Dictionary User Typology: The Slovenian Case

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Abstract

Understanding the preferences, needs and habits of dictionary users is an important prerequisite for the compilation of a dictionary. When researching these topics, an appropriate balance has to be struck between over-generalising or over-individualising user profiles. Following this goal, the paper presents a typology of dictionary users, developed as part of the conceptualization of the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language (a general monolingual dictionary of the Slovene language). The typology consists of two levels. On the first one, the situations of dictionary use are divided into the ones arising from: (i) the process of (formal) education; (ii) professional context; and (iii) spare time activities. On the second level, a number of user groups for each of these situations are formed, based on their specific language needs that have been identified. The presented typology will enable quality user studies and consequently improve the status of dictionary use research in Slovenian lexicography. Internationally, the typology can be integrated into the existing methodology of dictionary user research to facilitate more representative sampling of user groups, and to provide a better understanding of the obtained results.

Keywords: dictionary user research; user typology; Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language

1   Introduction

One of the important guidelines in dictionary-making pointed out by Atkins and Rundell (2008: 28) is: "Know your users: that way, the dictionary will give them what they need." Atkins and Rundell then go on to describe the process of devising user profiles and conducting user research as two complementary ways of getting to know your users. Unfortunately, many dictionary-makers are still using the approach which includes devising rather general user profiles, or simply using a general description of the target users, and conducting user research only after the dictionary is published, if at all.

One of the important foundations for devising profiles of dictionary users and researching their habits and needs is user typology, often cited in research literature ever since Hartmann (1987) introduced the four-category classification of dictionary use research, which in addition to user typology included dictionary typology, skills typology and needs typology. It is interesting to note that from the perspective of user profiles and user research, it makes little sense to separate types of users from their needs and skills, as they are often dictated by the group they belong to and the setting in which they use dictionaries. In other words, it is difficult to devise a user typology without considering their needs and skills. This is also evidenced in the description of the process of devising a user profile by Atkins and Rundell (2008: 28-30).

One frequently pointed out problem of dictionary use research is that certain user groups are much better researched than others. Two of the most frequently researched user groups are students and

language learners (of English). As Hartmann (2007: 166) puts it, students are "the ever-available guinea-pigs of academic research," while language learners, often also students, are interesting to researchers because advanced learner's dictionaries are among the most widely used dictionaries in the world.

Dictionary use research in Slovenia has been virtually non-existent, especially in monolingual lexicography, mainly on account of the fact that the makers of the current, and the only, general monolingual dictionary of Slovene, conceptualised in 1960s and gradually published since 1970s onwards, focused more on establishing the dictionary as a symbol of national identity and on cultivating Slovene language speakers. The aim of the dictionary was thus improving language competence of users rather than helping them solve problems with decoding or encoding.

Recently, a new dictionary of Slovene, called the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene, has been proposed and conceptualised. The dictionary will be focused on meeting the needs of users, and thus a detailed description of various user groups and activities in which they use dictionaries was required. This resulted in the development of a user typology, which is presented in this paper and which will not only inform the dictionary compilation but also provide a good basis for further dictionary use research in Slovenia.

The paper first provides an insight into the monolingual dictionary situation in Slovenia, with a special focus on the role of the general monolingual dictionary as perceived by dictionary-makers, and the consequences for the users. Next, we present a dictionary user typology that has been devised for the purposes of the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene. Then, the potential use and applications of typology are discussed, both in terms of Slovenian and international dictionary use research. We conclude by pointing out the main aspects of the typology and discuss plans for the future.

2   Dictionary Users in Slovenia

Dictionary user typology proposed in this paper is based on the Slovenian situation and its specific socio-linguistic circumstances, especially the role of language in building national identity, but also language policy which directs the development of language resources and their inclusion in the education process. In addition, we need to consider the stance taken by the only monolingual dictionary of Slovene towards its users, and the fact that there are very few studies of dictionary use in Slovenia and some of the research that does exist is not based on empirical data.

