

## JAN ERIK VOLD'S CONCRETE POEMS: A WAY TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' CREATIVITY AND GRAMMAR SKILLS IN NORWEGIAN

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**ABSTRACT.** *Jan Erik Vold's Concrete Poems: A Way to Enhance Students' Creativity and Grammar Skills in Norwegian.* The current paper aims to present the didactic use of the Norwegian concrete poems. The concept of concrete poetry will be approached through Jan Erik Vold's literary perspective as the promoter of concretism in Norway. In order to prove the effectiveness of these poems in the teaching process, a survey was conducted including a questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions. The respondents were 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students of BA in Norwegian language and literature and a group of 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students from The Centre for Language Industries, enrolled at the Faculty of Letters, at Babeş-Bolyai University. This research aimed at the effectiveness of using Vold's concrete poems when teaching specific language structures in Norwegian. Thus, a survey was done at the end of one semester of experiment when I used Jan Erik Vold's concrete poems for my students during my Norwegian language courses and seminars. The results showed that especially during these seminars students read, analyse and design concrete poems in Norwegian, including grammatical and typographical poems, ready-mades, tongue twisters and nursery-rhymes-like poems, in order to better understand and to revise a specific grammatical, syntactic or lexical structure in Norwegian.

**Keywords:** *Norwegian language, concrete poems, Jan Erik Vold, visual poem, grammatical poem*

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**REZUMAT. Poeziile concretiste ale lui Jan Erik Vold: O modalitate de a îmbunătăți creativitatea și competențele gramaticale ale studenților în limba norvegiană.** Lucrarea de față își propune să prezinte folosirea în scop didactic a poeziilor concretiste norvegiene. Conceptul de poezie concretistă va fi prezentat prin prisma perspectivei literare pe care o are Jan Erik Vold ca promotor al concretismului în Norvegia. Pentru a dovedi eficacitatea acestor poezii în procesul de predare, am realizat un chestionar format din întrebări cu răspunsuri închise și deschise. Respondenții sunt studenți din anul I și anul al II-lea de studiu, de la Specializarea de limbă și literatură norvegiană, nivel licență și studenți din anul al III-lea de studiu de la Centru pentru Industriile Limbii înscriși la Facultatea de Litere din cadrul Universității Babeș-Bolyai. Scopul acestui studiu este de a sublinia eficacitatea folosirii poeziilor concretiste ale lui Vold în procesul predării limbii norvegiene. Astfel, la finalul semestrului în care am folosit poeziile concretiste ale lui Jan Erik Vold la nivel de experiment, am realizat un chestionar pentru studenții mei de la cursurile și seminarele de limbă norvegiană. Rezultatele au arătat că cel mai adesea în timpul acestor seminare studenții citesc, analizează și compun poezii concretiste în limba norvegiană, de tipul poeziilor tipografice și gramaticale, *ready-made*, *tongue twiters* și versuri cu caracter ludic pentru a aprofunda și a recapitula o anumită structură gramaticală, sintactică sau lexicală în limba norvegiană.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *limba norvegiană, poezii concretiste, Jan Erik Vold, poezia vizuală, poezia gramaticală*

## Introduction

The use of poetry can be of great importance for the students who learn a foreign language. The present paper aims to underline the didactic use of Jan Erik Vold's concrete poems during the Norwegian language courses and seminars and the students' motivation and willingness to use these poems as a learning tool in order to better understand specific grammatical, lexical and syntactic Norwegian structures. I used these poems during the Morphology and Lexicology seminars as an experiment aiming to provide support for our students to practise and to better understand the grammatical and lexical structures and to underline that Vold's poems are an important material in teaching grammar not only literature. In this sense, his grammatical and visual poems, along with tongue twisters, were very often used by the students as models in the process of creating themselves such poems related to specific grammatical structures taught during the Morphology seminar (see the Appendix).

The present paper consists of two main parts which begin with a theoretical background related to the concept of concrete poetry as it is

presented by Jan Erik Vold (b. 1939), the Norwegian contemporary poet, essayist and performer. The second section of this paper presents an in-depth interpretation of the results from a survey which aimed to underline the effectiveness of using concrete poems as a didactic resource in the process of teaching Norwegian as a second language. The respondents were first-year and second-year students who studied Norwegian language and literature at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature, the Faculty of Letters of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and a small group of third-year students who studied Norwegian as D Language within The Centre for Language Industries<sup>2</sup> at the same faculty. The idea of this survey came to my mind after I taught the seminar of Norwegian Morphology to my first-year students.

