Creative Writers as Dictionary Users: Creating in Language and with Language

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Abstract

In this article, we present a pilot survey among users of language manuals, with a focus on people who deal creatively with the language as part of their work, such as writers, scientists, journalists and advertisers. We were interested in how their language awareness is shown through their need for dictionaries and other language manuals. The results indicated that all the people observed in this study at least occasionally used language manuals, with both traditional printed and online versions being consulted. The usage partly differs from group to group, and it also depends on the age of the person involved.

Keywords: language manuals, dictionary, user survey, language awareness, creativity.

1   COMMUNICATIVE INTENTIONS OF THE CREATORS

The users of language manuals for professional purposes are a very broad and diverse group. In our short survey we captured those occupational profiles which are characterized by the regular production of texts, which are intended for the general public and are reflecting, to a certain extent, the authors' creativity. The works of literary artists, scientists, advertisers and journalists, as taken into account in the survey, differ in their purposes, even if creativity is a common element among them.

In the analysis of this creativity we can consider the theory of speech acts and the division of human speech activities on the basis of the four basic illocutionary roles, i.e. cognitive, communicative, executive and art-expressive (Mikolič 2007; Skubic 1995; 2005). The purpose of literature is art-expressive. Writers declare their subjective view of reality with their own aesthetic expressions. The more the writer's world is unique and multifaceted, the more valuable is their literature. This is of course on the condition that the literature is in itself coherent and convincing. The author is interested in the reader only in the second stage, wanting the literary work to have a life of its own. Scientists are also not primarily driven to carry out research by a desire to communicate knowledge to their readers, but instead by taking a creative attitude to the existing reality, in which the scientist sees all the time new ideas and new challenges, and as yet unexplored areas. The basis for scientific discourse is therefore also subjective and contains a great deal of creative thinking, because the scientist must be able to look at already known facts differently, with a new and perhaps previously inconceivable point of view. However, unlike literature, science belongs in the cognitive field, because the scientist's primary purpose is to explore unknown aspects of reality and their relationships to the whole, to expand and create new knowledge. Scientific activity thus has a primarily cognitive purpose. The scientist must confirm and externalize their subjective insights in the external-language reality by carrying out a survey based on evidence. Nevertheless, the scientist remains creative in their use of methods, with the possibility of linking disjointed and seemingly incompatible ideas into new, creative and insights. Journalistic and advertising discourse are communicative activities in the narrow sense of the term. Their basic feature is being oriented to the recipients, and their primary purpose is to communicate with the recipients, to convey a certain message to them. However, in journalistic speech the need to inform the recipient should prevail. On the other hand, advertising speech wants primarily to convince the recipient about the positive features of whatever the text is referring to. As such, when journalists function as advertisers they are looking for innovative and effective communication strategies. This is especially important for advertisers, where creativity is now the

central element of a successful advertising, with all other elements derived from this (Jewler and Drewniany 2005).

As we have seen, the categories of discourse examined in this work vary by the extent of creativity used, as well as the creative methods that are applied. Unlike a literary work, which tends to be more appreciated the more the author is coherent in their own subjective world and form of expression, scientist needs to externalize their initial innovative and subjective view of the problem reality in the course of their research. A similar difference can be found between journalists and advertisers. The latter, working in accordance with the purpose of advertising, have more creative freedom, although professional ethics dictate that advertisers should respect the truth of some objective conditions. Nevertheless, for all four categories of authors analyzed in this study we can say that in their language production they are, at least to a certain extent, subjective and creative; moreover, the texts that are produced on the basis of this creative view, are – sooner or later – intended for a wider audience. On this basis, we can predict the authors will have a special sensitivity for language, and thus we are interested in how this linguistic awareness is shown through their need for dictionaries and other language guides.

2   OBJECTIVES AND METHODS USED IN THE PILOT RESEARCH

With the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s came the assertion that language communication is always interactive and intended for an actual or potential recipient (Schiffrin 1987). Moreover, around the same time the field of user research began developing, which was interested in the users of language manuals. This is of course understandable, since such manuals were text-based ones, and thus explicitly and primarily intended for users. However, it is surprising that in the Slovenian context we have not paid much attention to this topic so far, except for a few works that have recently started to note the need for more research into dictionary users (Logar 2009; Stabej 2009). Undoubtedly this call for a change in focus, to a greater orientation on the user, can also be seen in some recent projects that are interested in users of the language more widely, and so aimed to carefully monitor their needs. For example, the researchers of the Communication in Slovene project[1] wanted to find out which aspects of the Slovene language cause problems to writers. Based on this work, the project developed a style guide and a number of other online language resources and tools, focussed on the needs of language users. Moreover, various online resources are also available to language users, such as the portals Fran and ŠUSS. Due to the rapid development of

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1   http://eng.slovenscina.eu

communication technologies and the profound changes in the nature of communication in recent years, it is especially important to establish regular monitoring of user needs in these new contexts.