In Slovenia, a dictionary has always been considered as something that the Slovene language needs for its recognisability and social standing (Stabej 2015: 18). Nonetheless, dictionary planning has always included considerations about who would need/use a dictionary and for what purpose. The first dictionaries of Slovene had a very practical orientation, but later the symbolic status of the language started playing an increasingly important role in dictionary making (Stabej 2009). The only monolingual dictionary of Slovene currently in existence, the Dictionary of Slovene Literary Language (DSLL), as well as its recently published updated edition (Gliha Komac et al. 2015), define their target users very generally. Formulations used to describe the users are very abstract and are more or less projections of lexicographers' views on the usefulness of dictionaries (Arhar Holdt 2015: 138; Gantar 2014; Perdih 2009). The concept of the DSLL, published in 1960s, defines the target user indirectly, i.e. through the description of the vocabulary covered by the dictionary, especially different genres that represent the basis of a literary language as a sort of a "top-level genre", the target language of a cultivated speaker of Slovene. In this way, the dictionary establishes a certain abstraction of the language as a symbol of national identity, and by including "sub-genres" it defines

and determines the level of language competence of the speaker of Slovene. As a result, dictionary users, who have had only one monolingual dictionary at their disposal for almost half a century, have become used to this approach adopted by the dictionary makers, and more importantly, have adapted their expectations and habits to it (Stabej 2009, 2015; Gantar 2014). From this perspective, the characteristics of Slovenian dictionary users were – and to a notable extent still are – well summarised by the words of Lew & De Schryver (2014: 314): "when dictionary users run into obstacles while consulting dictionaries, they tend to blame themselves rather than the work".

Although researchers acknowledging current trends in lexicography have been calling for studies into dictionary use (e.g. Stabej 2009; Logar 2009), most research so far has lacked support of (national or international) empirical data. Recently, a few empirical studies have been conducted, for example Rozman (2010), Rozman et al. (2015), Arhar Holdt (2015), Arhar Holdt et al. (2016, in press), and Čibej et al. (2016, in press). When preparing the concept of a new (general) monolingual dictionary of Slovene, the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language (Gorjanc et al. 2015), we thus wanted to make a step forward in terms of dictionary users and the methodology for studying dictionary use. The focus of the discussion, previously on user competence and skills, has been shifted to user needs, also resulting in changes to the relationship between the role of the dictionary and the needs of its users. Consequently, it was necessary to devise a user typology that would provide a framework for selecting types and quantity of dictionary information, as well as for the preparation of strategies that enable the adjustment of methods to different, even opposing, user needs.

3   Dictionary User Typology

As a possible solution to the problems presented in the previous section, a typology of (potential) dictionary users was designed (Figure 1). It is important to note that the typology is not considered as the final or the only possible solution, but rather as a starting point for further empirical studies (see Chapter 4). The typology consists of two levels. On the first level, the situations in which monolingual dictionaries are typically used are divided into three main categories, as proposed by Lorentzen and Theilgaard (2012): (I) dictionary use in the process of (formal) education; (II) dictionary use in the professional context; and (III) dictionary use in spare time activities.[1]

On the second level, each of these three categories is divided into a number of user groups. The main criterion for the division of a certain user group inside the typology was the existence of their (to some extent) specific language needs, as identified in previous dictionary user studies. For example, the use of dictionaries for educational purposes has been covered in great detail in the field of dictionaries for learners of English as a second/foreign language. Additionally, dictionary use habits of some professional and spare-time user groups have been presented in the monograph on the use of online dictionaries, edited by Müller-Spitzer (2014). As the primary purpose of the typology is its application to Slovenian lexicography, the final formation of the user groups was based on the research among Slovene language users, namely the study of their lexical needs as reflected in language questions posted in digital media (Arhar Holdt et al. 2016, in press).

