vollendetes Gedicht des gesamten Menschengeschlects"
>
> [Language is the most wonderful creation of the human poetic ability ... and, it is an always becoming, always changing, never complete poem of the whole human race. - BEZ]

Schlegel therefore sees human language in general as a poem, i.e. a creative product created by **all** human beings, not just the artistic few. Associating the *creative aspect of language use* with literary and poetical creativity seems to contradict Humboldt's view that there is a distinction between the "form of a language" and its "character", which is the way it is used by poets and philosophers:

> ...the inner character of a language must be distinguished from the form, the syntactic and semantic structure, which are matters of form, not use. A great writer and thinker can modify the character of a language and enrich its means of expression without affecting its grammatical structure. ... the normal use of language typically involves creative mental acts; but it is the character of a language rather than its form that reflects true "creativity" in a higher sense - in the sense that implies value as well as novelty. (Chomsky 1966: 27)

Humboldt's views on the "character" of language (i.e. the way in which it is used) seems to refer to a kind of evaluative stylistics, whereas the normal use of language, which is a matter of syntactic and semantic structure involves "creative mental acts". Even though Chomsky (1966) expounds Descartes' *creative principle*

and his own view on the *creative aspect of language use* as an essential trait of the human mind, Sampson (1980) states that both Descartes and Chomsky simply maintain a Platonian view of concepts and knowledge. In this view, concepts and knowledge are either innate ("really just a recollection of things that we knew in former lives" (Sampson 1980: 2)) or acquired by experience, where " ... 'originality' is ... merely the birth into conscious awareness of elements of a fixed stock of ideas all of which were present in unconscious potential form in the thinker's mind from the start of his life, and beyond which he can never go." (Sampson 1980: 2). According to Sampson (1980: 4) " ... both thinkers reject or ignore the creative view of mind", where the "creative view says, briefly, that it is in the nature of human minds to be always coming up with novel ideas - ideas which are in no sense implied by anything that has gone before, so that the workings of a man's mind are not predictable as machines or natural phenomena are" (Sampson 1980: 1). Sampson (1980) makes a distinction between 'limited-minders' and 'creative-minders', and in his evaluation, Chomsky's views and therefore also generative linguistics is based on the 'limited minded' view. By focusing on the unpredictability of linguistic creativity, Sampson claims that novel ideas are never based on an existing source or basis. This is an extreme *ex nihilo* type of view of creativity (i.e. that something is only truly creative if it is created from nothing at all) which in my view overstates the case of unpredictability. For creativity to be unpredictable does not necessarily imply that it cannot be based on or be prompted by existing knowledge or resources.

To sum up: In his essay on rationalist thought, Chomsky (1966) re-visits a philosophical history and tradition for the notion of a *creative principle* in language that rests on the following ideas:

- X creativity distinguishes human beings from both animals and machines
- X creativity is to be distinguished from the *mechanistic principle* which accounts for the instincts and bodily functions of both human beings and animals
- X creativity enables human beings to respond in novel and appropriate ways to novel situations, and
- X creativity enables free and diverse thought, action and expression.

Chomsky therefore postulates linguistic creativity, as an essential trait of all human beings, as a problem which needs to be explained by a theory of language. The way in which he solves this problem will be presented and critically evaluated in the next section.

2.2 Generative creativity

After arguing for creativity as a essential human trait, and setting up linguistic creativity as a problem that needs to be explained by linguistic theories, Chomsky makes his proposal on how a generative theory of language can account for linguistic creativity. The generative view essentially sees linguistic creativity as the ability to combine a *finite known* stock of elements on the basis of a *finite known* stock of computational patters. Gay (1980) refers to all forms of creativity in which

structural analogy or compositional rules are identified as a source for the linguistic creativity as ‘weak creativity’.

