

# Expectations of the Latvian Dictionary Users on the Ideal Terminological Dictionary

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## ABSTRACT

While studying the state of contemporary Latvian terminography, it has to be acknowledged that there is a lack of well-designed dictionaries with introductions that explain the principles and intentions of creating the dictionary; there are no references to the resources or other indicators that are important to the dictionary user. Before publishing any dictionary, lexicographers should be aware of the target users, but there is a lack of studies on the habits and needs of the users of the terminological dictionary. A continued study into the attitudes and habits of dictionary users is needed to make clear what the public expects from a terminological dictionary, and that is why a survey was conducted among 161 Latvian bachelor, master, and doctoral students with regard to dictionary use and culture. This empirical research presents a result of a preliminary study on the opinions, attitudes, and habits of Latvian dictionary users regarding the use of terminological dictionaries and their dictionary culture. The aim of the report is to present and discuss answers to one of the open questions in the survey: “In your opinion, what characteristics should the ideal terminological dictionary have?” By mentioning some of the statements to be drawn from the survey, it should be highlighted that the dictionary user in Latvia wants the dictionaries to have an introduction that explains everything that the user is looking for. Being aware that it is almost impossible to create an ideal dictionary, a number of aspects that are relevant to the user are reflected on in the report.

**KEYWORDS:** terminological dictionaries, user needs, dictionary users, lexicography, Latvian terminography.

## ANOTACIJA

Nagrinęjant šiuolaikinės latvių terminografijos būklę reikia pripažinti, kad trūksta gerai parengtų žodynų su įžangomis, kuriose būtų paaiškinti žodyno kūrimo principai ir ketinimai; nėra nuorodų į išteklius ar kitus žodyno vartotojui svarbius rodiklius. Prieš išleisdami bet kokią žodyną, leksikografai turėtų žinoti žodyno tikslinį vartotoją, tačiau trūksta tyrimų apie terminų žodynų vartotojų įpročius ir poreikius. Norint išsiaiškinti, ko visuomenė tikisi iš terminų žodyno, reikia tęstinio žodynų vartotojų požiūrių ir įpročių tyrimo. Šio empirinio tyrimo metu buvo apklaustas 161 Latvijos bakalauro, magistrantūros ir doktorantūros studentas. Straipsnyje pateikiami preliminarūs žodynų vartotojų Latvijoje nuomonių, požiūrių ir įpročių, susijusių su terminų žodynų vartojimu ir su jų žodynų kultūra, tyrimo rezultatai. Tikslas – pateikti ir aptarti atsakymus į vieną iš apklausos atvirų klausimų: „Kokiomis savybėmis, jūsų nuomone, turėtų pasižymėti idealus terminologinis žodynas?“ Paminėjus kai kuriuos apklausos teiginius, reikėtų pabrėžti, kad žodynų vartotojai Latvijoje pageidauja, kad žodynai turėtų įvadą, kuriame būtų paaiškinta viskas, ko vartotojas ieško. Suvokiant, kad idealaus žodyno sukurti beveik neįmanoma, straipsnyje atsižvelgiama į keletą vartotojui svarbių aspektų.

**ESMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** terminų žodynai, vartotojų poreikiai, žodynų vartotojai, leksikografija, latvių terminografija.

## INTRODUCTION

In Latvia, terminological dictionaries are issued very often. At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, within twenty years, over 660 dictionaries (Šmite 2012) were added to Latvian lexicography, of which several hundred were terminological dictionaries. In particular, since 1991, i.e., after the restoration of independence of Latvia, there has been a significant increase in the number of terminological resources. The present research examines 405 Latvian terminological dictionaries that have been published in the last 30 years. They vary widely, both in terms of the authors and publishers, in terms of language selection, and in terms of the target audience. In addition, in the market there are dictionaries approved by the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences and dictionaries that are not approved by any official institution. The dictionary is an authoritative and accurate source of information. Dictionary users generally consider it particularly significant and reliable during any research process.

