

## **More on Fodor and the creative writing department**

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*Abstract.* This paper proposes that Jerry Fodor has, or had, a personal reason to avoid the creative writing department to do with his opposition to inferential role semantics.

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When I was an undergraduate, I received an essay writing guide, which I believe was by Helen Beebee. Amongst other things, it tells me:

A well known philosopher may be able to get away with starting a paper with the words. ‘Granny and I think that things have gone too far, what with relativism, idealism and pragmatism at Harvard, graffiti in the subway stations, and Lord knows what all next.’ You, on the other hand, cannot. Remember that you are studying philosophy, not creative writing. (Beebee n.d. 10)

That is Jerry Fodor writing about Granny and Harvard. Why does he do that, or why did he? Some may view it as an eccentric choice. I tend to think many people in Fodor’s overall position, in terms of talent and location within a social system, would settle on the same or similar solutions. But perhaps there is a personal reason for him to avoid the creative writing department, instead of saving the material for there.

Fodor is famous for his opposition to inferential role semantics. But the creative writing department seems more suited to this way of analysing meaning. “I teach creative writing.” “So you teach people who are not creative how to be creative?” No, that is probably not a valid inference. By determining which inferences are acceptable, one works out the meaning of the opening sentence and various others.

The meaning is given by the acceptable inferences, the inferential role. I hope his alternative approach can survive there, but I am not sure.

### **Reference**

Beebe, H. n.d. How to write a Philosophy essay & exam preparation. *Centre for Philosophy. University of Manchester Department of Government.*