

Zoran Božič
University of Nova Gorica
Vipavska cesta, 5000 Nova Gorica, Slovenia
zoran.bozic@scng.si

Empirical Research – How To Improve Reception of Classical Poetry

Problems with comprehending *The Baptism at the Savica*

After my decision to research the problems of receiving by France Prešeren's¹ *The Baptism at the Savica* more in detail at the scientific level, I used, as the theoretical basis of my empirical research, modern findings about reading processes or literary reading, as they were presented at the turn of the millennium in monographs by Sonja Pečjak, Boža Krakar Vogel and Meta Grosman². For lengthy narrative texts which are not presented merely with the selected fragment³, modern literature didactics foresees two possible school treatments:

- a) Home reading, i.e. "students independently read literary works outside school", which is usually followed by two hours of discussion at school, and

¹ France Prešeren (1800–1849) is the most important Slovene poet of romanticism. Although of peasant origin, he completed his doctor's degree in law in Vienna. He worked in Ljubljana as a lawyer's assistant and, due to his free thinking, was permitted by the authorities to open an independent law practice only three years before his death. With his poetry, romantic in contents and classical in form (Romance poetic forms, such as tercina, quartina, octava and sonnet, prevail), the Slovenians established a contact with contemporary European literature.

² S. Pečjak, *Osnove psihologije branja*, Ljubljana 1999; B. Krakar Vogel, *Poglavja iz didaktike književnosti*, Ljubljana 2004; M. Grosman, *Zagovor branja: bralec in književnost v 21. stoletju*, Ljubljana 2004. These authors are scientists and professors of Psychology, Slovenian language and literature and German language and literature Departments at the Faculty of Arts, University in Ljubljana.

³ *Krst pri Savici* has been defined as compulsory home reading in accordance with the valid Curriculum for the Slovenian language as a subject in high schools (1998, p. 31).

- b) Long reading, i.e. reading which “takes place at school so that students, together with their teacher, read and interpret a particular literary work over a longer period”⁴. Due to the fact that the method of long reading requires more school time, students as a rule read *The Baptism* at home.

To the greatest possible degree, home reading should be a spontaneous and burden-free activity, as when we “give [students] explanations of the text and impose [on them] the task of finding answers to these questions, the possibility for them to achieve pleasurable and/or interesting literary experiences diminishes considerably”⁵. In the chapter entitled *Književne sposobnosti* (Literary abilities), Krakar gives a detailed analysis of the literary reading ability, which consists of four cognitive-receptive phases: experiencing, comprehending, evaluating and expressing to prove reading ability⁶. Experiencing, which the author associates with the first reading of a text, is the phase where “the reader spontaneously perceives, feels, visualizes, and understands meaningful or obvious components of the text, and disregards those which do not match his/her scheme and often [...] expresses his/her first opinion of approval or rejection”. Krakar is certainly aware that in actual reading, these cognitive-receptive phases are intertwined, that consequently experiencing a text depends on the reading comprehension⁷, i.e. on word decoding, access to the words and on analysis of the meaning and syntax⁸.

Difficulties with the reception of Prešeren’s poetry were presented by Boža Krakar Vogel in her 2001 article *Obravnavanje literarne klasike v sodobni šoli – na primeru Prešerna* (*Dealing with literary classicism in modern school – the example of Prešeren*), who in her empirical research tested comprehension of one stanza of Prešeren’s *A Wreath of Sonnets*, while I decided to empirically test the comprehension of Prešeren’s romantic

⁴ B. Krakar Vogel *Poglavja iz didaktike književnosti*, p. 108–109)

⁵ M. Grosman, *Zagovor branja...*, p. 192. In her dissertations, Grosman explicitly stresses the importance of a positive literary experience, which is in her opinion a key factor of discussing literature at school, as well as of the development of students reading competences.

⁶ B. Krakar Vogel, *Poglavja iz didaktike književnosti*, p. 40–45.

⁷ “As the reader was unable to understand the text well, he could respond only in a superficial and naive way, illustrating that the initial two phases of reading classical verses with demanding wording and composition are not automatically followed by comprehension”. B. Krakar Vogel, *Obravnavanje literarne klasike v sodobni šoli – na primeru Prešerna*, »Jezik in slovstvo« 2000/2001, vol. 46/4, p. 131.

⁸ S. Pečjak, *Osnove psihologije branja*, p. 41–47.

poem *The Baptism at the Savica*, since opinions on its difficult receptivity appeared while the poet was still alive⁹.

I therefore tested comprehension of three passages in the first six stanzas of *The Baptism* (from the stanza “The matching violence of man and cloud” to the stanza “When Črtomir was here, on this small isle”¹⁰) of students in the first two grades of high school¹¹ who had to reiterate the contents or the message of the first half of the first, third and fourth stanza in their own words¹².

This allowed me to verify the third, highest level of comprehension, the so-called applied comprehension, which manifests through students’ ability to transform the text they have read from one abstract form into another, to explain particular metaphors and symbols by rewording them and to analyse the components/events in a text and define their mutual relationships¹³. This naturally implied primarily testing reference meanings of the text, i.e. facts which cannot depend on the reader’s expectations or his cognitive scheme. To illustrate: in the first octave of *The Baptism*, the night fight and storm, the dawn shining on Triglav and the calm surface of the Bohinj lake are illustrated, while at the aesthetic or symbolic level the contrast “temna noč” – “svetla zarja zlati z rumen’mi žarki” (“dark night” – “bright dawn gilds with yellow rays”) presents a point of view which belongs to the area of co-referential meanings¹⁴.