In this paper we thus present a pilot survey among users of language manuals that work in creative professions. The survey can form the basis for further studies in this area and the regular monitoring of the working methods of such users of the language, as well as their needs in terms of language manuals.

The initial question was as follows: How is the linguistic awareness of individuals, who in their careers deal creatively with the language, shown through their need for dictionaries and other language guides?

For this purpose in the spring of 2015 we carried out semi-structured interviews (half in person, half via e-mail) with 30 individuals. In these we asked the following questions:

1. Do you use the language manuals in your work?
   1. 1. If yes, which ones?

2. With what purpose or for what issues do you reach for them?

3. Do you know any online language manuals or tools? (dictionaries, corpora, etc.)
   3. 1. If yes, which ones?

4. Have you had any language problems or questions to which the language manuals have not given you the answer?

5. What do you hope for from a dictionary of the Slovenian language? What do you think it should contain?

The respondents in both the face-to-face and e-mail interviews were encouraged to freely share their true opinions. Some respondents used linguistic terminology associated with the use of dictionaries and other language guides more than others. In the subsequent analysis we present examples of their responses, while at the same time we have summarized their answers into linguistic categories, so that the results can be presented in tables and figures.

2.1   Description of sample

Among the 30 subjects that were interviewed, there were ten literary creators, ten scientists, five creatives/advertisers and five journalists, all of various ages (the youngest from 20–35, the middle group from 35–50, the older ones aged over 50)

and genders, and from different areas in Slovenia (from Koper, Piran, Ljubljana or Maribor). Among the literary creators were poets, prose writers and dramatists (three women and seven men). The scientists were from the areas of the humanities (but not linguistics), and social and natural sciences (six women and four men). With regard to the five journalists, there were two working in the print media (both women), two in radio (one woman and one man) and one in television media (a woman). Among the creatives there was one working in an advertising agency associate (a woman), a designer with the status of a freelance artist (a woman), two PR managers (working for large companies, a man and a woman) and a retiree (a woman), who was previously employed in the PR department of a large company.

Since we used a small sample, the findings naturally have limited value. However, some interesting characteristics with regard to the linguistic consciousness of the respondents and some of their similarities and differences were found. As mentioned earlier, in future work it will be necessary to monitor these features in a more in-depth manner.

3   THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE WRITERS AND THE LANGUAGE MANUALS

It is interesting that we quickly recognized two extremes in this group of users; on the one hand, there were regular users of the language manuals, and on the other there were those who prefer to rely on their own language intuition, and do not use language manuals, or do so only in exceptional cases.

It seems that this is partially generationally determined. Users from the older group, and some from the middle one, regularly used the printed versions of *Slovene Orthography* (SO), the *Dictionary of Slovene Literary Language* (DSLL), and dictionaries of foreign words, and one respondent stated that they occasionally open Toporišič's grammar and Bezlaj's or Snoj's etymological dictionaries. Respondents from the older group, and some of the middle one, did not know about any online language manuals or resources. They tended to search the Internet only with the use of search engines, if interested in any specific language use.

The rest of the middle age group, and all of the youngest one, used language manuals very rarely, but among those they do use are printed dictionaries such as Verbinc's *Dictionary of Foreign Words*, Oxford's *Dictionary of English*, and online manuals like DSLL, SO, and Wikipedia. They did not know any other online dictionaries and resources (such as, for example, corpora).

The respondents stated that they reached for language manuals when they are writing and translating, and one author stated that they did so to enhance their

education. They used the language manuals for looking up spelling and gram-matical information, sometimes to find the accurate meaning or the usage or formation of a neologism (i.e., they are curious as to whether the word already exists in the dictionary). They also tended to look up word-formational features in order to learn the language rules for the formation of neologisms. Finally, the respondents were also interested in stylistically characterized words, ambiguity and in rhythmic texts where the accent appears in a word.

