

E-LEARNING MATERIALS FOR THE SLOVENE LANGUAGE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (6TH–9TH GRADE)

ALENKA VALH LOPERT¹ & MIHAELA KOLETNIK¹

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¹ University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Slovenia

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KORESPONDENČNI AVTOR/CORRESPONDING AUTHOR
alenka.valh@um.si

Abstract/Povzetek The theoretical part of the paper presents the project *Slovenščina na dlani* (*Slovene in the palm of your hand*), which is intended for the establishment of an interactive learning environment for the Slovene language (as mother tongue) in elementary and secondary schools. In this paper we limit the research to elementary school. In the empirical section, we focus on freely available e-learning materials for the Slovene language from the 6th to the 9th grade of elementary school and present the results of an analysis of 10,118 tasks according to their types. The findings indicate an unbalanced representation of different types of tasks, with short answer types in the majority, the task type that is least popular among students. By introducing the most advanced linguistic technology into learning processes, we try to overcome the limitations of existing e-resources for learning the Slovene language.

Keywords:

the Slovene language,
mother tongue,
elementary school, e-
learning resources,
Slovenščina na dlani

Ključne besede:

slovenski jezik, materni
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E-gradivo za slovenski jezik v osnovni šoli (6. – 9. razred) V teoretičnem delu prispevka bo predstavljen projekt *Slovenščina na dlani*, ki je namenjen vzpostavitvi interaktivnega učnega okolja za učenje slovenščine kot materinščine v osnovnih in srednjih šolah. V tem prispevku se omejujemo na osnovno šolo. V empiričnem delu se osredotočamo na prosto dostopna e-gradiva za učenje slovenščine od 6. do 9. razreda osnovne šole in predstavljamo rezultate analize 10 118 nalog glede na njihov tip. Ugotovitve kažejo na neuravnoteženo zastopanost različnih tipov nalog, pri čemer prevladujejo naloge s kratkim odgovorom, ki so med učenci najmanj priljubljene. Z uvajanjem najsodobnejših jezikovnih tehnologij v učne procese poskušamo premagati omejitve obstoječih e-gradiv za učenje slovenščine.

Introduction

The article will explore question types in existing E-learning resources for the Slovene language as mother tongue, and will ascertain which types should be integrated—as being the most desirable, but currently under-used—into a typical textbook to maximise learning opportunities for learners. The project *Slovensščina na dlani* was implemented in August 2017, and its main aim is the creation of an interactive learning environment for the Slovene language in elementary and secondary schools. The creators of the project, however, have set up the project in order to overcome the limitations of existing e-resources for the Slovene language learning, so it is no longer just a transfer of the printed workbooks into an electronic form.

The present article focuses on a review of existing, freely accessible materials for teaching/learning the Slovene language from the 6th to the 9th grade of elementary school and the results of an analysis of current e-learning resources according to question types. The findings show an unbalanced representation of different question types, with a dominant type that is least popular among students. In what follows, the second phase of the project, secondary school materials, will be taken into consideration, using the same criteria.

Slovene experts have carried out research (O kakovosti 2018, p. 8) on the quality of Slovene textbooks, discussed the content-didactic and professional aspects of textbooks at the primary level of elementary school within various subjects, including textbooks for the Slovene language. Four criteria of assessment have been taken into consideration:

- (1) *Thinking*—a textbook promotes problem/critical/creative thinking.
- (2) *Vocabulary, language*—a textbook encourages the enrichment of the vocabulary to a sufficient extent and includes appropriate professional terminology, as well as illustrating the professional concepts with an example or an illustration, i.e. with an image, a model etc.
- (3) *Content*—the examples used in the textbook are related to everyday life, the textbook enables meaningful cross-curricular integration and deals with current scientific knowledge and topical issues.
- (4) *Learning, knowledge*—a textbook meets the requirements of an appropriate level of student development and includes an appropriate level of complexity; it enables the inclusion of the student's pre-knowledge and a pre-knowledge check; it increases the difficulty for the progress of the learners; it encourages active forms of learning,

learning by research and collaborative learning; it allows learners to reflect on their own learning, and enables self-evaluation of knowledge.

According to teachers' responses, the researchers stated (O kakovosti 2018, p. 9), on the one hand, that a high percentage of textbooks for the Slovene language at the primary level of elementary school do the following:

- (1) stimulate problem solving (79%), critical (78%) and creative thinking (82%);
- (2) promote the enrichment of vocabulary (89%), give professional examples with illustrations (85%);
- (3) use examples from everyday life (85%), allow cross-curricular integration (82%); (89%), allow the inclusion of student's pre-knowledge (82%), allow students to check their pre-knowledge (68%), and enable student progression (70%).