The degree of comprehension in a particular task was graded with two points (complete answer), one point (partial answer) and zero points (wrong or no answer). In each fragment it was thus possible to achieve 100

⁹ F. Prešeren, *Poezije in pisma*, ed. A. Slodnjak, Ljubljana 1964, p. 339. Prešeren’s letter to Stanko Vraz written in 1837: “As you wished, I am sending you 24 copies of my *Kerst* which you found to be so difficult to understand”.

¹⁰ F. Prešeren, *Poems/Pesmi*, ed. F. Pibernik, F. Droč, trans. T.M.S. Priestly, H.R. Cooper, Kranj, Klagenfurt, Ljubljana, Vienna, 1999, p. 119–121

¹¹ I purposely chose the first grade of secondary school since *The Baptism* is compulsory home reading only in the second year and, as a rule, the elementary school curriculum includes only the Introduction to *The Baptism*. Thus I could expect only non-systemic or coincidental interfering factors.

¹² The questionnaires were filled in by 50 students, most of them girls. In both classes I started with historical events to refresh students’ memory (from the deaths of Avrelj and Droh to the siege of the Ajdovski gradec fortress and the death of all pagan soldiers except Črtomir), and after that I distributed the questionnaires. I read aloud all six introductory stanzas of *The Baptism* and then students were asked to read the first half of three chosen stanzas and write down in one sentence, in the marked fields on the right, the content/meaning of the related text.

¹³ S. Pečjak, *Kako do boljšega branja: tehnike in metode za izboljšanje bralne učinkovitosti*, Ljubljana 1993, p. 59.

¹⁴ S. Pečjak, *Osnove psihologije branja*, p. 48. Without that, scientific examination of comprehension would be absolutely impossible. Thus it is wise to share the opinion of Meta Grosman who stated that the author’s “choice and arrangement in the artistic structure is obligatory for a reader” and that “most reading ‘mistakes’ and consequently limited or groundless actualizations of literary text arise from the readers’ inability to perceive or his wrong perception of the text constituents. M. Grosman, *Zagovor branja...*, p. 156, 172.

points altogether or a maximum 300 point in all three. The results for each fragment and for the entire questionnaire are given below¹⁵:

FRAGMENT	TOTAL POINTS	POINTS ACHIEVED	PERCENTAGE
Mož in oblakov vojsko je obojno ...	100	18	18
Na tleh leže slovenstva stebri stari ...	100	12	12
Prenesla pričujoče ure teže ...	100	22	22
TOTAL	300	52	17

The final result (17 percent of available points) testifies that high school students experience, in an overwhelming majority, unsurpassable difficulties with their first, spontaneous reading of *The Baptism at the Savica*¹⁶, since they do not understand the text and are consequently not able to experience it. Such students undoubtedly need help with their first reading.

As I selected fragments for testing without using a special key and primarily with the intention to create a meaningful unit, I was surprised by a great difference in understanding the first and the fourth stanza as opposed to the third. Detailed observation shows that all three stanzas are profusely inverted and noticeably metaphorical, yet there is a significant difference in the number of archaic words. While the first stanza contains three such terms and the fourth only one, there are nine in the third¹⁷. Obviously it is a question of a clear opposite correlation: the greater the number of archaisms, the more understanding deteriorates. This also confirms the view of Grosman, who noted that numerous unknown words make understanding a text completely impossible.

¹⁵ For the first and third stanza there were only two complete answers, one in each, while there were six complete answers for the fourth stanza.

¹⁶ Almost 40% of students did not achieve a single point (of six possible points), only 12% of students obtained more than one third of the possible points, two students obtained 4 points and no-one at all achieved all available points. According to these results it could be said that no student reached the level of independent reading, two students reached the level of preliminary reading, four students reached the reading level necessary for participation in the lessons, while a high share of 44 students (88%) typically show frustration level reading where it is "impossible to expect efficient understanding of texts and advanced reading proficiency". S. Pečjak, *Kako do boljšega branja...*, p. 63–64. Since such conclusions can of course not be true, the real problem lies not in the students but in Prešeren's poetry, which is receptively too demanding.

¹⁷ The archaic (difficult to understand or unknown) terms in the first half of stanza "Na tleh leže slovenstva stebri stari" (Old pillars of Slovenedom are cast down) are: ležé, šegah, postave, parski, Tesel, ječé, jarmom, sini, Slave. These nine words (of twenty-two) represent 40 percent of all text! As expected, students were not able to recognize the meaning of the word "parski" which means *bavarski* (Bavarian), the word *jarem* (yoke) is unknown to contemporary town children, and pretty much unknown to rural children as well, although it is still preserved in the idiomatic expression '*zakonski jarem*' (yoke of matrimony). Young people are also not aware that the word *postava* (law) may also mean *zakon* (marriage).