However, in general the respondents did not remember having any specific lin-guistic questions for which the language manuals were not able to give an answer, although some argued that they sometimes they did not agree with a suggested spelling or that they could not find a word in a dictionary. One author also noted that dictionaries often omit some non-standard words that are retained in dia-lects, and are also part of the Slovenian language.

More revealing are the respondents' expectations for a dictionary of the Slovenian language, which can be summarized as follows: the dictionary should be easy to use and comprehensive, the descriptions and examples given should be extensive and originate from the living speech, and be accessible in both printed and online forms. These expectations are described in the following statements:

"In dictionaries, for example, I miss many of the words that are in all respects completely Slovene, but they may be maintained only in one dia-lect. I am specifically interested in "linguistic archaeology", therefore I am in search of the hidden archaic remains, even treasure in one language. This could be for example the language character, the spiritual founda-tion of this character, this "spirit" of language, which can be seen in lexi-cal roots and other phonemes, also syntax, etc. Linguists or etymologists prefer to avoid these components, and this is perhaps from a scientific perspective completely excusable - while literary writers are often looking for this "magical" vividness, because the language is the live tradition, the medium through which the literary writer "appeals" to spirituality, the spirit of already long-dead generations who created this language. Linguis-tics of course mainly remains silent about this "spirit", which cannot and must not mean that this is not present in the language. In my opinion the same is true for the essence of each language and its creative use, which mainly evade linguistics."

(A respondent who is a literary writer from Ljubljana, born in 1958)

„/…/ that there will be no artificially produced words in the dictionary, but it will follow the folk, beautiful Slovenian language, and it will not re-arrange and invent words. /.../ I take the dictionary as some other opinion, and not as the absolute truth."

(A respondent who is a poet from Piran, born in 1984)

4   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENTISTS AND THE LANGUAGE MANUALS

The researchers all occasionally used language manuals. They sometimes used the printed versions of SO and DSLL, and knew and used several online language manuals and resources, such as the online DSLL, SO, PONS and other bilingual online dictionaries, dictionaries of English and other foreign languages (German, Italian), dictionaries of classical languages (ancient Greek), terminological dictionaries (geographical), the multilingual terminological database Evroterm, Google Translate, Amebis Presis, Besana, and Termania. However, they did not know about corpora of Slovene or foreign languages. The middle and younger generations of scientists used almost exclusively online language manuals, as well as visiting online services and forums for advice and opinions on language matters.

These scientists sometimes needed language manuals to find spelling and grammatical information, look for suggestions for synonyms and alternative terms, but in general their most common needs were related to the formation and use of terms. And thus in the translation of the technical literature into Slovenian these authors were looking for Slovenian counterparts for foreign terms (e.g. Eng. aspiration economy – *ekonomija učinkovitosti*), looking for the appropriate lexical roots for the formation of new terms (e.g. Eng. citizenisation – *državljenje*) and in the case of terminological doubles they were looking for the Slovenian denominations. Moreover, these respondents used language manuals, especially bilingual dictionaries, or dictionaries of foreign languages, when writing in a foreign language. Sometimes they look for a translation of a term, and sometimes only check the format of the words. The problems that they cannot solve with the help of language manuals are also linked with translation. For example, sometimes they are not able to find the relevant translation or they do not find a sufficient explanation to choose a new term. In particular the respondents noted that they are disturbed when the meanings given are too general, imprecise and not professional enough, with dictionaries often not taking into account the multidisciplinary use of a term. The respondents thus hope that a dictionary of the Slovenian language would come with many examples of use, that these would make use of more complex sentence structures and be presented in different contexts and areas, so that it is easy to see the various peculiarities of meaning and use. The researchers also noted the importance of a user-friendly and clear structure for the dictionary, while at the same time noting that the possibilities of new technologies should also be taken into account. Their expectations for a dictionary are well summarized in the following statements:

"I don't know, I have never thought in that way … I want that the dictionary is up-to-date, which means, that it contains also the most modern words, maybe professional terminology, and also foreign words …"

<div align="right">(A respondent who is a scientist working in the field of social studies from Koper, born in 1971)</div>

"The dictionary should present different contexts of words. Also the form is important, which should be clear and manageable. At the same time the dictionary should be interactive, using all the opportunities that are enabled by new technologies."

