

Creative Writing in Slavic Languages: The Examples of Polish and Croatian Languages

are just trying to survive with our students “in here”, amidst proliferating portals and passwords, frequently on a low wage, or a fragile contract, surrounded by changing parameters, and a seemingly splintering, often violent globalized world? Participants in my presentation contributed insights into where they go as teachers: into prisons, community centres, schools, hospitals and theatre groups. The vast infrastructures of the information era and of late capitalism into which our learners venture can seem to operate “above” us, or, confusingly, outside the limits of our knowledge and power, even though it is *our* job to provide an education for the sometimes incomprehensible wider world.

“The Cart” was published just after the assassination of the Moscow mayor who had championed popular education and two decades before revolution saw the end of three decades of Romanov rule in Russia.

Great revolutionary change may follow sustained challenges to popular education, but there are risks of other outcomes.

If students feel misunderstood, unheard, disconnected, impoverished, disempowered, alienated, within their learning spaces, those feelings are easily carried outside into their lives.

Vice versa, if those feelings begin outside, then they’re easily carried into the classroom.

If we lose the special place that the educational environment can be, like the place that Marya Vassilyevna has in her mind’s eye, this loss can all too easily become an anger, despair and hopelessness that feed both mental health ills but also social troubles such as scapegoating; acts of extremist rage; punitive aggression, etcetera (turning to leaders who approve and intensify our mistrust and disconnection or who captivate us with false promises of perfect order).

Chairing and attending others’ presentations at the 2024 Conference renewed my faith that many writing teachers and facilitators continue to encourage human creativity for good in the face of the divisions, precarity and anomie of our times.

Each of the writing exercises that I shared also aimed at the educator beginning to find the wellspring of inspiration that is the individual student’s intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

To quote Ginsburgh, “it is up to the educator to help his students discover for themselves what their greatest inspirational drive is”, and we can encourage such inspiration where we “initiate students to the *eternal present* where all things are possible because of the continual renewal and recreation inherent in each moment”.⁴

When motivated and inspired, with meaning and purpose, we do see the world in a powerfully different way.

Perhaps when we look at the old globes, or the way we used to conceive of the world outside our window, which is going through such massive geopolitical, structural and social changes, these models seem hardly recognizable—at best, outdated, and, at worst, useless. In the thinking of Chassidut, the mystical belief in “perpetual creation”, meaning that Our Creator gives the world anew every

moment, offers to replace our feelings of disorientation with inspiration—and disconnection from what we knew is superseded by radical connection to being far greater than ourselves.

Translated into my “itinerant teaching” model, this way of seeing can give us the feeling that we are perpetually arriving somewhere new with our students and we can use creative writing to get our bearings and map a way forward too.

At best, this is a place where our learners experience themselves as really connected; as visible, heard and understood individuals making sense of their own, valuable, unique learning path within an ever-changing reality.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh (2005). *The Art of Education*. GalEinai Publication Society, p.78.

² www.gutenberg.org. (n.d.). *The Schoolmistress and Other Stories, by Anton Chekhov*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1732/1732-h/1732-h.htm#linkschool>.

³ Wikipedia Contributors (2023). *In the Cart*. [online] Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_the_Cart [Accessed 25 Aug. 2024]; Wikipedia Contributors (2024). *Nikolay Alekseyev*. [online] Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolay_Alekseyev [Accessed 25 Aug. 2024].

⁴ Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh (2005). *The Art of Education*. GalEinai Publication Society, pp. 51, 71.

BIOGRAPHY

Anna Morvern writes about the wise stories of holy guidance written by Nahman from Uman [available online](#).

Formerly a human rights lawyer who worked in diverse areas such as immigration, criminal defence, family and employment law, she has been focused on teaching and working as a translator for just over a decade.

Her autobiographical book on trauma and mystical relationship was published in June 2023.

A NAWÉ member for many years who has previously presented on writing in prisons and writing with survivors of rape, Anna has lived in England, Ireland, the USA and Germany but now lives in France.

MICHAŁ PIOTR GOSTYŃSKI spoke at the NAWÉ Conference 2024 about how how differently we construct sentences, formulate thoughts, look for words to express ourselves, or present a story and tell it, when not writing in English. He demonstrated to what extent storytelling depends on language proficiency, and used examples of the Polish and Croatian languages.

Introduction

We can read, write, analyze, and explore many texts. Most of the time, we pass through them for several reasons to reach various purposes. Text is text, but the question is: what is creative text? What is creative writing? Do we question that? And what about creative writing in Slavic languages?

Creative writing in the field of education is a multi-faceted lens through which we can explore language, culture, and self-expression. All of them are closely related to the identity of literary languages and their corresponding language’s potential. What this article aims to touch is one of many borders between educational and artistic contexts and it exemplifies Polish and Croatian creative writing.