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[1] Their analysis reveals that regular users of *Den Danske Ordbog* generally use the dictionary most often at work (37%), followed by the use in their spare time (30%), and in the process of education (28%). Also mentioned is the category Other (5%), for which no further explaination is provided (Lorentzen in Theilgaard 2012: 685).
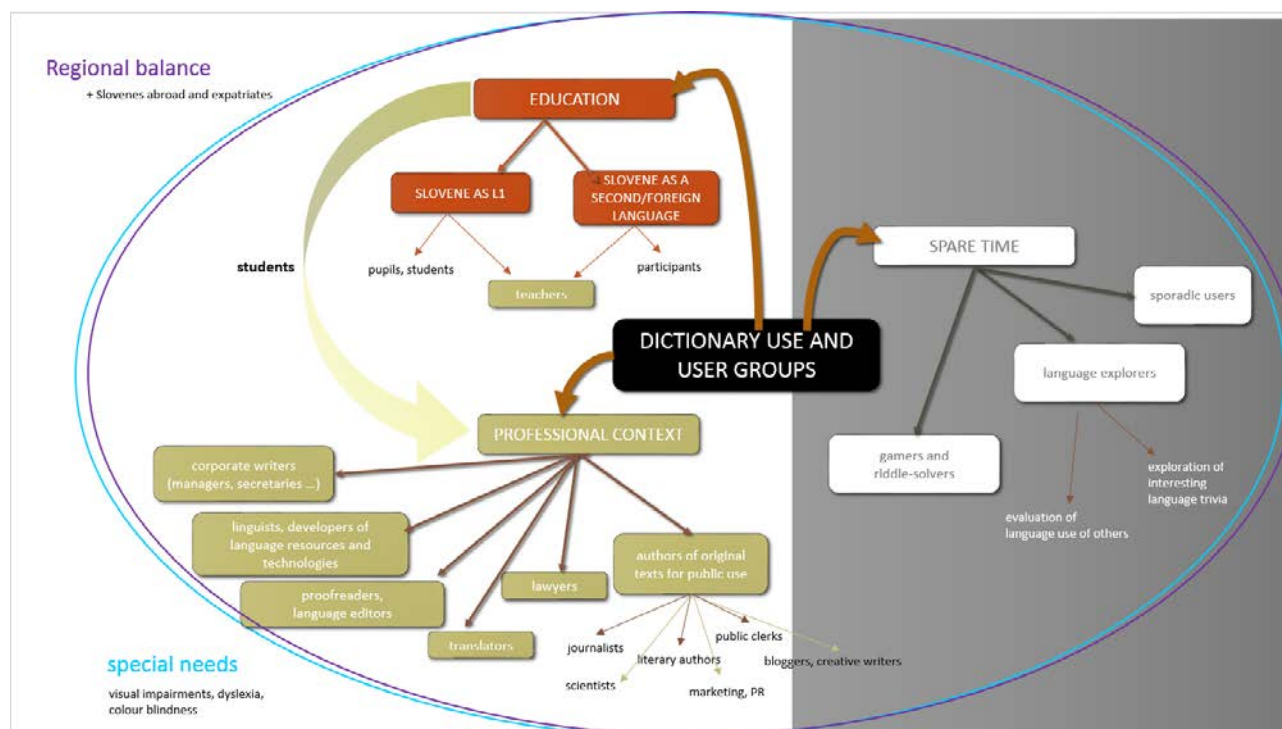
Figure 1: User typology for the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language.

3.1 User Groups in Education

Dictionaries play an important role in the process of education, not just in learning foreign languages, but also in L1 education.[2] As already mentioned in Section 2, there are currently no specialised dictionaries aimed specifically at pupils and students of Slovene. Rozman et al. (2015) address this gap in Slovenian lexicographical research, problematising the use of a general monolingual dictionary in primary and secondary schools. Based on their findings, the user groups in Figure 1 were formed.

Generally speaking, dictionary use in the process of education has two goals. On the one hand, it aims to fulfil didactic needs of **teachers**, e.g. by providing appropriate format and availability of the resource, data that can be easily adapted for teaching purposes or even ready-made teaching materials, and "motivational" content, such as different types of visualisations of language data, interactive content, links to external resources, etc. On the other hand, dictionary data needs to be appropriately adapted to the cognitive capabilities of **pupils and students,** which of course change with age and the level of education. Some important features of the dictionary that need to be carefully considered are for example the structure of entries, the structure and language of definitions, and the presentation of metalinguistic information (labels).