<div align="right">(A respondent who is a scientist working in the field of humanities from Ljubljana, born in 1977).</div>

"The basic concept of the dictionary should be interdisciplinary, so it can be used in a wide range of areas, because real life is wide and it is not limited to single disciplines. To solve most problems it is necessary to work in an interdisciplinary manner (e.g. for issues related to water and wood) and the appropriate terminology should be used in these fields."

<div align="right">(A respondent who is a scientist working in the field of social studies from Maribor, born in 1967).</div>

5   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND THE LANGUAGE MANUALS

The journalist respondents were also quite regular users of language manuals in both paper and online forms. They mainly use DSLL and SO, and also occasionally use the style manuals of Janez Gradišnik, bilingual dictionaries, various law manuals, local lexicon, and various encyclopaedias, and sometimes visit Wikipedia and forums, where their language problems can be solved. Only one respondent from this group stated that she also searched corpora (e.g. Gigafida). The youngest group of respondents exclusively used online language manuals and resources, although even they did not know about the most up-to-date online language portals, which collect several manuals and language resources together.

The respondents in this group stated that they used language manuals when writing articles. They were mostly interested in spelling and grammar, e.g. the declension of the foreign names and the use of upper-case. They often reached for language guides when they wanted to define the relationship between a new term and the linguistic norm. Sometimes they are also interested in terminology, especially legal terms. The journalists working in radio and television media

were also interested in the correct place of the accent in multi-syllable words. One of the journalists also highlighted the use of language manuals in her free time or with her family (e.g., helping a primary school child and student, or proofreading diplomas).

When these authors encounter something that is incomprehensible they tend to turn to a proofreader (if they have one) to ask for help, or to their journalistic colleagues. They stated that dictionaries often do not include newer lexis, and noted that they often could not find the words they were searching for.

With regard to what such users wanted from a dictionary of the Slovenian language, they wanted it to be user-friendly and concise, because due to the nature of their work where they do not have much time to resolve any language issues, and thus need answers to their questions very quickly, as noted in the following statement:

> "The tempo of my work is extremely fast and sometimes I simply don't have the time to looking into a specific question and find a solution."

> (A respondent who is a journalist from Koper, born in 1987)

In addition, they want the dictionary to be up-to-date and that its authors should thus monitor the development of new vocabulary, which can then be presented with the aid of new technology. In particular, the dictionary should pay attention to the needs of the language user, as journalists must be oriented to the needs of their readers, listeners and viewers, as illustrated by the following statement:

> "As journalists we have an obligation to bring specific and also technical issues to the reader, and this we can only do with understandable and stylistically appropriate language, therefore in dictionaries we want transparent explanations of the senses and the actual use of words."

> (A respondent who is a journalist form Koper, born in 1964)

6   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADVERTISERS AND THE LANGUAGE MANUALS

The respondents who were advertisers/creatives were fairly regular users of the language manuals. Those in the middle and older groups regularly used the printed versions of SO, DSLL, dictionaries of foreign words, an English-Slovenian dictionary, and occasionally an etymological dictionary. Other users in the middle group, and all those in the youngest group, used the same manuals online, as well as dictionaries from the online portal of the Fran Ramovš Institute for the Slovenian language ZRC SAZU, *The Tongue Unleashed* (*Razvezani jezik*) – a free dictionary of the living Slovenian language, some terminological dictionaries

(e.g. for the theatre), bilingual online dictionaries, dictionaries of English and other foreign languages, and Google Translate, but they did not use corpora.

Language manuals were used primarily to find spelling and grammatical information, look up explicit meanings and stylistic characterizations, and for finding synonyms to avoid foreign words. One of the interviewees from this group stated that advertisers are aware of the trend for the excessive use of foreign words in advertising, which has been led by the desire to be special, different, and more visible.

Sometimes these respondents stated that they encounter an unsolvable language problem, because the dictionary does not provide sufficiently comprehensive explanations of meaning or enough examples of use, so they turn to authentic texts or asked a proofreader or translator. Their expectations for a dictionary of the Slovenian language are thus that it would give enough information about words, so that it can be used in a creative process of searching for creating advertising ideas. They are also aware of the impact of globalization on advertising, and in using the Slovene language also see the possibility of deviating from the standard examples. The Slovene language, with its own cultural specifics, gives them the possibility of engaging in different, creative thinking. At the same time they also want the dictionary to be user-friendly and concise. All of this is summarized in the following statements:

> "It should be manageable, functionally designed, and logical for the usage – 'simple and logical'."
>
> (A designer with status of a freelance artist from Koper, born in 1964)

> "The power, the weight of each word should be shown. /.../ More emphasis should be given to the cultural specifics, also to the etymology, so that advertisers would paid more attention to the relevant transfer of globalized advertising strategies and content in Slovenian culture. "
>
> (A retiree, previously employed in the PR department of a large company, from Ljubljana, born in 1946)

7   CONCLUSIONS

All of the speakers and writers surveyed in this work, who deal creatively with the language, no doubt have a developed and active language awareness. Although they are not mainly concerned with metalanguage issues and also do not think directly about what language manuals should be like, they often think about language and appropriate ways of expression, and thus often need to look for answers to problems that arise in different places, including language manuals.