In generative linguistics there is a definite and consistent separation of form and meaning, with form and meaning represented in separate linguistic modules. Chomsky then gives a principled motivation for focusing on the grammatical (i.e. structural) aspects of creativity only. According to Chomsky (1966: 59) the “central doctrine of Cartesian linguistics is that the general features of grammatical structure are common to all languages and reflect certain fundamental properties of the mind”. On the grammatical level, Chomsky (1966: 41) argues for a finite set of recursive or iterative devices that “provide the infinite use of finite means” and that will serve as a universal mechanism for accounting for the creative aspect of language use. For example, a morphological rule in English, like N → N N together with lexical insertion rules operating on an open-ended lexicon can produce an infinite number of instantiations like: *table cloth*, *restaurant table cloth*, *seafood restaurant table cloth*, etc. On the syntactic level, a recursive rule like S → NP V S can account for a limitless recursion of embedded sentences, as in: *I believe that Chomsky is relevant to this topic*, and *I believe that he thinks that Chomsky is relevant to this topic*. Chomsky refers to this type of linguistic creativity as the “rule-governed creativity which constitutes the normal use of language” (Chomsky 1966: 27). The description of linguistic creativity as *rule-governed creativity*, however, appears to be a contradiction in terms: how is it possible for a fixed set of universal and innate rules, operating on a fixed set of universal and

innate elements yielding predictable outcomes, to account for the type of unpredictable creativity that is seen as an essential human trait? (Fischer 1997). Chomsky himself seems to have realised this contradiction in his arguments. After reiterating the general views of his 1966 essay on the *creative aspect of language use*, Chomsky (1980: 222-223) deals with the problem in the following way:

> The grammar, in whatever form its principles are represented in the mind and brain, simply characterizes the properties of sentences, much as the principles of arithmetic determine the properties of numbers. We have some understanding of the principles of grammar, but there is no promising approach to the normal creative use of language, or to other rule-governed human acts that are freely undertaken. The study of grammar raises problems that we have some hope of solving; the creative use of language is a mystery that eludes our intellectual grasp. ... [we have to] distinguish **the mystery posed by the creative aspect of language use** from the difficult but still intelligible problems that arise in the investigation of the unbounded scope of grammar and human knowledge quite generally [my emphasis - BEZ].

Chomsky (1980) makes a distinction between mysteries and genuine scientific problems (cf. also Chomsky 2000), and claims that since grammar is un-creative, its problems can be solved. Sampson (1980: 7) agrees that "the creative view implies that a language can be described scientifically only to a limited extent", notably in terms of its phonological and syntactic aspects, but not in terms of its conceptual aspects. Both these authors seem to imply that phonology and syntax are not part of the creative aspect of language and can therefore be studied scientifically and successfully. The issue whether aspects of phonology and syntax are, in fact, not creative, as they claim, will be investigated in Chapter 3. What both Chomsky and Sampson are referring to as the so-called acceptable and scientific investigation of language, is only possible in linguistics if one accepts an artificial, idealised speaker who produces sterilised, sanitised and predictable language

outputs. This excludes the truly creative and innovative essential human trait that Chomsky argued for in the first place.

At first, Chomsky seemed to have focused purely on the syntactic aspects of creativity in the form of recursive syntactic rules. This is in direct contrast to Humboldt's views that the "form of language" includes "Regeln der Redefügung" [rules of rhetoric and discourse] and rules of "Wortbildung" [word formation] (Chomsky 1966: 19). However, since Chomsky (1980) the regularities in word formation processes such as derivation and compounding were incorporated in the lexical component of a generative grammar, but the focus here was on capturing regularities in existing words, rather than the creative coining of novel words. The issue of novel lexical items will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Chomsky (1966: 20) points out that Humboldt does not regard the lexicon of a language as a "fertig daliegende Masse" [a complete given mass - BEZ], not as a memorised list from which words are simply extracted but rather as based on organising generative principles that produce the appropriate items on given occasions. As has been shown here, these ideas have, however, been incorporated into the generative view of linguistic theory:

X *selection*: the lexicon is regarded as a list of memorised / learnt words which are extracted and inserted into syntactic structures by means of lexical insertion rules (Hudson 2000: 111), and

X *combination*: in lexicalist morphology the organising generative principles at work in word formation have been included into the lexical component of a generative grammar (Hudson 2000: 80).