It is worth mentioning that Jan Erik Vold's poems are part of the syllabus for all the students who study Norwegian language and literature at our department. For instance, first-year students are taught about Jan Erik Vold during their course of Scandinavian Culture and Civilisation, while second-year students translate Vold's poems during their Literary Translations course and seminar and our third-year students translate and analyse poems at their course and seminar of Semantic Analysis and Translation. One of the reasons why Vold is included in the curriculum is because he, along with other writers, is part of the Norwegian literary canon, being a representative poet for the Norwegian lyric Modernism of the 1960s. While reading his poems, built upon the two concepts, *konkretisme* (*concretism*) and *nyenkelheten* (*the new simplicity*), often set to jazz and blues, the reader has a better understanding of the world. In other words, his poems "turn towards the real world, and it wants us to enjoy the happiness given by things around us" (Wærp 2008, 304)<sup>3</sup>. Thus, with respect to the syllabus, Vold's poems are used as a didactic resource in teaching literary translations and Norwegian Modern literature.

According to Stephen Dunning, "teaching poetry is that poetry tends to be richer, linguistically, than any other genre. Verse may help students see something of the possibilities of language" (1966, 158). Asking students to create grammatical concrete poems as a practical exercise to revise the pronoun and the adjective, was at the same time useful and engaging. The fact that the students became an active part in the teaching process is significant and the students "learn language through the expansion of [their] experience with a large human reality" (Hess 2003, 20). On the other hand, the active implication

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<sup>2</sup> The students enrolled at the Centre for Language Industries study 6 hours per week of Norwegian language for six semesters. These students are enrolled at the Department of Applied Modern Languages, at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University.

<sup>3</sup> "vender seg mot det foreliggende, og vil ha oss med på denne gleden over tingene rundt oss" (Wærp 2008, 304, my translation).

of the reader, imagination and life experience are three crucial elements “to complement the text and to give it shape” (Spooner 1986, 272). In addition, it is not always an easy task to read and analyse a poem, especially when it comes to concrete poems. It is also a difficult task for students to make grammatical poems when referring especially to the correctness of the parts of speech used (Ainy 2008).

There has always been a strong connection between literature and language. For instance, when translating different Norwegian literary texts (e.g. novels, short stories, poems etc.), the students develop both their literary and language competences. In this sense, the students must possess detailed knowledge of certain rules and grammar aspects in the target language, in our case, Norwegian. For instance, Collie & Slater in their volume *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities* stated that “from the teacher’s point of view, literature, which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind, provides material with some emotional colour, that can make fuller contact with the learner’s own life, [...]” (1987, 2). In other words, a literary text might be used in order to put into practice students’ knowledge of the foreign language, thus enriching “the context in which individual lexical or syntactic items are made more memorable” (5). Therefore, in the process of a second language acquisition, the role of the literary texts can be of great importance and language learning process can be effective “because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers” (5).

On the one hand, learning a foreign language through literature can become a pleasant process especially if the students identify themselves with the feelings the poems transmit. On the other hand, Duff and Maley (1990, 8-10) emphasise the idea that when analysing a poem, the language learners are given the possibility to interpret it from various perspectives, thus giving their own version. “Students of literature will, we hope, become more creative and adventurous as they begin to appreciate the richness and variety of the language they are trying to master and begin to use some of that potential themselves” (Collie and Slater 1987, 5).

In the volume entitled *Literature and Language Learning in the EFL [English for Foreign Learners] Classroom*, in the essay entitled “Translation of Japanese Poems into English: Literature in the First Language as a Motive to Communicate in a Second Language” signed by Kiyoko Sakamoto, it is stated that “the literary texts in L1 can stimulate students to communicate in L2. [...] The students also became more aware of both the Japanese and English languages, realizing the challenge and fun of bridging the linguistic and cultural differences” (2015, 209). Speaking skills along with reading skills can be also developed through literary texts. This idea is also emphasised in the article “The

Role of Literature in Foreign Language Learning”, where the author stated that by reading literature the students can achieve the higher level of foreign language proficiency and “promote cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly globalized society” (Nasu 2015, 245). In the article “Teaching Language Through Literature: *The Waste Land* in the ESL Classroom”, Lach Agustín Pilar strengthened the idea that the study of poems has as target a foreign language acquisition and “not only literary competences can be developed, but also lexical, morphosyntactic and social- communicative competence” (2007, 16). In this sense, Jan Erik Vold’s poems encapsulate emotions, feelings, memories with friends, irony, playful thoughts, in other words, the simplicity and the beauty of Norwegian life.

The present paper is based on the following research questions:

1. To what extent can Jan Erik Vold’s concrete poems (grammatical/ typographical/nursery rhymes/ tongue twisters etc.) enhance students’ Norwegian language skills and knowledge?
2. How do the students utter their motivation and engagement about using and creating their own concrete poems made of specific grammatical/ lexical/ syntactic structures during Norwegian language seminars?