There are clear generational differences with regard to the respondents' use of language manuals in this study. The older respondents only used printed language guides, those in the middle generation used both printed and online manuals, while the youngest group tended to use only online language manuals.

All of the groups mainly know and use the standard printed and online language manuals (SO, DSLL, dictionaries of foreign words, bi- and monolingual dictionaries). However, only a few know the more advanced web portals that offer a variety of language resources and manuals, such as the Communication in Slovene, the portal of language resources, Termania, Fran, FB-portal Language Slovenia, and so on. Moreover, only one interviewee knew about using corpora (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: The language manuals use of the respondents

Do you use language manuals in your work?	Literary authors	Scientists	Journalists	Advertisers	Total
Yes	6	10	5	5	26
Rarely	3	0	0	0	3
No	1	0	0	0	1
Total	10	10	5	5	30

Table 2: Use of online language manuals and tools

Do you know any online language manuals or tools?	Literary authors	Scientists	Journalists	Advertisers	Total
Yes, I know them, including corpora and language portals	0	2	1	1	4
Yes, I know different tools, but I don't know corpora and language portals	3	7	1	3	14
Yes, I know them, but only the online versions of printed works	2	1	2	1	6
I know some, but rarely use them	3	0	0	0	3
I don't know any of them	2	0	1	0	3
Total	10	10	5	5	30

The respondents stated that they used the language manuals mostly to find spelling and grammar information. Moreover, the most common reasons for using

such tools were to find more details of the meaning of words, and to search for examples of use. These reasons are followed by interest in newer lexis, translation counterparts in Slovene, synonyms or professional terms (see Table 3).

Table 3: Reasons for using language manuals

With what purpose or what issues do you use these resources?	Literary authors	Scientists	Journalists	Advertisers	Total
To find explanations of meanings	4	3	2	2	11
To find explicit descriptions of meanings	6	8	0	5	**19**
To find out the stylistic characterization of a term	3	0	2	4	9
To find neologisms and newer words	2	6	5	3	**16**
To find spelling and grammar rules	6	8	5	5	**24**
To find synonyms	4	6	0	3	**13**
Ambiguity	1	2	0	0	3
Examples of use	5	6	3	5	**19**
Multidisciplinarity	0	5	1	0	6
Technical terms	0	9	3	0	**12**
Translation counterparts in Slovene	0	10	2	2	**14**
Etymology	1	2	0	2	5
Word-formational features	2	3	0	0	5
Accent	2	0	3	0	5
Total	36/10=**3,6**	68/10=**6,8**	26/5=**5,2**	31/5=**6,2**	161/30=**5,3**