In addition to that, it explores the linguistic and cultural elements that gives them legacy value in the development of creative literacy and cross-cultural understanding.

Creative writing – what is it?

What is writing? What is creative writing? In general, writing can be defined as all forms of text creation. The goal of such writing is to communicate facts or ideas clearly and directly.

The tone of writing is often formal, factual, and objective. It is focused on conveying information or fulfilling practical tasks.

In my opinion, there are three types of writing in general culture.

The first one is writing with “artistic”, “expressive”, or “esthetic” values. Secondly, it can be just “good” writing. The third one is every single writing (a piece of written text). All types raise similar questions: how can we measure whether the text is “artistic”, “esthetic”, “good” or “creative”?



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When it comes to creative writing, we should consider the following aspects. Primarily, it is the purpose. Creative writing can entertain, evoke emotions, provoke thought, or explore human experiences. It is imaginative and expressive.

Then, it is that there are the different forms of creative writing; for instance, fiction, poetry, drama, screenplay, memoirs, or personal essays.

The tone and style of such writing can be informal, experimental, or abstract. The last one is the focus. Creative writing emphasizes artistic expression, narrative structure, character development, and emotional resonance. Most of the time, in creative writing we have more freedom in terms of language, form, and content.

Creative writing has three dimensions: intercultural, performative, and educational. The intercultural aspect of creative writing is that creative writing in foreign languages can combine different cultures, which is defined as the phenomenon of

translanguaging (García, 2009). The performative character of creative writing is given by creating text and presenting it in front of an audience, i.e. theatre form on the stage. The educational aspect of creative writing is important while teaching foreign languages. By using creative writing in language teaching, we can improve students’ comprehension skills. Moreover, using creative writing in a foreign language classroom can create bilingual/ multilingual reflective practice.

One should also consider the textual elements in creative writing. Textual elements can help and support the individual and the unique voice of writers. These elements are text structures (linear or nonlinear, epistolary, circular, and stream of consciousness), language features (like word choice, syntax, punctuation, imagery, figurative language, formality), and literary devices (i.e. foreshadowing, irony, symbolism, motifs, juxtaposition, or archetypes).

Slavic Languages in a Nutshell

The origin of Slavic languages comes from Proto-Slavic (Common Slavic) and Old Church Slavonic Languages (Šipka & Browne, 2024). According to *The Cambridge Handbook of Slavic Linguistics*, Slavic languages are divided into three general groups: Eastern (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian), Western (Polish, Czech, Slovak, Southern and Northern Kasubian, Upper and Lower Sorbian), and South (Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian) Slavic Languages.

There are also other subgroups of Slavic languages, however, in this article, only the simplified division is included.

Creative Writing in Polish and Croatian Languages

Polish and Croatian literatures have a long, hard history, with themes of struggle, survival, and national identity.

Because of that, Polish and Croatian creative writing has engaged with political and historical realities. In educational context, Polish and Croatian creative writing not only helps to connect with cultural heritage but also fosters critical thinking, emotional expression, and language proficiency.

The characteristic of the Polish and Croatian languages is their linguistic flexibility, which is a common aspect of Slavic languages in general. Both languages have rich, complex grammatical systems, and a lot of expressive word formation techniques. Creative writing in Polish and Croatian offers educational benefits in terms of language acquisition and fluency. Through the study of poetic forms and narrative structures, students can develop a strong command of syntax and vocabulary.

Exercises that engage with the free word order which is typical for Polish or Croatian can enhance flexibility in writing. Such exercises can be easily adapted to classroom activities, like collaborative poetry, drama or prose writing, where students experiment with word placement to emphasize particular emotions or themes, further developing their language skills.

Croatian literature also reflects the unique

composition of Slavic, Mediterranean, and Central European cultures. This confluence is evident in Croatian culture and literature, where the themes of identity, displacement, Adriatic Sea and cultural hybridity are central. One of the distinctive features of Croatian is its use of regional dialects alongside standard forms of the language. While standard Croatian serves as the unifying language for literary and formal writing, dialects such as Čakavian, Kajkavian, and Štokavian (Ivić, 2002) are still widely used in regional literature and poetry.

This dialectal diversity enriches Croatian language and gives an opportunity to explore creative writing in dialects, to experiment with different linguistic registers and to experience a cultural significance in language use.

Practical Application of Polish and Croatian Language in Education

Creative writing in Polish and Croatian can be included in schools and at universities as a part of the curriculum to improve language proficiency, creativity, and emotional intelligence. This practice will stimulate critical thinking and discussion, for example, how language influences the worldview of students. These activities do not only engage students with literary traditions and linguistic diversity but also promote an understanding of language as a living, evolving medium for the expression of themselves.