### **Jan Erik Vold’s Concrete Poems**

The concept of concretism (*konkretisme*) came to Norway through Jan Erik Vold’s experimental poems from the 1960s. He wrote grammatical and typographical concrete poems, tongue twisters, ready-mades and nursery-rhymes-like poems. He made his literary debut in 1965 with the volume *mellom speil og speil* (*Between Mirror and Mirror*) where he also published several typographical poems having different forms (e.g., an hourglass, a square, yin and yang, a cross etc.). Volume *blikket* (*The Gaze*) published in 1966 represents his breakthrough in the matter of Norwegian experimental literature, being made of only five words, (*blikket* – the gaze, *du* – you, *fanger* – catch, *ikke* – no, *meg* – me) arranged in different order, most of the times without preserving a logic and syntactic structure. This volume is rather related to music, in this case, the rhythmical dimension being a prominent feature. “The change of tempo that resembles the changing of musical volume, sometimes higher, sometimes lower, may be also associated with the sound of drums and the drumbeat manner of the drummer” (Răduț 2018, 141). However, The English Professor Herman Rapaport stated that “the sound poem, therefore, is very much like a foreign language whose sense we grasp through its sounds, even though we

would be at loss if someone actually required us to denote what was being communicated” (125). Moreover, in the beginning of one of the articles entitled “Om kunst og konkret poesi. Tre fragmenter” (“About Art and Concrete Poetry. Three Paragraphs”), Vold states the idea that a concrete poetry is made of sounds and visual features: “A spade is a spade and chair is chair but not only chair. *Chair* is also the word *chair*, composed of sounds that make the word pronunciation and letters that give the word spelling” (71, own translation)<sup>4</sup>. This idea is also strengthened by Mary Ellen Solt in her book entitled *Concrete Poetry: A World View*: “it is certain that words are symbols, but there is no reason why poetry couldn’t be experienced and created on the basis of language as concrete material” (75). *Kykelipi*, published in 1969, is another emblematic volume of concrete poems which consists of figurative poems, grammatical poems, nursery rhymes, tongue twisters and ready-mades. Poem “Bølge” can be of great use for our students during the Morphology seminar, since it is made of adverbs, adjectives, pronouns and verbs. “The reader can easily see that the poet attempted to create a wave-shape poem by unfolding the words on the page. In a manner reminiscent of traditional romantic poems, the point the poet wants to make relative to this poem is to bring before the readers the idea of the passage of time” (147). Another poem which can be used as a teaching resource for our students is the one entitled “Uselvstendige verb” (“Copulative Verbs”): “be/ become/ be called/ think/ and be called”<sup>5</sup> (Vold 1969, 74). “Consequently, the poet wants to emphasise the idea that grammar can be taught through poetry, and thus become more interesting and sometimes funny” (Solt 1970, 157).

Therefore, by using these concrete poems during my grammar seminar I discovered that these three volumes consist of representative concrete poems which can be used as didactic materials for Norwegian practical courses and even for Norwegian literature and language courses and seminars. Moreover, they enhance students’ creativity, together with their grammar and vocabulary skills in Norwegian. By studying and analysing Vold’s poems, our students use these poems as a tool to enrich their vocabulary and learn Norwegian language.

### Research methodology and participants

With respect to the methodology, the present study is based on a quantitative and qualitative research. From a total number of 14 questions

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<sup>4</sup> “En spade er en spade og stol er stol, men ikke bare stol. Stol er også ordet stol”. sammensatt av lyder som gir ordets uttale og av bokstaver som gir ordets staving (Vold 1976, 71, my translation).

<sup>5</sup> “være/bli/hete/synes/og kalles” (Vold 1969, 74, my translation).

(hereafter referred to as items), 12 form the quantitative research, the answers gathered offer an objective overview together with a series of percentages. The data obtained through the students' answers to items no. 7 and no. 14, which are two open-ended questions, is part of the qualitative research.

The aim of the present study is to show that Jan Erik Vold's poems used within various writing activities during Norwegian language courses and seminars can help students to revise and to learn new specific grammar, lexical, syntactic structures and to enrich their vocabulary and their creative writing abilities. The idea of using Jan Erik Vold's poems during the language courses and seminars taught to my students came to my mind while I was working on my doctoral thesis about Vold's concrete and *new simple* poems. This idea was strengthened from the moment Vold's became part of my students' curriculum regarding a few literature courses and seminars which I mentioned in the introductory part of this study. Thus, I decided to encourage my students to use Jan Erik Vold's poems more often during various activities in the course of the Norwegian language seminars.

The main purpose of this survey is to emphasise the didactic use of Jan Erik Vold's concrete poems in the process of teaching Norwegian language to undergraduate students. The survey consisted of 12 close-ended questions (including multiple choice and check boxes) and 2 open-ended questions (item no. 7 and no. 14), aiming to gather useful data regarding the effectiveness of using concrete poems as a teaching tool for Norwegian language courses and especially seminars (e.g., Morphology, Lexicology, Syntax, Semantic Analysis and Translation). The questionnaire began with a set of general questions about students' specialisation (item no. 1), year of study (item no. 2) and their level in Norwegian language and literature (items no. 3 and no. 4). It has to be mentioned that the results make reference to items 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 analysed through the quantitative method, while items 7 and 14 are analysed through the qualitative method.