Secondly, separate user groups were made for teachers and students of **Slovene as L1** and of **Slovene as L2.** The differences between L1 and L2 users of monolingual dictionaries are naturally not limited

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[2] Dictionary use has a positive impact on learning and retention of new words, and facilitates the improvement of knowledge on semantic characteristics and usage of words (Paynter et al. 2005: 35–37, 41–45), and a rich vocabulary is extremely important part of individual's communication skills. Also, dictionaries play an important role in student performance as they can be used as an aid in understanding new material, and consequently contribute to better reading literacy (Paynter et al. 2005: 3–7, Pečjak 2012: 31).

to the process of education, however the users are most easily approachable in this context, and the needs of language teachers are presumably similar.

Dictionary user research tends to include **students** atypically often, probably because they can be easily approached by researchers (who are often working at universities), and in some cases with an erroneous assumption that students can adequately represent a larger sample of users (Tarp 2009: 290). In our typology, students are highlighted as a special user group, for they are crossing from educational to professional context, as well as mastering academic language and terminology of their field, which is a unique combination of tasks that presumably results in specific user needs.

3.2   User Groups in Professional Context

It is clear that dictionaries are used differently in professional settings, depending on the type of productive and receptive language-related activities. Thus, a relatively fine-grained typology of user groups was formed in this category.

The first cluster consists of user groups with professions that include **regular production of original texts** aimed at a wider public. The groups identified so far are: journalists, scientists, literary authors, marketing and PR staff, public clerks, and bloggers and creative authors. The needs of these user groups have been recently studied by Mikolič (2015) who conducted interviews among representatives of different groups and identified common points and specifics of their dictionary-related preferences and needs. One of the findings of the study was that while all of the interviewed subjects agreed that the Dictionary of Slovene Literary Language should include more examples of use, many of the suggestions for dictionary improvements were specific to a single group: journalists prioritised newer vocabulary; scientists highlighted the need for technical and multidisciplinary definitions; literary authors desired an inclusion of a more diverse vocabulary (including regional and non-standard variants); and advertisers expressed the need for more detailed and explicit definitions. Although the number of the interviewed subjects in this study was rather low (N=30), these first findings indicate that the application of the proposed typology has potential for dictionary user research.

The second cluster consists of user groups participating in **corporate / business communication,** such as people working in management, administration, accounting and so forth. In terms of dictionary needs and habits, these user groups are among the most under-researched. Some insight into possible avenues and methods for studying dictionary needs of these groups is provided by Arhar Holdt et al. (2016, in press) who find language dilemmas posted at Slovene language advice sites and forums are posted also by the representatives of these user groups.

Finally, there is a list of user groups that have been given more attention in existing research: **proofreaders / language editors** who have specific needs regarding the representation of the normative part of lexical data; **linguists** and other researchers that might (in addition to regular dictionary use) have the need to use the dictionary as a resource for linguistic material (Müller-Spitzer 2014: 116); **writers of legal documents** with a specific need for using lexical data in the production and interpretation of legal documents; and last but not least, **translators** that use monolingual dictionaries as well as other resources to translate texts to and from Slovene.

3.3   User Groups in Spare Time Activities

When addressing dictionary use in spare time, the key question is not when during the day a dictionary is used, but rather for what purpose. In other words, dictionary use is not a result of educational or professional tasks or activities, but rather originates from the spare time activities. The

first and maybe the most specific user group in this category are those users who use dictionaries as an aid in solving **language puzzles** or when playing language games such as Scrabble. The remaining two groups consist of users that are interested in language questions with the aim of improving their own language skills, exploring interesting trivia about language (in order to enrich their vocabulary, or learn about the phraseology or etymology of a word), or evaluating the correctness or appropriateness of the language use of others, especially in media (Arhar Holdt et al. 2016, in press). The last user group is represented by users who use a dictionary sporadically, yet still have an opinion of and expectations about the role of the dictionary in the society, and the type of content it should provide.