As the linguist Juris Baldunčiks has acknowledged, in Latvia “dictionary reviews are a very rare phenomenon, but without criticism the

improvement of the quality of dictionaries is unthinkable” (Baldunčiks 2012a: 10). In Latvian terminography, there is a lack of studies on the habits and needs of terminological dictionary users. Publications of reviews or analyses of the qualitative performance of such dictionaries are also rare. Of course, there are various criteria developed by theorists that analyse and assess the quality of the terminological (and other type) dictionaries. For example, the content, information architecture, navigation, access, help, customisation, and innovative technologies used to manage information in e-dictionaries are identified as the main categories of evaluation criteria for e-dictionaries (Ball, Bothma 2018). Sergey Grinev-Grinevich (Сергей Гринев-Гриневич) points out specific parameters of the macrostructure of a terminological dictionary (author’s requirements, thematic orientation, purpose, target audience, functions, size, term selection principles) and microstructure (term registration details, formal, historical, and remote information, interpretive, associative, pragmatic, and illustrative information) (Гринев-Гриневич 2007: 23–24). Piet Swanepoel developed a framework for the description and evaluation of dictionary evaluation criteria using parameters from research on dictionary criticism and the usability of websites (Swanepoel 2008). However, as the result of this study also shows, the habits of dictionary users are almost never associated with any strict scientific parameters (they are more useful for researchers and specialists).

As part of the study so far, terminological dictionaries have been examined in several aspects: the experience of leading publishers and their view on publishing terminological dictionaries has been gathered; Māris Baltiņš, the chair of the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, was interviewed; a thematic characterisation of terminological dictionaries was carried out in terms of the fields and economic sectors represented; a survey of the terminological dictionary users was conducted, which presents the main habits of the use of these dictionaries. So far, in Latvian terminography research, a survey of dictionary users was conducted within the framework of the study of the Translation and Terminology Centre (see TTC 2005); another survey of dictionary users was conducted within the framework of the research on dictionary-making in Latvia (see Baldunčiks 2012b). Similarly, a student survey was conducted and the expectations and needs of dictionary users were considered when carrying out a project of two higher education institutions developing a mobile application for the dictionary of medical terminology (see Sviķe, Gorbunovs, Veckalne, etc. 2020).

The habits of dictionary users determine the language needs of a particular user or a particular user group (e.g., students, translators, etc.), and since today's lexicography is based on the needs of the language user, it is very important to implement this aspect of "user-friendly" in practice when compiling a dictionary. The lexicographer Henri Béjoint considers the study of "needs and skills of the users" an attempt which will enhance user-friendliness in the process of compiling a dictionary (Béjoint 2000: 167). In recent years, the functional approach has dominated in the field of dictionary design and compilation. "In as much as the design features of a dictionary successfully support the target users and their linguistic needs in such use contexts, they are evaluated positively; in as much as they do not, they are evaluated negatively. Degrees of functionality/usability on the positive-negative scale are thus defined in terms of the performance levels achieved by users for certain tasks in which a dictionary with specific design features is used. As such, it accords with the user approach to the evaluation of a dictionary." (Swanepoel 2008: 222)

After years of research, it has been established that a dictionary (not just a dictionary of terms) is considered good when:

- 1) it provides the main functions of dictionaries (communicative and normative),
- 2) it allows the user to verify or extend their knowledge of the language,
- 3) it is good for the educational process,
- 4) it is readily accessible and user-friendly,
- 5) it is clearly structured,
- 6) is compiled by specialists in the field,
- 7) the selection of headwords is clearly understood,
- 8) it contains neologisms,
- 9) it contains easily readable and perceptible entries,
- 10) it contains appropriate illustrative material.

## THE SURVEY AND ITS METHODS

The theory may reflect one point of view, but the habits and needs of the target audience or dictionary users are unquestionably important; with this on view, an online survey on the use of terminological dictionaries was conducted as part of a wider research on the Latvian terminography. The research describes the theory and practice of terminography, provides a

description of modern Latvian terminological dictionaries in a variety of aspects: thematic, target audience, volume, etc. As well guidelines for the development of terminological dictionaries are being developed by literature review and by compiling the opinions of industry terminology specialists, publishers, and good practice examples among dictionary users.