The questions of the survey were formulated to observe to what extent students are willing to use concrete poems during Norwegian language courses and seminars and if these poems are useful in their process of learning Norwegian as a foreign language at the university. Thus, the survey's main objectives are:

1. to find out if students prefer to read concrete poems during Norwegian courses and seminars and what type (grammatical, nursery rhymes, tongue twisters etc.) (5, 6).
2. to identify the extent to which the students have composed a concrete poem in order to better understand a specific grammatical/lexical/syntactic structure, to improve their vocabulary or to enrich their creativity (7, 8, 9, 10).

3. to identify if the form of a concrete typographical poem should be preserved when the students translate it or when they analyse it to better understand the message of the poem (11, 12).
4. to identify if the students are motivated and willing to use concrete poems during their Norwegian language courses and seminars as an important teaching tool (13, 14).

As regards the role of Jan Erik Vold's concrete poems in the teaching process and especially in the activities performed with the students during my language courses and seminars, it was of a great importance since I asked the students to write their own concrete poems in order to revise different parts of speech in Norwegian (e.g., pronouns, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions etc.). Thus, for instance, at the end of each seminar of Morphology, I invited them to read and to present their concrete poems to their colleagues. I realised that it was a very useful exercise for them because, besides reading their own poems, they also explained to their colleagues why they used a specific part of speech and what is its role in a sentence. Teaching grammar through this inductive method I asked students to compose concrete poems in Norwegian and I encouraged them to make use of the theory. A few examples of grammatical concrete poems written by the students are appended.

Last but not least, the students suggested that it would be of great interest for them to create a poetry club. Their desire was accomplished because in the spring semester, in 2022 I started and coordinated the poetry club, *DiktLek*, at our Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature. The literary workshops that take place within this poetry club have in focus the study and the translation of Norwegian poetry. We had special quests, among prominent teachers and researchers from Romania and Norway (e.g., Professor Henning Howlid Wærp from UiT – The Arctic University of Norway), and also students and alumni who write and love poetry. This year in April, *DiktLek* organised an important cultural arrangement about poetry and music, having a special quest, the Norwegian poet Jan Erik Vold, “Scandinavian’s major reader of poetry to a jazz accompaniment” (Wærp 2004, 347), who recited his concrete and *new simple* poems over music. Moreover, it was a memorable and important event for *DiktLek* to have at our Department two important guests, the emblematic Norwegian poet Jan Erik Vold and the professor and the poet Henning Howlid Wærp.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> While Jan Erik Vold read poems from the first anthology of concrete poems which I translated into Romanian, entitled *Briskeby blues* (2023), professor Henning Howlid Wærp read poems from two of his volumes of poetry, Sofia. *Halifax* (2012) and *En avhandling kanskje, om noe vakkert. Gyldenlær (Maybe a Thesis About Something Beautiful. Gilt Leather, 2011).*

## **Participants**

The survey made of 14 questions was filled in online through a link sent to the first (42.1% of the respondents) and second (51.6% of the respondents) year students who study Norwegian language and literature within the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature, at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University. In addition, this questionnaire was also sent to 3<sup>rd</sup> (6.3% of the respondents) year students who study Norwegian as D Language at The Centre for Language Industries (CIL).

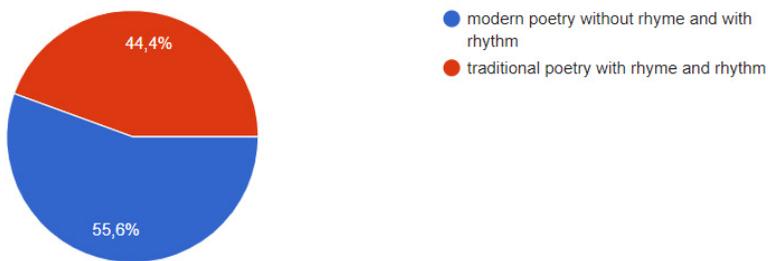
With respect to the undergraduate students who participated in this study, in the academic year 2020-2021, there were 90 first-year students who were minoring in Norwegian and 40 students majoring in Norwegian. As for the second-year students, 25 students were majoring in Norwegian, while 50 students were minoring in Norwegian. The third-year students from CIL were 11. A total number of 126 respondents included in this study provided answers on a voluntary basis within three weeks after they were told the useful information about this research. From 126 students, 74.6% were minoring in Norwegian, 14.3% were majoring in Norwegian, while 11.1% studied Norwegian as D Language.

Regarding their language acquisition of Norwegian as a foreign language, 32.5% of the respondents evaluated themselves as having a B1 level, 42.9% an A2 level, 19.8% mentioned an A1 level, while 4.8% answered B2 level. With respect to their competences in Norwegian literature, the gathered data indicated that 36.5% had an A1 level, while most of them, 46.8%, chose an A2 level. Only 14.3% answered B1 level, and quite a few, 2.4%, indicated B2 level, while C1 and C2 levels were not mentioned by any respondent. Thus, these answers indicate that most of the respondents self-evaluated their language and literature competences as having an A2 level. This is an expected result, since most of the respondents, namely (51.6%) are 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students, after 3 semesters of Norwegian. Their A2 level is widely opened towards the next level, namely intermediate Norwegian (B1 level).