3.4   Different Language Communities

The proposed typology includes two factors that need to be taken into account when conceptualising a general monolingual dictionary of Slovene. First, user research for such a dictionary has to include a sample that is regionally balanced and also consists of representatives of user groups that live outside Slovenia (e.g. across the border), as the dictionary in its symbolic function plays a different role in these environments. Second, users with special communication needs have to be included in the studies. On the declarative level, there is a high consensus among lexicographers and linguists about the need to consider the needs of these users when preparing language resources. However, in practice, very little is done, even though some adjustments would be relatively easy to implement, such as the option of using fonts for easier reading (e.g. for users with dyslexia), or the option to increase font size without affecting layout or formatting of the entry.

4   Application of the Typology

As mentioned in the beginning, the main purpose of the proposed user typology is to enable quality user studies and consequently improve the status of dictionary use research in Slovenian lexicography. In our context, the typology is particularly useful for preparing a plan for systematic collection of data on the preferences, habits and needs of (potential) users of the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language. The typology enables us to form a balanced sample of users, and study their habits and needs with one of the established research methods. It is important to note that the typology offers the option to adjust the selection of research methods to individual user groups. Namely, certain user groups could be more easily accessed via social networks, other via their organisations and societies, some may prefer electronic format, other interviews conducted in person etc. Structuring the sample in advance improves its representativeness and at the same time prevents a well-known problem that surveys on dictionary use are normally completed by people who use dictionaries with above-average frequency – and are likely to have a more positive attitude towards them.

The information on user group, or user groups, to which the participants belong could improve the interpretation of the results of dictionary use studies. As shown by pilot studies (e.g. Mikolič 2015, Čibej et al. 2016, in press), certain dictionary needs are general or universal, while others are specific to individual user groups. A better understanding of both types of needs would enable a better preparation of lexical data, not only in the dictionary but in the database it is based on. In addition, having information on the common aspects of user groups, as well as differences between them, will help us better define the target users and inform the development of dictionary interface.

Asking users to identify the group of groups they belong to would also help with better understanding

of log files and facilitate further improvements to the dictionary. However, we need to stress that we do not intend to use the typology in order to devise a user-tailored presentation of dictionary contents (as for example used in the LEAD project; Paquot 2012, Granger & Paquot 2010), but mainly to assist the compilation of a lexical database that can be used as a basis in the compilation of different types of dictionaries for different user groups.

Although the user typology and planned user research are primarily focused on the needs of a specific dictionary project, they have considerable potential for a wider use. In Slovenia, the proposed user typology could be used by researchers not only for studying dictionary use of different user groups but also for studying use of other lexical resources and tools. The typology can also help coordinating efforts, ensuring that different user groups receive similar amount of research attention and thus avoiding the situation currently observed in dictionary use research on international level.

5   Conclusion

When describing target users or potential users of a dictionary, a balance needs to be struck between over-generalising or over-individualising user needs and habits. The best method to avoid that is a carefully devised plan that includes both user profiling and user research, which need to be based on a user typology. In this paper, we have presented a user typology that has been devised as part of the activities related to the compilation of the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language. Several user groups have been identified, and the first pilot studies considering this taxonomy have been conducted to identify user needs. The findings point to both universal needs, common to nearly all user groups, and many needs specific to a single user group, confirming the need for such a typology. The difficult question in the compilation of the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovene Language will be how to meet all the needs of different user groups, or which ones to meet and which ones to leave to other dictionaries. One considerable benefit of the dictionary is that it will be an online dictionary, and the online format is the most versatile format for meeting user needs. Nonetheless, caution should be taken as to avoid ending up with a dictionary that is overly complex to use and not very user-friendly.

The proposed typology is also highly relevant for dictionary use research in Slovenia, as the current status of the discipline in Slovenia shows a need for not only a high quantity of research studies, but also for a sound dispersion of studies into different user groups. Although the proposed typology is based on the Slovenian situation, many user situations and groups are not specific to Slovenia, making the typology, or at least some parts of it, transferable to other languages. This means that the typology could also be useful for international researchers studying dictionary use, serving as a point of departure when devising their own user typology or helping them in identifying the user groups they want to investigate. Furthermore, the typology could be used as a starting point in devising a general user typology which would help to facilitate multi-language and multi-country dictionary use projects and comparisons of dictionary use and user groups on an international scale.

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