In 2021, an online survey of dictionary users was conducted with an aim to learn the habits of using terminological dictionaries. Bachelor-, master-, and doctoral-level students were selected as the main respondents of the survey. In total, the survey covered 14 questions which revealed the type of terminological dictionaries – online or printed – the students prefer; the situations in which the terminological dictionaries are mainly used; it revealed the importance of officially approved dictionaries, the importance of providing equivalents of terms in other languages, the importance of the dictionary being not more than five years old, etc. This article analyses the answers to one of the survey's open questions: "Which should be characteristics/features of an ideal terminological dictionary? Please mention two or three!" The survey was completed by 161 respondents. Of those, 106 were bachelor, fifteen master, and 40 doctoral students. Of the 161 respondents, 114 were women and 47 were men. Regarding the age groups, 85 respondents were between 18 and 24 years of age, 47 between 25 and 34 years, 20 respondents between 35 and 49, and nine respondents were over 50 years of age. The gender and age indicators surveyed played a secondary role in the analysis of the results. Mainly, the answers were classified by the level or field of the students' studies. The comparison of the data obtained in the survey was based on the views of the industry's leading specialist and terminologists.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the total of 161, 156 respondents answered the question about the ideal terminological dictionary and its features. The answers vary from one word to even a deeper analysis.

Interestingly, 46 out of 156 answers have the word *easy* in them, but 43 times the words *renewed*, *updated* or *current* are mentioned, for example,

- *easy to understand the meaning; easy to navigate;*
- *the terms correspond to the current situation in the field;*
- *renewed as frequently as possible;*
- *periodically updated.*

In students' responses, the words *easy* and *simple* apply both to the dictionary itself, its layout and transparency, and to the readability of the text. As well these responses reveal that students are looking for a convenient, easy-to-use, and regularly updated terminological database.

Words *reliable*, *professionally approved*, *scientifically approved* and *approved terms* appear 34 times, for example,

- *comprehensible explanations approved by professionals;*
- *dictionary should be reliable.*

These answers indicate that a terminological dictionary or database must have this stamp of quality of terminologists and specialists in the field. In the interview (personal interview, 16 June 2020), Balțiș emphasizes that professionalism and responsibility of the dictionary compilers are more important than the formal aspect of approval because not all the terms in approved dictionaries are discussed in the commission, and the fact of approval alone does not guarantee the quality of the dictionary. However, as the survey results show, the quality stamp of terminology specialists is very important for dictionary users.

Forty-five responses reveal that dictionaries should contain term equivalents in other foreign languages, for example,

- *terms available in at least five European languages;*
- *terms are available in several languages.*

From the point of view of dictionary users, monolingual interpretative term dictionaries are not that practical. They may be more useful for secondary or high school level.

The answers reveal an opposite point of view as well. Part of the respondents mentioned they wanted a brief term explanation, for example,

- *as many entries as possible, short explanations;*
- *brief, concentrated definitions,*

but in multiple answers the exact opposite is included, for example,

- *entry should contain term etymology, perhaps extended explanation, for example, a historical context;*
- *broad but clear explanations;*
- *the origin, history of a given term, because it often reveals the wider meaning of the term and makes it more understandable.*

These responses are closely related to the field of the respondents' education. According to respondents' replies, it is in the interest of students in the humanities and the natural sciences that the entry consists of more

information. It is also related to the level of their studies: for bachelor students, a brief explanation of the term does not necessarily reveal the full meaning of the concept and does not reveal the idea of its meaning. For master and doctoral students, this scientific experience is greater and understanding the meaning of terms does not pose a problem.

Thirty-four answers reveal the inclusion of examples in the entry of each term as an important feature for an ideal dictionary, for example,

- *typical usage examples of the term are included;*
- *not just meaning, but as well examples where the term is used.*

It is interesting that fifteen respondents also want the synonyms of a term to be included, for example,

- *provide examples and similar words;*
- *accuracy, explanations, synonyms;*
- *it would be valuable if synonyms were displayed.*

In Latvian lexicography, the term is described as a good term if it is “clearly different from other terms (preferably one with no synonyms and homonyms)” (Nacionālā enciklopēdija 2021). Such responses may be related to the fact that students are often reminded to avoid repetition of words in scientific language to ensure good sounding (for example, Microsoft Word smart editing highlights two identical words if they are too close to each other in the text and calls on the author to choose synonyms), but this does not apply to terms. Their consistent use ensures that the text is unmistakable and clear, which is one of the criteria of academic writing.

In multiple responses, students mention that an entry should include information about the source of the term. At first, this seems confusing, but the answers reveal what is meant by it:

- *I think a perfect term database accurately indicates the source of the term;*
- *It has a link to a source that uses the term.*

This feature is related to the fact that, mainly, the online term databases available in Latvian are a collection of several printed terminological dictionaries and term sets, which are not regularly updated or are updated when publishing houses produce a new printed terminological dictionary. For students, of course, it is convenient for reference making: a reference to a printed dictionary creates the credibility that the term comes from an edited and reliable source. These answers reveal that currently there are

no terminological databases in the Latvian language which are regularly updated and maintained by terminologists and specialists in the field.