## **The analysis of the responses and discussion**

Regarding which kind of concrete poems the students want to read (e.g., grammatical, nursery rhymes, tongue twisters etc.) during Norwegian courses and seminars, item no. 5 (Figure 1) in the questionnaire indicates that the respondents prefer to study modern poetry without rhyme and rhythm, which emphasises the idea that the students consider that it encourages them to use their imagination and creativity. A modern poem with no rhyme and rhythm

might get closer to the reader's expectation, thus, having no boundaries between understanding, analysing and the creative process. An amount of 55,6% of the respondents want to read and study modern poetry. However, there are also a few students who prefer traditional poetry with rhyme and rhythm during Norwegian courses and seminars. For instance, during the Morphology seminar I have used the modern poem "The Wave" ("Bølge") by Jan Erik Vold, without rhyme and rhythm. It is a visual poem made of adverbs, nouns, pronouns and verbs: "[...]/ thus/ glides/ your hair/ out of my/ hands like/ the wave facing/ and gliding/ in/ the ocean and/ the light is diminished/ along these beaches/ while the sand slips through my fingers/ like days nights years"<sup>7</sup> (Vold 1969, 45). I used this poem as an activity where students had to identify and analyse the nouns from a morphological perspective, making reference to the number (e.g., singular, plural), the article (e.g., definite, indefinite) and the gender (masculine, feminine and neuter).

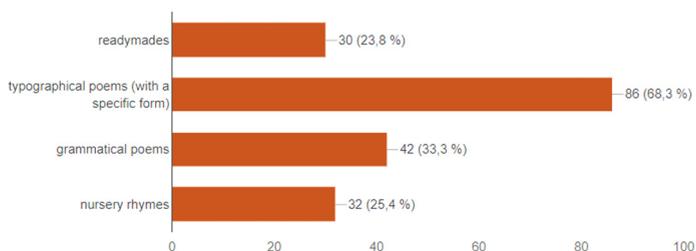


**Figure 1.** What kind of poetry do you prefer to study during the Norwegian courses and seminars?

In addition, the respondents were asked to indicate their preference in the matter of concrete poetry: item no. 6 (Figure 2). The results for this item indicate that the majority, 68.3%, said that typographical poems were of great interest for them, 33.3% mentioned grammatical poems, while 25.4% of the participants preferred nursery rhymes, and 23.8% ready-mades. In this case, I used Jan Erik Vold's typographical poems selected from the volume *mellom speil og speil* (*Between Mirror and Mirror*) shaped by the poet in different forms (e.g., a cross, an hourglass, a yin-yang figure, a square etc.). In other words, most of the students consider it important and, at the same time, interesting to read visual poetry in different forms, thus, becoming an active part of the creative

<sup>7</sup> "[...] så / glir/ ditt hår/ ut av mine/ hender slik/ bølgen vender/ og glir/ i / hav og/ lyset svinner/ langs disse strender/ mens sanden glir gjennom mine fingre/ som dager netter år" (Vold 1969, 45, my translation).

process together with the poet. This reading activity is useful for the students in the sense that it develops learners' creativity and their ability to write their own poems, making use of different grammatical structures (e.g., the noun, the pronoun, the verb etc.), as a warm-up or a revision activity in the beginning of the Morphology seminar. In other words, "concrete poem may be seen as a highly serious linguistic game in which the reader (or perceiver) is required to participate actively with his imaginative faculties to complete the poem" (Solt 1970, 423).

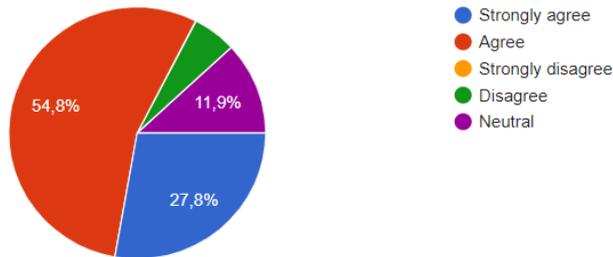


**Figure 2.** What type of concrete poem do you like to read?

The results for item no. 7 (*Have you written a concrete poem e.g., grammatical/ typographical/ nursery rhymes etc. so far? For what purpose?*), which is an open-ended question, emphasise the idea that these concrete poems can be used as teaching materials for literature and language courses, as well as seminars, and even for practical courses, as an interactive resource for students, in order to better approach what they have learned so far. A total number of 106 students of 126 gave answer to this question and most of them said that they wrote concrete poems for the Morphology seminar (first-year students), for the Lexicology seminar, for the seminar of Literary Translations and for the course of Literary Genres (second -year students), but also for practical courses in Norwegian (*Ny i Norge* and *Stein på Stein* 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students CIL). Most of the answers provided to this question underlined the idea that creating a specific concrete poem (e.g., grammatical concrete poem) helped students to better understand what they were taught, as one of the respondents wrote: "[...] they helped me to better understand the theory". Another respondent outlined the idea that the purpose of writing a grammatical concrete poem was "to learn specific Norwegian grammatical structures". One of the students pointed out that the purpose of writing a grammatical concrete poem was "to improve vocabulary and language skills in a different way, combining visual images with linguistic elements". One of the answers was that these concrete poems "improve my vocabulary and enrich my creativity", while most of the students

agreed with the fact that these poems helped them to practise what they have learned in theory, being also an interesting and creative task.