On the other hand, in the opinion of teachers, the following characteristics of textbooks are represented in a lower percentage:

- (1) textbooks promote active forms of learning (57%),
- (2) enable self-assessment of knowledge (50%);
- (3) allow students to reflect on daily learning (only 6%); and
- (4) discuss contemporary scientific findings (52%).

The findings of the research coincide with the main guidelines for the preparation of new learning materials for the Slovene language, and we will strive to achieve the highest possible level of consideration of these goals.

On the Project *Slovenščina na dlani*

The project *Slovenščina na dlani* (Gradivo za izobraževanje 2017; Internet source: <http://projekt.slo-na-dlani.si/sl/>) is co-financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and by the European Union, i.e. the European Social Fund. It is carried out at the University of Maribor, including three faculties: the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Informatics. It will last four years, until the end of September 2021.

During the project period, fourteen educational institutions (primary and secondary schools) from all over Slovenia will participate in order to improve the responsiveness of the formal education system and increase its attractiveness.

The purpose of the project is to create an innovative, interactive learning e-resource by introducing the most advanced linguistic technology into the learning processes, on the one hand. On the other hand, we seek to offer students an e-environment that is highly automated. It will provide (for certain tasks) an almost unlimited number of individualised exercises and adapt automatically to the needs of each individual user, while being interactive in the sense of automatically providing information to the user on his/her achievement and performance and automatically directing him/her among tasks, using the advantage of gaming elements from the computer environment to motivate students.

The target group comprises students from the 6th to the 9th grades of elementary school and secondary school students, who can produce longer texts, but with deficits in language expression and understanding, especially in the case of non-literary texts. It is precisely these deficits that are targeted in our new learning e-resource, *Slovenščina na dlani*. The learning e-environment will be freely accessible and adapted for use on tablets and smartphones. It will be available to anyone, even without registration, but registration is desirable for use in schools, so that students can take full advantage of all the potential of e-environment adaptation to each individual user.

The e-exercises will be divided into five content sets: (1) orthography (use of commas, capital letters, words written together and apart, etc.), (2) grammar (use of prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, etc., difficulties in conjugation, declension and comparison), (3) idioms, proverbs, (4) texts (reading and summarizing), and (5) explanation of linguistic topics.

Theoretical insight

Common to all the free e-learning materials for Slovenian language in elementary school (those reviewed for this paper) from the 6th to the 9th grades is that they are designed to provide students and teachers with many (diversified) question types. They differ from each other according to how they are compiled, according to the level of student activity in solving tasks, according to predicted response, and according to demand, namely the taxonomic level. We point out—in our area, the best known—three different classifications of types of tasks that differ in the way they are sorted.

As early as 1965, the Slovenian psychologists Ivan Toličič and Leon Zorman had classified and described the question types in their *Testi znanja in njihova uporaba v praksi* (Tests of Knowledge and Their Application in Practice, 1965). They divided the question types into two groups with several subtypes, using as criteria for the division the composition of the question types and the manner in which students answer them. The first group lists question types for which the answer needs to be written, that is, question types requiring the reproduction of learning material (complement question types and the short answer). In the second group, there are question types in which the answer should be selected (optional type/with subtypes), the linking and editing type, and the alternative type (with subtypes) (Toličič, Zorman 1965, pp. 26–57). They also mention question types with free answers that require a written response but do not classify these in any group. In 1968 (pp. 81–84), Zorman also wrote about interpretational question types, which are more demanding and complex on the level of content and form in comparison to other question types. These are suitable for identifying complex educational components (e.g. knowledge of cause-effect relationships or the ability to develop hypotheses), but among pupils with less reading ability, these are very unpopular, as they usually contain a great deal of text.

In her paper *Pisno preverjanje in ocenjevanje pri pouku slovenskega jezika v tretjem triletju osnovne šole* (Written examination and evaluation in Slovene language classes in the third trimester of elementary school, 2008), Slavist Tamara Vomer divides the question types into two groups:

In the first group, they are classified according to the level of understanding of the text—i.e. factual question types, in which the individual is expected to copy the answers literally from the given text; concluding question types, which require the individual to conclude on an answer that is not literally given in the text, and the critical/creative/applicable question types, requiring a certain pre-knowledge. In the second group, she classifies question types according to the learner's activity—question types of a closed or objective type, requiring the individual to choose an answer from the multiple answers given or specify a specific answer; question types of a semi-open or partially objective type, which the individual needs to answer or solve independently, with the type of answer being specified by the instructions, or question types that are composed of several different question types or sub-questions that are not necessarily interdependent: question types of an open or subjective type (all with several subtypes), which are characterized by an individual showing his/her own ideas and creativity or giving his/her opinion (Vomer 2008, pp. 34, 35).