Concrete answers are even more explicit than sheer statistics. Since such research is rare and the results are exceptionally instructive, I relate examples of a complete answer, partial answer and complete failure to understand each stanza¹⁸ and I provide, for comparison, half of a particular octave, which served as the source text:

THE FIRST STANZA	THE THIRD STANZA	THE FOURTH STANZA
<i>Mož in oblakov vojsko je obojno / končala temna noč, kar svetla zarja / zlati z rumen'ni žarki glavo trojno / snežnikov kranjskih siv'ga poglavarja*.</i>	<i>Na tleh leže slovenstva stebri stari, / v domačih šegah utrjene postave; / v deželi parski Tesel gospodari, / ječe pod težkim jarnom sini Slave**.</i>	<i>Prenesla pričujoče ure teže / bi ne bila let poznih glava siva; / v mladosti vendar trdnjše so mreže, / ki v njih drži nas upa moč golj'fiva***.</i>
COMPREHENSION: The war and the storm finished when the dawn shone on the snow-covered mount Triglav.	COMPREHENSION: Carinthia is destroyed; foreigners are masters of Slovenes who suffer under the siege.	COMPREHENSION: In distress the young fare better than the old, because the young still hold some hope.
PARTIAL COMPREHENSION: The war is over and the sun shone over Triglav.	PARTIAL COMPREHENSION: Slovenes were destroyed, murdered ... victory of Tesel, the proud new master.	PARTIAL COMPREHENSION: The young have more power and courage, because they still have hope.
FAILURE TO COMPREHEND: In the dark night no trace of the army can be seen, while during daytime even one general can be seen.	FAILURE TO COMPREHEND: Although Slovenes were oppressed, they maintained their culture and traditions without submitting to rulers.	FAILURE TO COMPREHEND: When old your head becomes gray and the brain no longer works well, but when young, you think well and know how to cheat.

* Cf. Note 57.

** Old pillars of Slovenedom are cast down, / And all our laws on ancient habit based; / All bow before Bavarian Tesel's crown, / The sons of Slavdom 'neath his yoke are placed,

*** A greying head, one of advancing years, / Could not endure the present hours of pain; / For youth the net much firmer yet adheres / Wherein false pow'r of hope can us enchain¹⁹.

As the examples of failed comprehension show, even though the majority of students decode many meanings of particular words or phrases, the real problem appears when these partial meanings have to be combined into a whole.²⁰ We can conclude that *The Baptism at the Savica* will not be

¹⁸ The students' comments have not been edited.

¹⁹ F. Prešeren, *Poems/Pesmi*, p. 119.

²⁰ To further illustrate some totally unexpected (but "possible") readings, I quote a few more examples of miscomprehension. THE FIRST STANZA: The chief and his big army were defeated in one night. The darkness brought the fighting to a standstill and the dawn shone on the dead bodies. THE THIRD STANZA: Slovenian soldiers lie on the ground, wearing national clothing. Soldiers are lying dead on the ground and they look tired.

able to perform its expected role in home reading in this reading population if nothing is done to facilitate comprehension. The first reading is simply too exacting for students, and consequently further discussion at school (unless the teacher uses the method of “long reading”) can be but passive reception of the teacher’s explanation or a reproduction of “literature about literature”²¹.

School possibilities to improve reception of *The Baptism at the Savica*

In the twentieth century, four different options / possibilities to improve the reception of older or linguistically / stylistically more demanding verse texts gained ground: linguistic actualization (modernization), adding notes (commenting), transmission into prose (prosification)²² and general simplification (simplification). Below I present the first three options in more detail in relation to *The Baptism at the Savica*, since simplification²³ as a tool of didactic adjustment cannot be used in school.

Linguistic actualization (modernization)

In West European literary readers and also in independent publications we can find examples of linguistic actualizations (appearing side-by-side

Slovenians are lying on the ground, dead and in dungeon. These are difficult times for Slovenians as the yoke of glory is too heavy. THE FOURTH STANZA: Even though the war was long, the soldiers still hope to win. In old age one remembers and awakens bad memories from the past.

As most of the examples show, students – through miscomprehension of the stanzas which describe the situation after the night battle – take meaningful components from the introductory story and use them to construct a complete meaning: for example in the metaphorical phrase “*na tleh leže slovenstva stebri stari* (Old pillars of Slovenedom are cast down)”, which symbolically describes the loss of Slovenian independency and state, students saw something very material like the dead bodies of young soldiers lying on the ground.

²¹ When Janko Bezjak, in his special didactics of the Slovene language, evaluates advantages of the text treated with “the developing illustrative method”, he draws our attention to the problems of reproductive teaching style and advantages of the discussion method of teaching: “When a teacher delivers his subject, students receive only passively, but when they think and answer the teacher’s questions, they participate actively. What they obtained with their own effort, became permanent and their spiritual property”. J. Bezjak, *Didaktika, Part II: Posebno ukoslovje slovenskega učnega jezika v ljudski šoli*, Ljubljana 1907, p. 209.

²² According to M. Juvan, *Imaginarij Kersta v slovenski literaturi: medbesedilnost recepcije*, »Literatura« 1990, vol. 133/134). I chose the Slovene term “*prozifikacija*” (prosification) which means a secondary form of a text, instead of the Slovene term “*prozaizacija*” which means that something becomes prosaic (ordinary, dull). *SSKJ IV (Dictionary of Slovene Literary Language)*, p. 266.