In the lexical component of a typical generative grammar, word-formation rules that are represented as making up the “organizing generative principles” of the lexicon of a language typically involve derivation, compounding and reduplication. Word-formation rules can be defined as the rules expressing possible combinations of **morphemes** as words (Hudson 2000: 8). This definition of word-formation rules will be significant in the further discussion of lexical creativity in Chapter 3. Aronoff (1976: 17-19) states that the task of a morphology is to enumerate the list of possible new words that a speaker of a language can form, using existing, or actually attested words as a guide. Word-formation rules are, however, different from syntactic rules in that they apply only when a new word is formed, whereas syntactic rules apply in the generation of all sentences. As Jackendoff (1975: 667) states: “... the normal mode for syntactic rules is creative, the normal mode for lexical rules is passive.” Word-formation rules are seen as redundancies that can be used to analyse existing forms and are only used to create new forms in infrequent and abnormal cases. This view is criticised by Bauer (1988: 131):

> It is ironic that Jackendoff should have cited compound nouns as his test case, since some figures are actually available on these in German, and they do not support his contention. Thiel (1973) reports ... in a corpus of 1 331 compound nouns only 37.9% were found listed in dictionaries, while 62.15 were neologisms. ... Jackendoff [also] seems to be dismissing the quite considerable productivity that various types of affixes show.

It is clear from this brief discussion that, in whatever way the generative principles

of the lexicon are conceived, the typical morphological processes of compounding and derivation are generally and freely generating new words, and therefore present a significant part of lexical creativity.

In a typical generative grammar, the meanings of words are combinations of lexical or semantic primitives, which are drawn from a finite set of universal, innate and primitive concepts, which are referred to as 'components' in the semantic approach of Componential Analysis, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 on semantic theories. Den Ouden (1975: 81) refers to semantics as "a pure science of the innate form of human thought, independent of all experience". This Platonian view was first applied in mentalist (or cognitive) linguistics by Katz and Fodor (1963) and is current in Jackendoff's work (Jackendoff 1990 and 1992, cf. also Wierzbiecka 1985). These primitive concepts are claimed to make up a language of thought into which each natural language expression can be 'translated':

> With the postulate of universality, the notion of a 'conceptual language' is clearly a limited-mind theory of the Platonic/Cartesian kind: the word-concepts potentially available to a human are exhaustively defined by specifying the list of atomic semantic features and the principles governing their combination into semantic 'molecules'. (Sampson 1980: 22)

According to Sampson (1980: 45), this view, which forms part of what he calls the 'limited-mind view' is not supported by any evidence. This view of the mind is regarded as limited by Sampson because it restricts or limits the true domain of creativity in the human being. He goes on to argue that the "creative view of mind suggests that any attempt to produce a rigorous, scientific account of the

semantics of a human language must be as futile as chasing a rainbow" (Sampson 1980: 46) and that detailed lexicographic work is the only way of doing semantics (Sampson 1980: 13). In lexicographical work, linguistic creativity is excluded in principle since the task of lexicographical work is to record frequently used, conventionalised and lexicalised words.

To sum up: Linguistic creativity in the generative framework is accounted for by *selecting* fixed elements from an innate, universal and finite stock of primitives and *combining* them according to a fixed and finite set of recursive formal rules, what Joseph (2003) calls 'rule-governed creativity'. As Harris (1997: 279) puts it: "The term *creativity*, to be sure, is much bandied about by linguistic theorists; in particular generativists, who pervasively confuse creativity with productivity", where productivity is defined as a quantitative "rate" or "measure", rather than as qualitative creativity (Gupta 1992: 27-28). According to Harris, the only really creative part in the generative view would be for the speaker to select which of the rules to follow which is referred to as the open-choice principle.