By fostering an appreciation for linguistic diversity, we can help students to understand and develop their writing skills and their ability to think critically about the role of language in societal development in a dynamic world. Exercises that make students reflect on their personal experience with language engage them in creative writing that speaks to linguistic identity.

Polish and Croatian creative writing can be used in educational settings to explore the relationship between language and cultural identity. The creative writing exercises in Polish and Croatian may encourage students to use regional dialects or to write about personal or familial experiences in a culturally specific context that helps them understand language and identity on a deeper level.

The Experimental Examples of Creative Writing in Polish and Croatian

Now, I would like to present a few examples of creative writing in Polish and Croatian languages. I call them a kind of language experiment, consisting of the translation of Croatian poetry into Polish and English. I will also share several parts of poetry and prose in Polish written by me. I will focus on the form, syntax and general playfulness of Slavic languages.

First, I will compare a fragment of the poem titled *Stone Thrower*, written by Antun Šoljan, a Croatian author. The text is originally in Croatian. I translated it into Polish and English. We will consider the rhythm, spirit and economy of the text.

In general, Croatian language seems more flexible and more economical (about the amount of words) than Polish or English. The same part of the poem in

Croatian includes 114 words, in Polish 125, and in English 141 words. Of course, it can also be a matter of translating the text and a few other factors, but the Croatian version of this poem is the shortest one. I also performed the poem and embodied it in several performances in Zagreb, Berlin and Padua.

Therefore, I can confirm that in that aspect, Croatian language (out of all three) is again the most malleable and natural to me to perform it, even though I am a Polish native speaker and I studied Croatian at university. Certainly, that is subjective. Some words – compared to Polish or English – were just a syllable less, or it was a case of syntax and inversion, during performing this piece, the fluency was the highest in Croatian language.

Therefore, I claim that speaking this poem in Croatian seemed the most fluent to me. It also differs whether the text is purely written and we read it silently, or even read it aloud, and there may be a different feeling when we speak, or perform the same poetry reading on stage.

I argue that this aspect could be very interesting for further research.

Now, I would like to briefly share my examples of writing poetry and prose in Polish language. First of all, both Slavic languages have a linguistic flexibility, while writing my texts in Polish gave me the freedom and joy of writing including a free word order, or playing with words by their semantics and forms. This kind of experiment with wordplay, or even creating neologism can emphasize particular emotions, themes and meanings.

In Polish, sometimes, I used the same verb, and it meant both a mental and physical activity. Likewise with the “physicalization” of certain actions, when the words touch the physical aspect, i.e. the body, there is a very narrow line there, but this thin and liminal difference is the point, to get that flavor of the work’s message.

Similarly, in playing with past, present, and future tenses, Polish language is extremely flexible. By adding even one letter (as a prefix, suffix, or interfix) it is possible to change the context of the situation completely; for example, differentiating whether it is a perfect or imperfect tense.

Sometimes, words look similar but the meanings are totally different. In addition, some Polish words are practically untranslatable.

Conclusion

Writing in Slavic languages (on the example of Polish and Croatian) in various forms, rhythms, styles, instances of wordplay, sounds and with Slavic spirit can give new perspectives.

It involves creating a coherent and unified Slavic voice that reflects the Slavic literature and culture, and emphasizes the Slavic language groups in the field of creative writing. This can contribute to the overall language skills (especially writing), emotional resonance, and engagement with writing.

Polish and Croatian creative writing traditions offer immense linguistic resources and cultural narratives that are of inestimable value in educational

institutions. By exploring these languages, students can learn within the framework of the development of not only writing skills but also cognitive thinking about language as a powerful cultural and historical phenomenon.

It nurtures linguistic development, cultural awareness, and critical thinking in students by including Polish and Croatian creative writing in teaching practices. Ultimately, the study of creative writing in these languages enriches students' understanding of the world, helps them connect with their own identities and histories, and improves writing language skills.

In my opinion, creative writing in Polish and Croatian can be also a good idea for further research, based on a writing experiment practice, and linguistic, cultural, and historical knowledge as well. In general, creative writing connects many fields of culture, art, and language.

The field of creative writing in Slavic languages can be a good improvement to the writing skills of students, and be a base for teachers using a performative language approach to language education. I claim that a new, more experimental, and creative approach to teaching Polish or Croatian is needed. To explore the impact of creative writing on writing skills in the context of Slavic languages, a shift of perspective may be of help to choose more alternative and effective ways to teach.