²³ It implies heavily abridged editions of different classical texts, written in prose. For example, in Great Britain, such texts are edited by Longman (Longman Simplified English Series) for readers learning English as their second or foreign language. Simplified editions of classics are immensely popular and *Shakespearove pripovedke (Tales from Shakespeare)* by Charles and Mary Lamb were reprinted eighteen times between the first Slovene edition of 1933 and 1971.

with the original, but also replacing the original) mostly authors from the Middle Ages, who are, due to the language development, poorly comprehensible or generally incomprehensible for today's readers who speak Italian, French or English as their mother tongue. For illustration I quote the original and linguistically updated version of the beginning of *The Knight's Tale*²⁴ by the English epic poet Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400):

ORIGINAL	MODERNIZATION
Whilom, as olde stories tellen us, there was a duke that highte Theseus: Of Athens, he was lord and governour, And in his time swich a conquerour, that greeter was there none under the sunne. Full many a riche contree had he wonne: What with his wisdom and his chivalrye, He conquered all the regne of Femenye, That whilom was y-cleped Scythia, And weddede the queen Ipolyta ... (Chaucer 1996)	Once on a time as old tales tell to us, There was a duke whose name was Theseus; Of Athens he was lord and governor, And in his time was such a conqueror That greater was there not beneath the sun. Full many a rich country had he won; What with his wisdom and his chivalry He gained the realm of Femeny, That was of old time known as Scythia. There wedded he the queen, Hippolyta ... (Chaucer 1988)

The author of the linguistic modernization strived to keep the verse and rhyme while substituting ten archaic words or phrases with modern counterparts and in thirteen cases substituting an archaic word with its modern form. This means that 23 out of 67 words have been linguistically modernized, which is about 30 percent.

In modern editions of Prešeren's poems (all notable school editions of poems except *Zdravljica (The Toast)*²⁵ originate from *Poezije* (1847), which was printed in the "gajica" alphabet) modernizations occur at the levels of orthography, sounds and forms, while the vocabulary remains unchanged due to the cult status of Prešeren's poetic word²⁶. The possibilities for improved reception brought by linguistic modernization of Prešeren's poems are evident in the comparison between critical approach to the texts of *Poezije* in Prešeren's Collected Works²⁷ by Kos and the more popular ver-

²⁴ These 10 verses from the beginning of *The Knight's Story* in Longman's simplified version, which saw five editions during the period 1987–1990, run as follows: "Duke Theseus once ruled over Athens. He was a great soldier. He conquered Scythia in a war, and married its Queen Hippolyta". G. Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (simplified), London 1990.

²⁵ The poem *Zdravljica (A Toast)* was censored and first published only after the March revolution in 1848 in Bleiweis' newspaper *Novice* (News) and in the poetic almanac "*Krajska čebelica V(The Carniolan Bee)*", set in the *gajica* alphabet.

²⁶ The wording in Prešeren's poems used to be changed mainly for purist reasons, for example "znablo znabla" was changed into "ustno ustna" (lip) in *The Baptism*, or "drekažo" (they shit) was changed into "kramlajžo" (they chat) and "zasrane" (shitty) was changed into "izdane" (published) in the "Nova pisarija" (The New Writing).

²⁷ F. Prešeren, *Zbrano delo I*, ed. J. Kos, Ljubljana 1965.

sion of Slodnjak²⁸, which was intended for a wider reading audience and of which an incredible 24,000 copies were printed in three reprints in a ten year period²⁹.

To compare both editions I chose the first six octaves of *The Baptism at the Savica* and used them to test high school students' comprehension of the poem. In Kos' edition of *The Baptism* there are 73 difficult-to-understand words (they are no longer in use, or are archaic in form, accent or meaning), representing around 25 percent of all words, while Slodnjak's version still includes 64 archaic words, i.e. about 22 percent. Slodnjak's modernizations³⁰ generally follow linguistic changes which are known as "new forms" in the history of Slovene literary language, which at about 1850 experienced a shift from distinctive Carniolan literary language towards all-Slovenian. Despite a clear intention to render Prešeren's language more familiar to a contemporary audience, Slodnjak's endeavours were very limited as he could not change abbreviated words or words with unusual accents on account of the metric scheme³¹, and he could not modernize numerous words with archaic endings because of their rhymes³²,

Considering the fact that even after linguistic modernization, one fifth of difficult-to-understand words remains, that modernization is ten times less extensive than in Chaucer and that empirical test in the first grade of high school where I used Slodnjak's version of *The Baptism* showed an extremely low degree of comprehension, I conclude that in Prešeren's case, this method of improving reception of a demanding classical text has a negligible positive impact³³.

²⁸ F. Prešeren, *Poezije in pisma*.

²⁹ In the last four decades the following practice gained ground: secondary school readers include a more demanding version of Prešeren's poems edited by Kos, while elementary schools reprint a slightly updated version by Slodnjak.

³⁰ roparjov – roparjev (robber's), nekdanji – nekdanji (former), vtrjene – utrjene (strengthened), tujcam – tujcem (to foreigners), de – da (that), vender – vendar (nevertheless), Bleškega – Blejskega, Bleški – Blejski (of Bled), gričam – gričem (to hills).

³¹ The word "mladenčov" (young men) could be updated as "mladenčev", however he could not write the proper form "mladeničev".