Fischer (2000) shows that conceiving of linguistic creativity in the so-called weak sense, i.e. as the ability to combine a finite stock of *known* elements on the basis of a finite stock of *known* computational rules, does not involve any creativity in the sense of 'new' knowledge at all. The 'problem' of linguistic creativity is therefore, according to Fischer (2000: 178) "dissolved". Creativity is, however, not about the mechanical application of formal rules, but also about meanings. The discussion of

linguistic creativity in a lexical and semantic approach is discussed in the next section. These criticisms of the generative interpretation of linguistic creativity can be directly traced, and are inextricably related to the consistent separation of form and meaning in this approach.

2.3 Lexical creativity

According to Gay (1980), weak linguistic creativity on the basis of structural analogy or rules (what I have called generative creativity), and strong linguistic creativity on the basis of metaphoricity (what I call lexical creativity), are in fact two distinct processes. In the lexical approach to linguistic creativity, the focus is on the ability of speakers to create and name novel concepts, either by creating completely new lexical items, or by using existing lexical items in a novel way. Di Pietro (1976) argues for a kind of linguistic creativity which he sees as a key innate property of linguistic competence in its 'larger' sense, in which metaphor is a larger creative force than grammatical recursion. Di Pietro (1976), therefore, in contrast to the 'limited view' of linguistic competence as in the narrow Chomskyan view, includes figurative language in the realm of linguistic competence, i.e. he propagates a creative construal of linguistic competence that goes beyond mental computations.

In this view the creative force of language is situated in the ability of speakers to convey new meanings, either by combining old words in new ways, or by changing

the meanings of old words by procedures such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche or irony, which has been studied both within the domain of diachronic lexical semantics, and more recently in Cognitive Semantics. For Ricoeur (discussed in Gay 1980), the creative potential of language is facilitated by polysemy (i.e. the ability of words to have more than one meaning), where a given word can be used in a new context and still be understood. According to (Gay 1980: 311), "the heart of linguistic creativity" is that "[m]etaphor, synchronically exploiting polysemy, diachronically expands polysemy". Once the historical dimension of linguistic creativity is introduced, all aspects of historical semantic change, such as the widening, narrowing or weakening of the meaning of words, as well as the amelioration or pejoration of specific concepts, can be regarded as instances of linguistic creativity. The synchronic/diachronic and the semantic dimensions of linguistic creativity will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

According to Gerrig and Gibbs (1988: 13) most theories of language production are based on the idea that speakers retrieve or *select* existing conventional elements from the mental lexicon (which can be regarded as the **basis** of linguistic creativity) and then *combine* them to express their intended meanings (which can be regarded as the **processes** of linguistic creativity). They conclude, however, that the **products** of linguistic creativity, the "[p]henomena of creative language suggest that this proposal is incomplete ... [and that] there is no one-to-one mapping between the intended meaning and words in the lexicon." From the discussion above it is therefore clear that the standard approaches to linguistic

creativity that have been followed in 20th century linguistics have been incomplete, partly because they exclude each other, with the generative view focusing on morphology and syntax and the lexical view focusing on semantic changes in lexical items.

In the discussion until now, I have shown that the main problem with various accounts of linguistic creativity has been that it has been dealt with in a reductionist way, i.e. either by focusing on syntactic and morphological generative creativity or on semantic change in lexical items. In the generative account linguistic creativity is regarded only as the selection and composition of a fixed set of formal linguistic elements, thereby focusing on the form aspect of the meaning−form opposition. Diachronic lexical semantics, on the other hand, has focused almost exclusively on the meaning aspect of this opposition in lexical items. In the following chapter, I will sketch out some of the dimensions in linguistic creativity that have been largely ignored by these accounts. In the next section, I will, however, briefly look at the nature of linguistic creativity as a linguistic problem.