To sum up, I think it is a huge field to explore and to be developed in the future. Fortunately, in the last few years, more and more studies on creative writing are being conducted in Slavic countries (especially in Poland, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Ukraine). It is possible to find various creative writing workshops led by cultural associations or private schools.

However, in Slavic academia, it is still a field to be improved, in order for it to be and being - both learned and taught - efficiently. It can be a new turn in the educational approach in the educational systems of Slavic countries, and – based on Western countries' practices in education – it can also give a new, refreshing perspective on the Slavic “linguistic world”.

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BIOGRAPHY

I am Michał Piotr Gostyński, a PhD student in the Language Acquisition in Multilingual Settings (LAMS) program at the University of the Basque Country. I am interested in performative language teaching and performative poetry in foreign language teaching. I hold two Bachelor's degrees: in Filmology and Croatian Literature.

I earned my double Master's degree in Polish Language and Comparative Literature from the University of Zagreb in Croatia. I completed two postgraduate study programs on Pedagogy and Teaching Polish as a Foreign Language. Currently, I am working as a lecturer of Polish Language at the School of Foreign Languages at Ankara University.

I wish to thank my dear wife, Sevim Tuba Mert-Gostyński, for her unconditional support, encouragement and help in editing the article.

How to Navigate the Last Stages of the PhD

KARÍTAS HRUNDAR PÁLSDÓTTIR spoke at the NAWE Conference 2024 with recommendations as you approach the end of your long journey through a PhD.

The last stages of a PhD can be hard to navigate. How do you follow through with the bureaucratic side of things whilst finishing the thesis itself? Not to mention the stress of it all. How do you cope with the pressure?

Based on a session at the 2024 NAWE conference, the aim of this article is to discuss the challenges of the last few months of the PhD and share personal recommendations and resources.

Please bear in mind that the following are personal recommendations – it is likely that some but not all will be helpful to you. I passed my viva in creative writing in November 2023 from the University of East Anglia, so some protocols/ rules may change or not be applicable to you as you go through these stages yourself.

As you reach the end of your PhD you should take the time to think about a few practical, bureaucratic things. Firstly, there may be some money within your department earmarked for you.

Soon it will be now or never for you to access these funds.

The money can usually be used for conferences, e.g., registration fees, meals, accommodation, travel expenses. Secondly, there may be some personal-professional developmental courses offered at your university that cover the steps to completing your research degree and /or formatting and submitting your thesis; those can be helpful to attend.

Thirdly – and perhaps most importantly – you need to have a conversation with your supervisor three to six months before you are ready to submit your thesis about contacting your two examiners (one internal, one external). If you do this too late it might mean you need to wait three months to submit, because it can take the university’s office up to three months to sort out paperwork connected to the examiners.

If you and your supervisors need ideas for the external supervisor, members of NAWE have access to a good spreadsheet with people who are available for the role; you have to login as a member to find this list.

As the exact submission guidelines vary from institution to institution, let's jump ahead to the time of submission which can feel anticlimactic, as you just send your work out into the void. Take time to rest! Enjoy not thinking about your thesis. Your viva

will need to take place within three months of submission, and it is the internal examiner’s role to suggest dates that work for all.

If you have not heard anything after four to five weeks, you can ask your supervisor; they may know where the discussion is at. Getting a date is helpful so you can make plans around it. From what I hear, it is common to use about one to two weeks to prepare for the viva. These points may prove useful:

- Do a mock viva with your supervisors.
- Think of possible questions that you could be asked, and how you would answer.
- Read through your thesis with fresh eyes and make notes.
- Do quick research about your examiners background and publishing history to understand their viewpoint.
- Come up with questions for the examiners – you can ask them anything at the end. E.g., Critical: about how to develop something into an article in the future or where you could expand if turning this into a monograph etc. Creative: Does my writing remind you of anyone (you could be in dialogue/ collaboration with or use as comparisons for selling your work to agents).

Additionally, I have some personal tips for you.

Remember to eat well and exercise – take good care of yourself. It is normal to experience all the physical symptoms of stress. Doing Yoga Nitra (deep sleep for mind and body without falling asleep) or other types of mindfulness and self-compassion meditations can help take pressure off not sleeping well leading up to the viva.

Try to find the excitement amongst the stress/ anxiety for the big day. You can do this for example by having a one/two week “advent” calendar with small treats for you like a piece of chocolate, a candle, a soap etc.

The viva is a bit like Christmas, you have been anticipating it for 3+ years!

You might also want to evaluate your expectations for the viva itself. Some people who have passed their viva say (with rose tinted glasses), that it was “enjoyable”. That may simply mean it was not as terrifying as they feared or in hindsight, it was great, because psychologically that is what nostalgia does to our memory.