Survey answers also reveal other interesting features, such as calling for terms not yet approved that are nonetheless widely used in the field to be included in term databases:

- *A lot of terms; they show the right terms and really the terms used by professionals in the industry.*

Such terms could be labelled separately in the dictionary as professionalisms used in the field, which would prevent them from being used in scientific language, but they would be available and explained to young professionals.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the survey responses suggest that, mainly, students see a regularly updated online terminological database with officially approved terms as an ideal terminological dictionary. The existence of one official terminological database would solve the issue of students perceiving various digital tools of questionable quality as online dictionaries.

In an answer to a survey question, one student wrote that “perfect things don’t exist in the world.” This student is right, but the answers reveal that in cooperation with terminologists, specialists in the field, publishers, lexicographers, dictionary users, and other specialists we can develop guidelines for compilation of terminological dictionaries, which could be used to develop a terminological source where users could find what they are looking for fast and easily. Terminological databases are not helpful when they are compiled as a summary of printed terminological dictionaries and are not regularly updated, because their users do not benefit much from them. The Covid-19 pandemic alone has supplemented English with 1000 new terms. The lexicographers are talking about *coroneologisms* (Roig-Marín 2020; Li 2021), meanwhile in Latvian terminography, the question of the neologisms in terminological dictionaries is still under debate, which means that the public has almost no access to them. Students’ recommendations should be included in the criteria for evaluating dictionaries as they are an important group of dictionary users.

Taking a broader look at this issue, it would be necessary to compare the data in both chronological (different time periods) and territorial (experience of different nations, languages) aspects. Sometimes respecting the



needs of dictionary users can be considered populism, a way of pleasing market requirements, or a derogation from scientifically-proven and verifiable criteria, while the language (including terminology and terminography) exists and develops mainly because of its users. Therefore, research on such data is not only interesting but also useful.

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## ŽODYNŲ VARTOTOJŲ LATVIŲ LŪKESČIAI DĒL IDEALAUS TERMINŲ ŽODYNO

### Santrauka

Terminų žodynai sudaro 30–40 proc. visos latvių leksikografijos. Jie atlieka svarbų vaidmenį, nes terminologija sudaro kiekvienos kalbos mokslinį pagrindą. Tyrimo metu buvo atlikta terminų žodynų vartotojų apklausa, kurioje buvo pateikti pagrindiniai šių žodynų vartotojų įpročiai. Kadangi dabartinė leksikografija remiasi kalbos vartotojo poreikiais, rengiant žodyną labai svarbu praktiškai įgyvendinti šį „patogumo vartotojui“ aspektą. Tradiciškai geram žodynui priskiriama daug savybių, tačiau teorija gali atspindėti vieną požiūrį, o auditorijos arba žodyno vartotojų įpročiai ir poreikiai yra neabejotinai svarbūs. Pagrindiniai apklausos respondentai buvo bakalauro, magistrantūros ir doktorantūros studentai. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiami atsakymai į vieną iš apklausos atvirų klausimų: „Kokiomis savybėmis turėtų pasižymėti idealus terminų žodynas? Pateikite dvi ar tris!“ Apklausa užpildė 161 respondentas. Remiantis studentų atsakymais, pagrindinės idealaus terminų žodyno savybės yra tokios: lengva naršyti, pateikiama naujausia oficialiai patvirtinta terminija, dažnai atnaujinamas, terminai pateikiami keliomis kalbomis, pateikiami terminų vartojimo pavyzdžiai. Kai kurios savybės, pavyzdžiui, įrašo turinys ir ilgis, išsiskiria ir yra priešingos. Atsakymai glaudžiai susiję su respondentų studijų sritimi: humanitarinių ir gamtos mokslų studentai suinteresuoti, kad žodyno straipsnyje būtų pateikiama kuo daugiau informacijos, ir su respondentų studijų lygiu. Bakalauro studentams trumpas termino paaiškinimas nebūtinai atskleidžia visą sąvokos prasmę ir neatskleidžia jos reikšmės esmės. Magistrantams ir doktorantams, kurių mokslinė patirtis yra didesnė, terminų reikšmės suprati- mas nekelia problemų. Rengiant žodynus, reikėtų atsižvelgti į studentų rekomendacijas ir žodynų vartotojų įpročius.

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