³² In any case, the inconsistent modernization is questionable. The Fourth Slovene reader for elementary school used in 1943 included the following text: "Dni mojih lepša polovica *kmalo*, / mladosti leta, *kmalu* ste minule...".

³³ Chaucer wrote his texts more than four centuries before Prešeren, however the share of archaic words showed that there is no significant difference between the difficulty of reception of both authors. In addition, Prešeren's poetical language is more inverted and above all much more metaphorical.

Adding notes (commenting)

Adding footnotes or endnotes³⁴ is common practice in difficult classical and modern texts regardless of literary form or type. Notes explain either less well-known data or receptively harder passages and undoubtedly facilitate comprehension of the text and thus also its experiencing. They may, however, be disturbing or even restraining as indirectly pointed out by Grosman³⁵, who notes – when explaining reception-related difficulties in reading more demanding texts – that various Slovenian textbooks “sometimes contain whole glossaries of new words with no respect of the fact that a text with so many new words becomes unintelligible to a student, de-motivates and diverts him/her from the subject”.³⁶

Since *The Baptism at the Savica* is, in terms of reception, one of the most demanding Slovene literary texts belonging to the hard core of Slovene literary standard, I first decided to research notes as they appear in similar (i.e. classical and in verse form) foreign literary texts. Thus *The Divine Comedy* in its 1971 edition and *The Tales from Canterbury* in its 1996 edition (in both cases these are one of numerous reprints, therefore these works are well-used) both include copious notes. On average there is one comment for each two lines in Dante, and exactly the same frequency appears in Chaucer’s General Prologue, which is semantically very condensed. According to these criteria the entire *Baptism at the Savica*, consisting of 516 lines, would be expected to have approximately 250 notes. As in one of the recent editions of Prešeren’s poems for school use³⁷, edited by Boris Paternu, there are only 15 notes added to *The Baptism at the Savica* (two for the sonnet to *Matija Čop*, five for the *Introduction* and eight for *The Baptism*), so the following has to be stated: either the comparison to Dante and Chaucer is completely out of place or the editions of *The Baptism* for school use have essentially too few notes added.

In defining the necessary number of notes we can look to Karel Ozvald, who used his experience of teaching Prešeren’s *Nova pisarija* (*The New Writing*) and published it with as many as 69 exhaustive notes in *Naši kulturni delavci* (*Our Cultural Workers*). We can extrapolate that the whole

³⁴ Modern readers more and more often have notes placed on the outer edge of the page.

³⁵ M. Grosman, *Razsežnosti branja*, Ljubljana 2006, p. 112.

³⁶ The fact that a large number of notes essentially reduce or even make impossible for the reader to spontaneously get familiar with a text (so-called evasion reading or reading with absorption) was indicated by the two authors of the simplified version of Shakespeare’s dramas, who stated that “readers who read the book in its original form must look into the dictionary too often, and in doing they forfeit a good deal of reading pleasure offered by the book”. Ch., M., *Tales from Shakespeare*, London 1971, p. 3.

³⁷ F. Prešeren, *Pesmi in pisma*, ed. B. Paternu, Ljubljana 2000.

The Baptism at the Savica would require 250 notes (verse ratio: 48 versus 516), which is, on average, one note to every two verses, thus presenting an equal density of clarifications as in the case of Dante or Chaucer. As such a number of notes actually disturbs the reading process and reduces the pleasure of reading and does not resolve the question of the 90% inversion rate in the lines of Prešeren's poem, we can reliably conclude that commentary cannot give a satisfactory solution to the problem of the first reading of *The Baptism at the Savica*.

Our thesis concerning the indispensable number of notes in the school version of *The Baptism at the Savica* would have remained an unconfirmed scientific hypothesis had I not discovered, during the finishing phase of the research when I scrutinized school readers, that by far the largest number of notes in Prešeren's poems can be traced to an ethnic Slovene reader, compiled in Italy by Robert Petaros and Maks Šah *Od prvih zapiskov do romantike (From the First Records to Romanticism 1980)*³⁸. Both authors added as many as 193 notes to the full *The Baptism at the Savica* (11 to the sonnet to *Matija Čop*, 51 to the *Introduction*, 131 to *The Baptism*)³⁹, which is an exceptional density of clarifications, amounting to one note each 2.7 verses. In the first six octaves of *The Baptism*, where I foresaw at least 25 notes, they found 24 difficult passages which needed to be explained to young readers⁴⁰.

Transmission into prose (prosilification)

According to Gerard Genette, the author of the famous *Palimpsestes*, prosification is, together with translation, versification and trans-stylization, one of the cases of formal transposition⁴¹, which "only likens the original to a new metasystem", in our case to the requirements of the prose form of literary text⁴². Prosification as a reception aid is used in two ways: as a substitute for a receptively too demanding verse original or as didactic addition to improve comprehension of demanding classical poetry.

³⁸ R. Petaros, M. Šah, *Od prvih zapiskov do romantike* (Slovene Reader for Second Year of Higher Secondary Schools), Trst 1980. This could be expected, as the central Slovene readers succumb to the mythological image of Prešeren, who "does not need many notes", however our ethnical minorities obviously have a less burdened and more distant view on necessity of notes, based on their school practice. This may also be a continuance of the tradition, which was established by Ozvald through his detailed notes a hundred years ago.