2.4 What kind of problem is *linguistic creativity*?

Even though the generative notion of linguistic creativity is accepted and used in linguistics, philosophy and psychology, it is interesting to note that very little primary research has been done on it. In a bibliographic search for 'linguistic creativity' on the electronic databases LLBA and MLA, there were 213 entries, of which only 28 (that is, 13%) actually contained the term **linguistic creativity** in the

title of the source. Seventeen of these titles, including only one book, fall into the domains of applied linguistics (child language acquisition, language teaching), sociolinguistics and translation; five of the other titles are in the discipline of philosophy, with only five titles dealing directly with linguistic creativity in the context of linguistic theories. This search was initially done on LLBA (Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts) and MLA (Modern Language Association) International Bibliography on 2 October 2001, and repeated in November 2005 when only one additional title with the term **linguistic creativity** was found, namely Joseph (2003). A similar search in On-line Dissertations for 'linguistic creativity' (producing 11 entries) did not yield a single title containing the term **linguistic creativity** in the title of the dissertation. Only two books have been found bearing the term **linguistic creativity** in the title:

- Fischer (2000) which is too recent to have been included in the bibliographic databases and which is a treatise with in the discipline of philosophy on the generative view of linguistic creativity, and
- Kirschenblatt-Gimblett and Backhouse (1976) which is on speech play in children.

What this brief survey highlights, is that linguistic creativity has apparently not really been studied in any depth in its own right by theoretical or empirical linguists, but is, on occasion brought into the discussion as a peripheral issue that may have a bearing on the main topic of the research reported on. Chomsky (1966) is a very good example of this. The main aim of *Cartesian Linguistics* is to embed the generative enterprise in a particular philosophical tradition, and linguistic creativity

(in the weak syntactic or generative sense) is used almost as a tool to achieve this. The real issue is not linguistic creativity at all, as became clear in Chomsky (1980) where linguistic creativity is assigned to the realm mysteries, and not a 'proper' object of scientific study. Kussmaul (2000: 59) echoes this view in describing the traditional views of the creative process, where creativity is regarded as something 'exceptional, inspirational, inspired by the Muses' which can not be studied or promoted. This view is shared by Sampson (1980) which regards studying linguistic creativity as 'chasing rainbows' (cf. Section 2.2) (cf. also Boden 1998). By criticising these views, I do not wish to claim that creativity is not exceptional or inspirational, I only wish to claim that these views as reasons for not studying linguistic creativity are dubious. Physics has given us good explanations for what rainbows really are and why they look as they do, but it has in no way diminished the individual's sense of wonder at seeing one.

According to the current state of the literature, linguistic creativity is either a mystery, a rainbow or a non-problem. Given all the discounting and discouraging arguments against the feasibility or worthiness of the study of creativity, particularly linguistic creativity, the question remains: Why re-open the case for linguistic creativity? It is, however, important to make a distinction between true limits and limits that hinder progress in science. It is my contention that linguistic creativity is not a limit in studying the linguistic abilities of speakers, but that it is a fundamental and crucial aspect that has been ignored for too long.

In the next chapter, I would like to show that linguistic creativity can be studied in different ways,

$ by treating linguistic creativity as an empirical phenomenon worthy of study in its own right within the domain of linguistic theory, rather than invoking it only as a side-issue,

$ by accepting linguistic creativity to be a multi-dimensional and rich phenomenon, rather than a limited and reductionist phenomenon in either a formal generative perspective of a diachronic semantic perspective, and

$ by asking different kinds of questions about linguistic creativity, for example, by exploring the products, sources and processes of linguistic creativity.

2.5 Conclusion

I started this chapter with some definitions of what is generally understood by the term **linguistic creativity**. I have shown that in 20th century linguistics, linguistic creativity has been understood either as structural generative creativity or as lexical creativity. Both of these approaches have weaknesses, partly because they exclude each other, but also because they are based on reductionist and limited views in which morphological and syntactic form is separated from meaning. The fact that linguistic creativity is rarely studied within the domain of linguistic theory, except as a secondary and justificationary argument in defence of a certain construal of linguistic competence, clearly calls for a re-investigation of what

linguistic creativity involves. In addition, in view of the general philosophical position that creativity in general, and linguistic creativity in particular, is an essential trait of all human beings, a better understanding of its scope and nature seems warranted. Chapter 3 presents such a re-investigation of linguistic creativity.