For item no. 8 (Figure 3) the results indicate that 54.8% of the respondents agree that a grammatical and typographical concrete poem can help them to understand a specific grammatical or lexical structure, while 27.8% strongly agree with this idea.



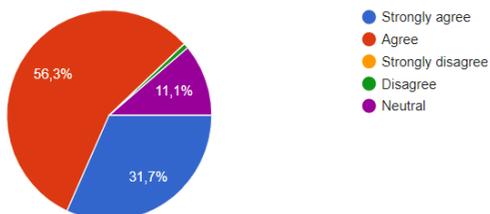
**Figure 3.** Would you evaluate that the writing of grammatical and typographical concrete poems provides you a better understanding of a specific grammatical/ lexical structure?

Thus, the gathered data indicate that concrete poems are of great use for the students, as they become self-confident and most ambitious in learning new grammatical and lexical structures. Additionally, writing their own concrete poem is also part of students' self-evaluation process regarding their language acquisition.

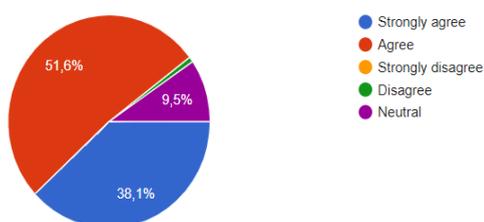
An amount of 56.3% of the respondents (item no. 9 – Figure 4) consider reading and creating concrete poems an important method to learn new words, thus, enriching their vocabulary in Norwegian. In this sense, the concrete poems of Jan Erik Vold are proved to be efficient, being full of common words and expressions used in everyday life. I have noticed this aspect while studying his poems for my doctoral thesis which was published in a book format in 2018, with the title *The Poetry of Jan Erik Vold and the Norwegian Lyric Modernism in the 1960s*. 31.7% of the respondents strongly agree with this idea, while 11.1% are neutral. Thus, “poetry is the art of using words, lines, and stanzas charged with their utmost meaning. Those concerned with language and intellectual life should be committed to keeping poetry in society’s literary repertoire” (Certo et al. 2012, 104).

As regards the way in which these concrete poems develop students' creativity, 89.7% of the respondents (item no. 10 – Figure 5) (strongly agree and agree) with the statement, while 9.5% did not state their opinion. It is worth mentioning that, while reading Jan Erik Vold's concrete poems, the student or

the reader in general is indirectly invited to be an active part of the writing process. In this sense, “[...], writing is a great way for many to deal with difficulties in their lives and gain helpful insight into their emotions and experiences” (Leahy 2005, 4).

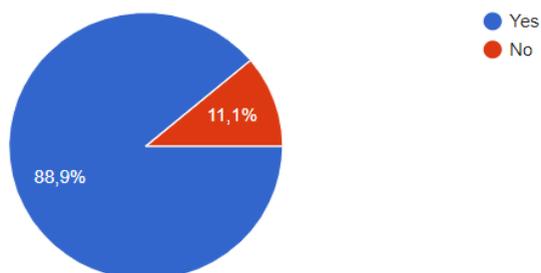


**Figure 4.** The use of concrete poems in teaching and learning a specific Norwegian vocabulary is very useful.



**Figure 5.** The process of creating grammatical/typographical concrete poems increases my creativity.

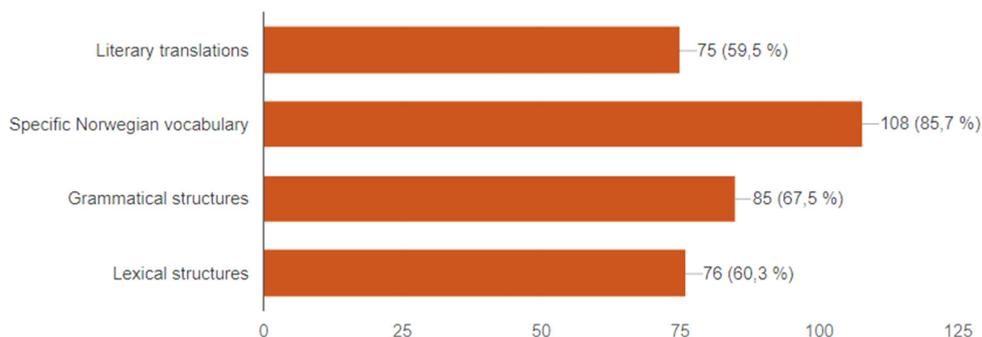
The gathered data for item no. 11 (“*Is it useful to preserve the form of a typographical concrete poem when we translate it?*”) indicated that 77.8% of the respondents consider that the translator has to preserve the form of the poem because its form is just as important as its content. However, 19% of the respondents chose the following answer: *Its content is more useful than its form*. Jan Erik Vold himself stated in an interview, which I conducted in Tromsø, during a five-month scholarship at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, with support from EEA grants, in 2015: “Poetry is stylistic work: it is not just a multitude of thoughts that comes out of my mouth; the graphic image becomes, in my opinion, prettier when it is organised in two quatrains with a blank line between them. It is a pretty, graphic image, which you see as a whole, while probably reading the letters verse by verse. Poetry is sound but language is also graphic” (Vold, in Răduț 2018, 342).