³⁹ This is thirteen times more than in Paternu's edition of Prešeren in 2000.

⁴⁰ An interesting fact is that two thirds of their notes are identical to those which I specified as essential footnote explanations.

⁴¹ G. Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*, Paris 1982, p. 237–340.

⁴² M. Juvan, *Imaginarij Kersta...*

The first method emerges also within simplified versions of texts at some key passages. I relate an example of the prosification of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*:

ORIGINAL TEXT IN VERSE FORM	PROSIFICATION
Tarry a little: there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood; The words expressly are a pound of flesh. (Shakespeare 1974)	„Wait a little, Jew”, said Portia; „there is something else. This bond here gives you no drop of blood; the words are, a pound of flesh.” (Lamb 1971)

As we can see, the adaptors of the text not only modernized the language, but also transformed verse to prose, and at the same time formally transposed the dramatic text to prose.

The second prosification method is intended for use at school and consists of displaying the same text in verse and prose, side-by-side. A typical example can be found in one of the recent editions of *The Divine Comedy*, which presents short prose summaries of most of the text, while some of the most beautiful fragments are in both verse and prose:

ORIGINAL TEXT IN VERSE	PROSIFICATION
«O frati», dissi «che per cento milia perigli siete giunti a l'occidente, a questa tanto picciola vigilia, d'i nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente, non vogliate negar l'esperienza, di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente. (Dante 1998)	Dissi: „O fratelli, che superando centomila pericoli siete giunti all'Occidente, a questo brevissimo tempo in cui disporremo ancora dei nostri sensi, non vogliate che ci priviamo dell'esperienza di vedere, seguendo il cammino del Sole, la parte del mondo dove non vive nessun essere umano..”

The prosification of this fragment of *The Divine Comedy* also shows formal transposition from verse to prose and is linked to linguistic modernization. A large number of added words can be noted as modern readers require more detailed explanations of Dante's extremely sparing expression.

In Slovenia at the beginning of the 20th century, prosification occurred both in scholastic theory and practice. When, in his special didactics, Janko Bežjak⁴³ speaks about school discussion of epic poems, he mentions that spoken prosification is an indispensable didactic means of improving reception of more complex poems: “After announcing this intent we present both versions and narrate the poem in neat, simple prose form, but only in

⁴³ Janko Bežjak (1862–1935), educator and linguist. He was principal of the first state Slovene language high school in Gorica. After the beginning of the World War I he was for ten years an inspector of secondary schools in Ljubljana. He co-authored several readers for the last grades of secondary schools.

the case where the contents assume a more difficult form, composition and poetic language than prose narrative, like for example in the poems *Mutec osojski* (*The Mute of Osoje*), *Turki na Slevici* (*Turks at Slevica*), *Noč in dan* (*Night and Day*), *Brodnik* (*Ferryman*), *Atila in slovenska kraljica* (*Attila and Slovenian Queen*), *Zvon na poti* (*Bell on the Way*)⁴⁴. Bezjak's didactic recommendation is significant for two reasons: he is clearly aware which elements hinder reception (complex form, composition and language) and of the purpose of prosification, while his direct mentioning of more complex epic poems proves that prosification is even more needed in Prešeren's poetry which is more problematic in terms of reception than some well known poems by Aškerc.

A good example of prosification appears in *Četrto slovensko berilo* (*The Fourth Slovene Reader*), prepared during German occupation in 1943 by Kristina Hafner and Franc Ločniškar. In their note under the first stanza of the poem *Slovo od mladosti* (*Farewell to Youth*), where the poetic language is modernized to the maximum still accepted by Slovenes, the stanza was explained through prosification:

PREŠEREN'S ORIGINAL	PROSIFICATION
Dni mojih lepša polovica kmalo, mladosti leta, kmalu ste minule; rodile ve ste meni cvetja malo, še tega rož' ce so se koj osule. Le redko upa sonce je sijalo, viharjev jeze so pogosto rjule. Mladost! Vendar po tvoji temni zarji srce bridko vzdihuje: Bog te obvarji!*	Pesnik se poslavlja od mladosti. Dala mu je malo veselja in sreče, pa še to, kar je užil, je trajalo le kratek čas. Mladost mu ni prinesla lepih upov za bodočnost, pač pa je doživel mnogo bridkosti in prebil veliko bojev. Kljub temu pa se pesnik težko loči od mladosti in ji kliče: Bog te obvarji!**

* Gone by the better half of all my days, / O years of youth, you have so quickly passed! / You bore for me so few of life's bouquets, / Whose blossoms, never much, still faded fast. / And seldom did hope's sun bestow its rays, / While all too oft erupted anger's blast. / Yet, youth, for your dark dawn in bitter quell / My heart forever sighs, God keep you well!⁴⁵

** The poet takes farewell from his youth. It gave him little joy and happiness, and event that he enjoyed but for a short time. His youth did not bring him bright hopes for future, on the contrary, he had to experience many sorrows and go through many battles. Yet still, the poet finds it hard to part from his youth and bids it: God keep you well!

This formal transposing is almost completely comparable to the above-mentioned prosification of *The Divine Comedy*. The poem *Farewell to Youth* is one of the receptively most difficult Prešeren's poems. A detailed analy-

⁴⁴ J. Bezjak, *Didaktika...*, p. 217.