In 2002, psychologists Barica Marentič Požarnik and Cirila Peklaj divided assignments into two groups in the *Preverjanje in ocenjevanje za uspešnejši študij* (Verification and Assessment for More Successful Study). The first ones are essay assignments, i.e. question types in which an individual responds freely, with a longer answer (a discussion essay, an essay with an element of role-play), and the second group comprises objective question types, which are further subdivided into open-type tasks (question types with short answers and complement question types) and closed-type questions (question types of the optional and alternative type, and the question type of connecting and editing) (Marentič Požarnik, Peklaj 2002, pp. 73, 74, 87).

In her Master's thesis (2017), the Slavist Maja Hadner concludes that, despite these classifications, some question types cannot be subsumed under the given types. Therefore, she upgraded existing classifications and question types according to the activity they require from the individual. The new, extended classification thus encompasses 21 question types, some types from existing classifications being also renamed.

Existing E-Learning Resources for Learning the Slovene Language in Elementary School

The following section presents materials for learning the Slovene language in elementary schools from the 6th to the 9th grades—freely accessible on the Internet (Internet source: <http://projekt.slo-na-dlani.si/sl/>). The study took place in 2017, from June until December. We were interested in question types and exercises, considering non-literary texts and covering the following topics: the Slovene language in general, the historical development of the Slovene language and its contemporary situation as well as its social and functional varieties, phonetics, orthography, lexicology, word classes, sentence elements and complex sentences etc.

The analysis includes the following textbooks, workbooks and additional interactive materials:

- 1: *Gradim slovenski jezik 6* – dodatno gradivo k učbeniku (Additional material to the Textbook, 6th grade);
- 2: *Gradim slovenski jezik 6* – dodatno gradivo k delovnemu zvezku (Additional material to the Workbook; 6th grade);
- 3: *Gradim slovenski jezik 6* – dodatno gradivo k samostojnemu delovnemu zvezku (Additional material to the autonomous Workbook; 6th grade);

- 4: *Slovenščina v oblaku*: interaktivno gradivo za slovenščino v 6. razredu osnovne šole (Interactive material; 6th grade);
- 5: *Od glasov do knjižnih svetov 6* (6th grade);
- 6: *Slovenščina, Vaje za 6.–9. razred* (Exercises: 6th–9th grade);
- 7: *Devetka.net* – Zbirka spletnih nalog (Collection of interactive tasks);
- 8: *E-učbeniki SIO.si: 8. razred* (8th grade);
- 9: *Projekt slovenščina za 8. razred* – Neumetnostna besedila (Part: Non-literary texts: 8th grade);
- 10: *E-učbeniki SIO.si: 9. razred* (9th grade).

Methodology

E-resources were reviewed and analysed according to the question types formulated and completed by Hadner (2017, pp. 25–33; terminology and typology of question types were also adjusted according to Internet source: <https://docs.moodle.org/34/en/Category:Questions>) that occur in all materials, i.e. textbooks, workbooks and additional interactive materials. Individual question types were checked and counted, and then percentages of all question types in the analysed materials were calculated. Within the analysis, 21 different question types were examined: 1 *Fill in the blank questions*—this question type requires the student to complete or finish a statement by writing in the missing words, phrases or short clause. 2 *Short answer questions*—this question type requires only a brief/short response, i.e. with a word or phrase; no reply with a sentence is necessary. 3 *Multiple choice questions* (one correct answer)—this question type requires only one correct answer from the answers offered. 4 *Multiple answer questions (two correct answers)*—this question type requires two correct answers from the answers offered. 5 *Multiple answer questions (answers where several are correct)*—this question type requires several choices, i.e. at least three answers from the answers offered. 6 *Multiple choice questions with varying degrees of correctness*—the individual is expected choose the most appropriate/correct from the offered answers. 7 *Multiple choice questions with an incorrect answer*—the individual is expected to identify the wrong answer from the answers offered. 8 *Multiple choice questions with the best answer*—this question type offers several correct answers, the best of which should be chosen. This question type is very similar to the optional type of question with varying degrees of correctness. 9 *Matching questions*—this question type requires connecting individual elements to meaningful relationships. 10 *Editing questions*—this question type requires organization of given elements by a certain criterion. 11 *Alternative questions*—this question type requires an answer or a definition with one of the two responses offered (for example, true/false, yes/no). 12 *Alternative questions with argumentation*—this question type is composed of an alternative question type, and in addition, it