**Figure 6.** The visual impact of a concrete poem helps you to better understand the message of the poem?

Regarding the visual dimension of a concrete poem, it helps students to better understand the message of the poem (item no. 12 – Figure 6). Thus, 88.9% of the respondents agree with this statement, while 11.1% disagree. With respect to the concrete poems in particular, their visual impact is of great importance, because the reader can look at such a poem as a work of art. Fiona McMahon, in her article “Concrete/ Visual Poetry” stated that: “from the very start, concrete poetry has enjoyed the sensory ‘sympathy’ (‘between the ear and the eye, and between tunes and colours’) that is historically associated with poetry” (331). Moreover, “the visual poem is a word design in a designed world. It can’t be a mere coincidence that the founders of the concrete poetry movement in both Europe and Brazil were involved not only with the world of contemporary avant-garde poetry, painting and music but with the world of graphic design as well” (Solt 1970, 60-61). Walt Jackson and Lew Musil emphasise the idea that a concrete poetry cannot be called as such if it has not its visual representation: “concrete poetry joins the shape of a word with its meaning, creating a poem that must be seen as well as read. Its appeal to the eye is similar to the language of poster art, billboards, street signs, and television advertisements” (290).

Item no. 13 (Figure 8) reflects that the vast majority of the respondents, 85.7%, agreed that concrete poems can be used in teaching specific Norwegian vocabulary, while 67.5% stated that concrete poetry can be used in teaching grammatical structures. An amount of 60.3% indicated that lexical structures can be presented by creating concrete poems with specific lexical elements used in theory. 59.5% of the respondents agreed that these poems can be included in teaching literary translations, trying to translate them by preserving their visual aspect. Furthermore, the act of translation can be challenging for students especially when it comes to translating a tongue twister poem. In this case, the translator also takes part in the writing process of the poem, because he/she has to figure it out and to find suitable words in the target language. For instance, the poem “1-2-3-4” written by Jan Erik Vold and published in the volume *kykelipi*, needs an adaptation depending on the target language. In other words, the translator may either preserve part of the words in Norwegian and continue with others in the target language, or to use other words. The poem in Norwegian is as follows: “1-2-3-4/kykelipire/5-6-7-8/kykelipåtte/9-10-11-12/kykelipoll/12-11-10-9/kykelipi” (Vold 1969, 27).



**Figure 8.** Concrete poems can be used in teaching

The answers to item no. 14, the open-ended statement, (*“Consider some other situations in which you could use concrete poems as a teaching method”*), indicate that these poems can be a very good practical exercise especially for the 1<sup>st</sup>- year students. Since most of these poems do not have rhyme or rhythm, it is easier for the students to translate or even make their own version. Moreover, concrete poems improve students’ creation process, as an exercise of imagination that helps them to improve skills in Norwegian and inspire students to come up with new ideas, being an innovative way to learn new things in Norwegian. Some of the students stated that these poems can be a source of inspiration in the seminars of creative writing, while the others pointed out that they “could be useful in practical courses as listening exercises”. Besides, concrete poems can be used in teaching phonology using tongue twisters and wordplay, and also specific morphological structures. Concrete poetry can be used by students who want to continue and improve their studies in the field of poetry. Most of the respondents agree that the purpose of the concrete poems is strongly related “to the vocabulary acquisition, being very useful in learning new words and expressions in Norwegian both in teaching basic and academic vocabulary”. Another student stated that through these concrete poems “we learn not only specific Norwegian vocabulary, but also useful words taken from daily life”. Other students stated that concrete poems may be a suitable resource for literature and literary translations: “they can be used as a warm-up activity or as a way of explaining the relationship between its content and the form of the poem”. In addition, “these kinds of poems can be a way to present a new concept, an idea or the theoretical part of a course in Norwegian language and literature”. Concrete poetry could also be used as a memory exercise, being “a method in order to memorise better new words from

a lesson taught during a practical course in Norwegian”, by transforming a grammar rule into a concrete poem made only of the key concepts that have to be memorised and understood. These poems also improve students’ writing skills. Thus, according to what students have stated, as I have already mentioned, I used concrete poems as an engaging warm-up exercise, as an introductory activity in the beginning of the Morphology seminar. Moreover, by constantly creating concrete poems, as an assignment, or as a warm-up exercise in the beginning of a language or literature course or seminar in Norwegian, the students improve their writing, grammar and vocabulary skills. I came up to this aspect being influenced by students’ responses to the open-ended question: “These kinds of poems are a way to introduce a new grammatical structure, a new concept, an idea, in a more relaxed way”; “They are a very good teaching tool for students”; “For instance, the use of concrete poems as a warm-up exercise during our Morphology seminar was very useful for us to better understand grammatical structures that were about to be taught”. Thus, when asked to write concrete poems in Norwegian, using different parts of speech (e.g., personal pronouns, adjectives), this task helped students to become an active part of the teaching process along with the teacher. They were able to work in groups and to explain to each other what specific grammar structures they used and why.