⁴⁵ F. Prešeren, *Poems/Pesmi*, p. 41.

sis of the original stanza shows that it contains many less comprehensible words⁴⁶, and above all that almost all lines contain inverted word order or metaphors. Prosification of the stanza, as opposed to modernization and commentary with their limited possibilities to improve reception, solves, in the first reading, the problems of archaisms, inversion and metaphorical language, which are the three factors which mostly hinder proper comprehension of the text. Since the prosification thoroughly performs the role of didactic modernization and simplification, the authors of the reader could, if they displayed both versions of the text side-by-side, leave the original in unaltered form on the left side, which would also allow more motivated students to obtain a realistic impression of Prešeren's poetic language.

Confirmed usefulness of prosification in improving reception of *The Baptism at the Savica*

In order to confirm my thesis that prosification is the most suitable didactic aid for improving the reception or primarily cognitive response of students also for complex Slovene classical verse texts, I carried out an empirical study in three classes of the first grade of Tolmin high school in February 2006. All three classes were taught by the same Slovene language teacher who carried out the test according to my instructions, while the classes were completely comparable as to the number of students, gender distribution, parents' education and students' general achievement in the final year of elementary school⁴⁷. I prepared three types of material: the first class received the first twelve octaves of *The Baptism* in poetic form, the second in prose form, while the third group received both versions side-by-side, with poetry on the left and prosification on the right⁴⁸. The teacher

⁴⁶ lepši, kmalo, kmalo, minule, rož'ce, viharjov, jeze, rjule, vendèr, zdihuje, obvarji...

⁴⁷ The number of students varied from 22 to 24, and distribution between sexes was even: each group had 10 boys and 12–14 girls. The average education level of parents fluctuated from 5.2 to 6.2 (according to the national classification), while students' average final mark from elementary school ranged from 4.1 to 4.6 (out of 5).

⁴⁸ The first stanza will serve as an example:

POETRY	PROSE
Mož in oblakov vojsko je obojno ... končala temna noč, kar svetla zarja zlata z rumen'mi žarki glavo trojno snežnikov kranjskih siv'ga poglavarja. Bohinjsko jezero stoji pokojno, sledu ni več zunanjega viharja; al somov vojska pod vodo ne mine, in drugih roparjev v dnu globočine*.	Z nočjo sta se končala tako nevihta kot vojaški spopad, zdaj pa jutranja zarja obseva vse tri vrhove Triglava. Bohinjsko jezero je mirno, saj ni več sledov viharnega vremena; vendar se pod vodno gladino somi in druge roparske ribe še vedno spopadajo**.

first distributed the material to the students who silently read all twelve stanzas, which were printed on both sides of one sheet of paper⁴⁹. When all students had carefully read the material, the teacher took it away and then handed out the same questionnaires in all three classes which included three tasks to verify student comprehension.

Due to the added prosification which already contains applied comprehension of the original, I chose, to test any potential differences between individual classes, only such tasks with which I identified the comprehension level for words and the comprehension level for interpretation⁵⁰. while using the procedure of supplementing, summarizing and answering questions (statements), where I chose a closed-type task with several alternative answers⁵¹. The results of the empirical test, expressed as a percentage of correct solutions, since otherwise the various numbers of possible points (1st task – 4, 2nd task – 2, 3rd task – 7) would make the task not completely comparable:

* The matching violence of man and cloud / By darkling night are ended now, and bright / Sunrise now gilds the threefold peaks unbowed / Of Carniola's grey and snowbound height. / All tranquil lie Lake Bohinj's water proud, / Of battle now no trace remains in sight. / But armies of fierce pike beneath the waves / Fight other denizens of th' watery caves. F. Prešeren, *Poems/Pesmi*, p. 119.

** With the end of the night, the storm and battle also ended. Now the morning sun gilds the three peaks of Triglav. The Bohinj lake is calm, signs of stormy weather can no longer be seen; yet under its undisturbed surface, sheatfish and other predatory fish still struggle with each other.

⁴⁹ The students with both literary forms were instructed by the teacher to read zig-zag so that they first read each stanza in its original form and after that its prosification. If necessary, they may go back to the original form and then continue with the second stanza.

⁵⁰ These two levels refer to familiarity with terminology and specific data (the lowest level) and understanding of relations between each part of the text or singling out some mutually independent events, points of view and their relevant details (the second level) (S. Pečjak, *Kako do boljšega branja...*, p. 57–58.

⁵¹ S. Pečjak, *Kako do boljšega branja...*, p. 61–62.

a) In the task of supplementing, students had to insert four missing words in a rewritten sixth stanza of the fragment; the missing words were Črtomira, mladenčev, joki and Staroslav.

b) When summarizing, students were instructed to mark the order of events from four selected stanzas with the numbers 1 to 4; I took care not to include the first and the last octave of the fragment. The stanzas were quoted in the following order: 4. (Že, Črtomir! je treba se ločiti) – 3. (Dari opravit bog'nji po navadi) – 1. (Al jezero, ki na njega pokrajni) – 2. (Tje na otok z valovami obdani).

c) Students received seven sets of closed-type statements and had to select the appropriate statement out of four possibilities, so random success was largely eliminated.