requires a justification for the selected answer. 13 *Open questions*—this question type requires a longer answer formed in the student's own words. 14 *Oral responses*—this question type requires a response that does not need to be written. 15 *Gap-filling*—this question type requires a specific element to be inserted into the word or text (for example, missing letters or punctuation marks). 16 *Mark correct answer (of the multiple-choice answers)*—this question type requires that something be marked, underlined, circled or coloured in. 17 *Error Correction*—this question type requires that the incorrectly written word, text or incorrectly written punctuation be corrected. 18 *Ordering questions*—this question type requires that the given elements be classified or distributed according to a given criterion. 19 *Reading*—this question type requires that the word or text be read carefully. 20 *A type including in-class activities*—this question type requires classroom activities among students. 21 *A type involving other resources*—this question type provides for the use of other materials and usually relates to a particular topic or substance and seeks to bring it closer to a student's real-life situation. (Hadner 2017, pp. 25–33).

The total number of question types analysed within the e-resources was 10.118. Thus, we sought to obtain data on the representation of individual question types in e-materials and compare the results with those question types that turned out to be the most common in Slovene language learning.

Question Type Analysis of Exercises in Existing E-Learning Resources for Learning the Slovene language

The tables present a set of tasks that represent at least 70.0% of all tasks in individual e-resources. Tasks representing less than 4.0% of tasks are not representative and therefore not included in the tables.

Table 1: Gradim slovenski jezik 6 (additional material to the Textbook; 6th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	36	46.8%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	12	15.6%
Multiple choice questions	10	10.4%
Gap-filling	5	6.5%
Alternative questions	4	5.2%

Total: 77 tasks. The most common question types appear in 84.5% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.9% or less.

Table 2: Gradim slovenski jezik 6 (additional material to the Workbook; 6th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	97	60.3%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	13	8.1%
Open questions	10	6.6%
Multiple choice questions	8	5.0%

Total: 160 tasks. The most common question types appear in 80.0% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.8% or less.

Table 3: Gradim slovenski jezik 6 (additional material to autonomous Workbook; 6th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	111	59.0%
Alternative questions	20	10.6%
Multiple choice questions	14	7.5%
Open questions	13	6.9%

Total: 188 tasks. The most common question types appear in 84.0% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.2% or less.

Table 4: Slovenščina v oblaku: (Interactive material; 6th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Multiple choice questions	10	14.7%
Mark correct answer	9	13.2%
Open questions	8	11.8%
Short answer questions	7	10.3%
Reading	5	7.4%
Ordering questions	5	7.4%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	4	5.9%
Multiple answer questions (several correct answers)	4	5.9%

Total: 68 tasks. The most common question types appear in 75.9% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 4.4% or less.

Table 5: Od glasov do knjižnih svetov 6.

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	27	44.3%
An oral response	21	34.4%
Alternative questions	4	6.6%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	3	4.9%

Total: 61 tasks. The most common question types appear in 90.2% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.3% or less.

Table 6: Slovenščina, Vaje za 6.–9. razred (Exercises, 6th–9th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	567	36.2%
A classroom activity–listening	398	25.4%
Alternative questions	344	22.0%
Multiple choice questions	130	8.3%

Total: 1566 tasks. The most common question types appear in 91.9% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 2.0% or less.

Table 7: Devetka.net (Collection of interactive tasks).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Multiple choice questions	1003	35.7%
Short answer questions	564	20.1%
Alternative questions	404	14.4%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	196	7.0%
Matching questions	162	5.8%

Total: 2807 tasks. The most common question types appear in 83.0% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.1% or less.

Table 8: E-učbeniki SIO.si: 8. razred (8th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	600	31.3%
Multiple choice questions	290	15.1%
Alternative questions	196	10.2%
Mark correct answer	141	7.4%
Reading	123	6.4%
Open questions	104	5.4%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	89	4.6%

Total: 1919 tasks. The most common question types appear in 80.4% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.1% or less.