Concrete poems can be used, as mentioned by one of the students, in “teaching grammar, encouraging creativity and practising writing skills”; “concrete poems can be used to teach almost anything. We could use these poems to teach (e.g., a grammar rule, thus helping students to remember it creating a concrete poem). These poems can be used for both language and literature courses and seminars”.

As mentioned before, the research questions of the survey were analysed quantitatively, gathered data being statistically illustrated through the figures with relevant percentages, as well as qualitatively through the students’ answers to the open-ended questions. After this experimental use of Jan Erik Vold’s concrete poems for one semester, in the academic year 2020-2021, as a teaching tool, during my Norwegian language classes for my 1<sup>st</sup>-, 2<sup>nd</sup>-, and 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students, the results of this survey show that they were very effective, the students being pleased to have them as a language learning material. The findings of this study are based on the analysis of the 126 answers, being sufficient enough to show that the students are willing to use concrete poems during the Norwegian language courses and seminars, either as warm-up exercises or as an important teaching tool in different activities to help students improve their language knowledge and skills. The fact that 55,6% of the respondents want to study modern poetry without rhyme, and 68,3% of them

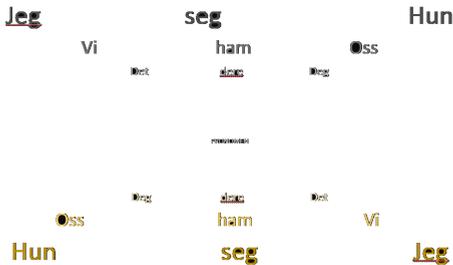
are willing to read Jan Erik Vold's visual concrete poems, emphasise that these poems can also become part of the syllabus regarding some of the Norwegian language courses and seminars (e.g., Morphology, Lexicology, Syntax, Semantic Analysis and Translation) along with the Norwegian literature courses and seminars where these poems are already part of the students' syllabus. The analysis of the results and the respondents' answers show that the use of Vold's concrete poems develop their language, morphological, lexical and syntactic competences, enrich their vocabulary in Norwegian and enhance their creativity.

### **Conclusions**

Jan Erik Vold's concrete poems constitute an important link between literature and language in the teaching process of Norwegian for Romanian students at Babeş-Bolyai University. The use of these poems for the first time as a teaching tool and as an experiment for my students, during their Norwegian language courses and seminars, proved to be efficient according to the gathered data, including the students' responses. By reading and studying this kind of poetry, the students became familiar with this literary genre with a vast applicability to different disciplines (e.g., Morphology, Phonology, Lexicology etc.). Thus, they are able to practise their grammar knowledge in Norwegian by creating their own grammatical concrete poems, using Vold as a source of inspiration. Moreover, this research provided an overview of how useful poetry can be in acquiring and developing competences in Norwegian. As mentioned before, by constantly creating concrete poems, as an assignment, or as a warm-up exercise in the beginning of a language or literature course or seminar in Norwegian, the students improve their writing, grammar and vocabulary skills. Moreover, these poems can be often used in teaching Norwegian language for beginners, for instance, for the first-year students. The gathered data show that 85.7% of the respondents agreed that concrete poetry can be also used in teaching different grammatical structures. Creating concrete poems by using different parts of speech (e.g., pronoun, verb, adverb etc.) encourages students to become creative and more confident in approaching and learning different grammatical rules. In addition, through this inductive teaching method, the students become an active part of the teaching process, being motivated to further develop their literature and language competences in Norwegian.

APPENDIX NO. 1

Norwegian Concrete Poems Written by Students During the Morphology Seminar



*Verdigheten min - din.  
Sjofommene mine - dine.  
Levet mitt - ditt.*

Jeg skal ut, du er inne  
Jeg løper hjem, du er allerede  
hjemme  
Tiden går fort for oss  
Og livet blir kortere og kortere

Forandret jeg meg  
Forandret du deg  
Forandret han seg  
Forandret hun seg  
Forandret den seg  
Forandret det seg  
Forandret vi oss  
Forandret dere dere  
Forandret de seg.

Bilene

Bilen min er rød.  
Bilen din er oransje.  
Bilen hans er gul.  
Bilen hennes er grønn.  
Bilen vår er blå.  
Bilen deres er indigo.  
Bilen deres er lilla.

LIV

skal være  
er  
å være  
ikke vær!  
har vært

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