

THE CASE FOR A SLOVENE READER

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Professor Cooper's paper also begins with a survey of the readers currently available to students of Slovene. He then continues with the following rationale and proposal for a new Slovene reader for English-speaking students.

. . . The goal of any foreign-language reader, as I understand it, is to introduce to the student texts which utilize his knowledge of the language, while gradually expanding it. A reader presumes a familiarity with the basic features of the given language. In the case of Slovene such basic knowledge would include: the declension of nouns, adjectives and pronouns, the comparison of adjectives, the formation of adverbs, the conjugation of verbs, the distinction of aspect, the use of auxiliary verbs and adverbs (particularly lahko, bi and naj), the use of prefixes and suffixes, the meaning of particles (pa, res, kaj, kar, že, še, le), familiarity with dual constructions, and simple syntax (with special attention to ki constructions). Furthermore the student would have to command a basic Slovene vocabulary of a few hundred key words, which he would acquire in learning the rudiments of Slovene grammar.

The reader would then begin with carefully selected, heavily annotated examples of genuine Slovene prose. In my opinion, those three qualities--selection, annotation, and authenticity--are indispensable to a successful reader. My experience with second-year Russian has shown time and again that poorly chosen readings can quickly discourage even the most motivated students. The ideal reading choices are from contemporary sources; have an innate interest which can appeal to, in this case, a mature American; they express their ideas clearly, without rhetorical flourishes, and use a simple, repetitious vocabulary in syntactically parallel constructions. Annotation shows the placement

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of accents, vowel length, open or closed o and e, and schwa; it adduces in the margins or at the foot of the page the definition of new words, and perhaps in footnotes following the text it explains simply all new constructions. In a Slovene reader, given the mobility of Slovene stress and the mutability of vowel equality, accents should be marked in all the texts, not just the initial ones, and grammatical and syntactical explanations should be repeated in the footnotes whenever they are needed. The third quality of a successful reader is, I insist, authenticity. That is, the texts should not be created ad hoc for the alleged needs of foreign language students, but rather should be drawn from genuine sources originating in the homeland of the language. Invariably ad hoc texts contain distortions--simplification itself is after all a distortion--and infelicities of style--the composers of readers and grammars are rarely fine writers--which undermine the accuracy of a reader. Original texts, though more difficult for the beginner, nevertheless have an integrity in style and structure which can be appreciated by the serious student from the outset. Thus real texts, carefully selected and scrupulously annotated, form the basis of a useful foreign-language reader.

As I have pointed out in the foregoing, the existing Slovene readers are designed by and large for the use of second-generation or later Slovenes living abroad. This fact inevitably leads me to my next point here: for whom should a new Slovene reader be composed? I have already hinted at the answer--it should be directed to the needs of the scholarly community, that is, the literary specialists, linguists and historians who are most likely to want to read Slovene texts in the original. Conversational primers are not in short supply, but introductions to the written language, with a detailed examination of the complexities of technical prose, simply do not exist for the English-speaking world. If our overall goal is to make the field of Slovene studies more generally accessible, then we must concentrate on interesting and assisting the scholarly community. A few implications arise from this bias. For one, explanations can be sophisticated, and draw on analogies from other

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languages, especially Russian. For another, texts must be chosen not only for their linguistic suitability, but also with an eye to informing and even challenging the scholar-student with new information. All in all, a new reader would have to serve not only as a linguistic tool, but as an introduction to Slovene scholarship as well.

I would like to conclude with a brief word about the texts themselves. They should run the gamut from the simplest selections we can find to the moderately difficult. Included might be grade-school history texts, Slovene versions of commonly known literature (Biblical passages, fairy tales, classical historical texts with literary qualities), passages from primers on linguistics and the like, for a start. Middle level competence might be achieved with encyclopaedia and newspaper prose, popular literature (spy and war stories, adventure tales, mysteries), and general linguistic treatises. In later sections passages from modern historians could be adduced, as well as more sophisticated modern fiction and linguistic analyses. Finding suitable texts would no doubt be a challenging task, annotating them would require the labor of native speakers of English and Slovene. But such a reader, with a scholarly bias and an ulterior motive (interesting the reader in Slovene studies), could if successful provide in short order a mastery of Slovene scholarly and literary prose which would permit its user to function independently in Slovene-language texts of whatever difficulty.

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