I quote an example for the first and the last stanza:

“V jutru po spopadu med pogani in kristjani je bilo vreme A) deževno, B) oblačno, C) megleno, Č) sončno.” (The morning after the battle between the pagans and Christians the weather was A) Rainy, B) Cloudy, C) Misty, D) Sunny.)

– “Ko se Črtomir poslavlja od Bogomile in njenega očeta, A) joče le Bogomila, B) joče le Črtomir, C) jočeta oba, Č) jočejo vsi trije.” (When Črtomir bids farewell to Bogomila and her father, A) only Bogomila cries, B) only Črtomir cries, C) they both cry, D) all three cry).

	Supplementing	Summarizing	Choosing	TOTAL
I. CLASS (poetry)	3	57	32	27
II. CLASS (prose)	10	63	66	48
III. CLASS (both)	13	90	68	54

As expected, only a low percentage of students in all three classes successfully completed the first task, although the difference between the first and the third group is significant. The result of the second group is surprising since in the prosified version of the text, as many as three words out of four differ in form from the original. The second task has the highest average score of all, as discovering the plot is obviously less demanding than decoding textual details. The outstandingly high results of the third group can, in my opinion, be attributed to “zig-zag” reading which prolongs the perception of the text and allows increased memorization. The third task proves that *The Baptism at the Savica* in its first reading indeed provokes exceptional reception problems, as appropriate referential meanings of the text were identified by a mere third of high school students who only read the poetic form of the poem. As expected, comprehension improves two-fold in those who read *The Baptism* in prosified form as there was no reception interference from archaisms, inversion and metaphors. Such a high result was also noted in the third group, who read *The Baptism* in both forms.

As in the first empirical study, it would be pointless to contend that no high school student from the first group reached the level of independent reading, that only one reached the level, enabled through teaching, and that all others remained at the frustration level of reading⁵²; rather, the results serve as repeated and clear proof that also educated people have great problems understanding *The Baptism at the Savica* and most other Prešeren’s poem at the first reading.⁵³ The results of the students from the third class show that the addition of the prosification immensely improves the reception, as these students, when their cognitive response was measured, achieved up to a hundred percent higher rate of positive answers compared to students from the first group⁵⁴.

⁵² S. Pečjak, *Kako do boljšega branja...*, p. 64. Only one student from the first class achieved more than 40 percent of all possible points, two thirds of students achieved between 20 and 40 percent, and almost one third less than 20 percent.

⁵³ When summarizing events (second task), only one third of students from this group achieved all points, while when choosing the appropriate statement (third task), only two students achieved four points out of seven and all others achieved less than half of the available points.

⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that the prosification, added to the poem, was more helpful to the boys than to the girls. The boys in both second classes collected fewer points than girls. In the third class, boys were better than girls in both key

An even clearer picture is obtained if we compare the results of only the last two tasks, since the first task mostly assesses memorization rather than comprehension. After this limitation, students of the first group obtained 45 percent of available points and students of the third group 79 percent. The percentage of the first group is almost identical to the result obtained by Krakar when assessing the cognitive response of primary and high school students⁵⁵, while the four fifths of points obtained by the third group confirm that prosification⁵⁶ proves to be an efficient didactic aid for the first reading of *The Baptism at the Savica*. My hypothesis is that added prosification benefits all three types of readers according to Schmidt⁵⁷ – utilitarian readers (who, in my view, are the most frequent among high school students), emphatic-emotional readers, as well as intellectual readers.

Translated by Darja Teran

tasks: in understanding the story and in the details. They obtained outstanding results of 95 percent and 76 percent successively

⁵⁵ B. Krakar Vogel, *Obravnavanje literarne klasike...*, p. 131.

⁵⁶ The main reason being that it effectively removes reception noise caused by exceptional archaisms and the inverted and metaphoric style of Prešeren's poems.

⁵⁷ M. Dovič, *Sistemske in empirične obravnave literature*, Ljubljana 2004, p. 73. Dovič quotes Schmidt's conclusion, that in the late 18th century, the German reading public developed into utility type readers (reading for utilitarian reasons), empathetic-emotional readers (reading for enjoyment and in place of experiences) and intellectual readers (reading as self-actualization). This classification made by Schmidt is still useful.

Zoran Božič

Empirical Research – How To Improve Reception of Classical Poetry

An empirical study of understanding *The Baptism at the Savica* showed that Slovenian high school students had notable difficulties in decoding the basic meanings of Prešeren's poem. In literature, didactics offer three methods of facilitating reception of complex classical poetry: linguistic modernisation, addition of notes, and transmission into prose. Due to the cult status of Prešeren's poetry, modernizations can only be limited, while commenting hinders a spontaneous reading experience; as a result, only prosification entirely solves the problems of pronounced archaization, inverted word order and abundant metaphors in Prešeren's lines. This was confirmed by an empirical study in which high school students, who read the prosification together with the verses from *The Baptism at the Savica*, attested a comprehension which was twice as good as comprehension of students who only read the poetry.

Key words: empirical research, reception, France Prešeren, *The Baptism at the Savica*, prosification

Słowa kluczowe: badania empiryczne, recepcja, France Prešeren, *Chrzest nad Sawicą*, prozaizacja