With regard to the expectations that the respondents had as dictionary users, we can see that all groups felt that the existing dictionaries – as well as other language resources – were not always able to solve their linguistic problems. In particular such works tend to lack more extensive and authentic examples of use, and a wider range of vocabulary. Moreover, the also often lack newer and non-standard vocabulary. In addition, all of the respondents stated that the first characteristic that they expect from a dictionary is being easy to use. The key elements that the respondents felt are missing in current dictionaries, and which the hope to be included in future versions, are shown in Figures 1 and 2.
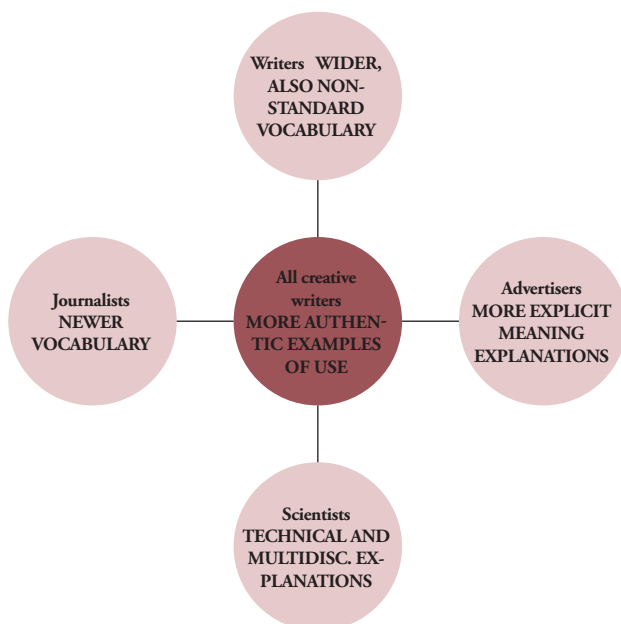
Figure 1: What do creative writers feel is lacking in current dictionaries?
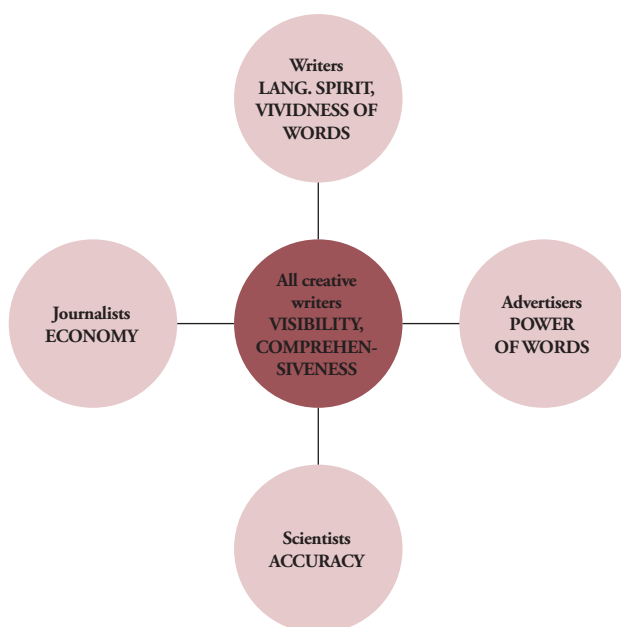

Figure 2: What do language creators hope for from a dictionary?

Regarding the use of language manuals and the expectations of dictionary users, although this study only had a small sample of respondents, it still found some interesting and notable differences among the groups. In Table 3, which shows the number of times each reason for using a language manual was cited, it can be seen that each respondent reported an average of 5.3 different reasons. The results also show that the scientists reported an above-average use of dictionaries (an average of 6.8 times) followed by advertisers (6.2 times), while the journalists are close to the average number (5.2 times). Finally, literary authors used the language manuals least (3.6).

Overall, it seems that the scientists knew most of the newer online language portals. Moreover, they reported using the language manuals primarily to form and understand professional terms, and thus want to obtain accurate explanations of words from the perspectives of different disciplines and areas. This group also emphasized the importance of making use of interactivity and other features of language manuals which are made possible by new technologies.

In contrast, the advertisers were primarily looking for inspiration for their creative ideas in the language, and thus in the language manuals used. They thus want to "feel" the words, their *power* and specifics, so that they can use the language in ways that deviate from the prevailing unified and globalized advertising patterns.

Literary creators are divided into two groups: they are either regular users of the language manuals or rely on their own language intuition and hardly use such works. The latter group are also the only one that stated that they very rarely or never use language manuals. However, all of these respondents were interested in the language, wanting to feel the spirit *of the language and the vividness of the words*, and thus they also wanted related details in a new dictionary of the Slovenian language.

All the journalists stated that they occasionally used language manuals. However, because of the nature of their work they cannot spend a lot of time using them. With regard to their expectations for a new the dictionary of the Slovene language, they stated that it should be user-friendly and *concise.* Journalists were also the respondents who most felt that current dictionaries lacked newer vocabulary items. Like some literary creators and advertisers, some journalists also rely on proofreaders to improve their writing. This is understandable, as larger media companies, as well as publishing houses, have organized proofreading services.

In conclusion we can say that the respondents examined in this work, who are both language users and users of language manuals, can actually be understood as language creators, who pay a lot of attention to language and its possibilities. The language infrastructure should thus follow their interests and needs, as this could then help to develop and expand their linguistic consciousness. The first condition for this, however, is a greater knowledge of these interests and needs, and so continued monitoring of user needs should be one of the main tasks of Slovenian lexicographers.