Table 9: Projekt slovenščina za 8. razred (Part: Non-literary texts; (8th grade)).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	239	31.9%
Open questions	84	11.2%
Reading	77	10.3%
Alternative questions	76	10.2%
A type involving other resources	58	7.7%
Multiple choice questions	49	6.5%
Alternative questions with argumentation	32	4.3%

Total: 749 tasks. The most common question types appear in 82.1% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.5% or less.

Table 10: E-učbeniki SIO.si: 9. razred (9th grade).

Question types	Number of tasks	Percentages (%)
Short answer questions	860	34.1%
Multiple choice questions	269	10.7%
Reading	243	9.6%
Mark correct answer	232	9.2%
Alternative questions	212	8.4%
Fill-in-the-blank questions	142	5.6%
Open questions	138	5.5%

Total: 2523 tasks. The most common question types appear in 83.1% of all tasks, while other question types appear in 3.0% or less.

Interpretation of Question Type Analysis

It can be noted that simpler question types are repeated very often, while those that are more demanding, and require more complicated mental processes, are rare. Simpler question types are—unquestionably—necessary for accustoming students to thinking, but too frequent usage of these types does not stimulate in-depth thinking and leads to a decline in motivation to answer this type of question. During the process of analysis, particularly while determining the question types, we discovered a gap in the classification of question types, which we want—as much as possible—to fill with expanded question types.

The review covered ten sets of e-resources, and 10.118 tasks were analysed:

- (1) in the additional material (77 tasks) to the textbook *Gradim slovenski jezik 6* the *Short answer questions* type is presented in 46.8% of tasks (36 tasks);
- (2) in the additional material (160 tasks) to the workbook for the same text-book the *Short answer question* type prevails, with 60.3% of tasks (97 tasks);
- (3) similarly, in the additional material (188 tasks) to the autonomous workbook for the same text-book, i.e. 59.0% (111 tasks);
- (4) in the interactive material (68 tasks) for the text-book *Slovenščina v oblaku* for 6th grade, *Multiple choice questions* amounted to 14.7% (10 tasks);
- (5) in the text-book *Od glasov do knjižnih svetov 6* (61 tasks), the *Short answer question* type was present in 44.3% (27 tasks);
- (6) among the exercises for the text-book *Slovenščina* (1566 tasks), the *Short answer question* type occupies 36.2% (567 tasks);
- (7) the collection of interactive tasks (2807 tasks) accompanying the text-book *Devetka.net* includes 35.7% (1003) of the *Multiple-choice question* type;
- (8) in the e-text-book (1919 tasks) *E-učbeniki SIO.si* for the 8th grade, 31.3% of tasks (600 tasks) comprise the *Short answer question* type;
- (9) in the Non-literary texts section (749 tasks) of the text-book *Projekt slovenščina* for 8th grade, the *Short answer question* type prevails again at 31.9% (239), as well as in
- (10) the e-text-book *E-učbeniki SIO.si* for the 9th grade, in 34.1% (860 tasks).

The results of the e-resources analysis reveal a shortage of the following question types: *Gap-filling*, *Mark correct answer of the multiple-choice answers*, *Error Correction*, *Ordering questions*, *Alternative questions with argumentation*, *Editing questions*, *Multiple answer questions (two correct answers)*, *Multiple answer questions (several correct answers)*, and *Multiple choice questions with an incorrect answer*. Since all these are question types that are more than suitable for e-environments, and they also enable the realization and achievement of higher taxonomic levels (use, analysis and synthesis), both the results of the analysis and the teachers' perceptions will help us to design appropriate e-resources within the framework of the project *Slovenščina na dlani*.

Bernik (2011, p. 209) emphasizes, according to all the analyses carried on Slovene and foreign textbooks, in his case, for history, that "/.../ an ideal textbook cannot be made, because students have different styles of learning, and teachers have different teaching methods, so they should have different methodologically designed textbooks /.../". This is undoubtedly true for textbooks of the Slovene language as well. That is why, when composing e-materials and tasks, we will—as far

as possible—take into account different types of perception, which is divided into five senses: visual perception, auditory (hearing) perception, kinaesthetic (movement, touch) perception, olfactory (smell) perception and gustatory (taste) perception (known as the VAKOG model). Depending on the different types, we could also suggest words (verbs for instance), used in speech patterns within the instructions, while remaining fully aware of the different effect of a given message on different groups of recipients.

Conclusion

The results show that, in the majority of e-resources, the type *Short answer questions* is most often represented, i.e. in 30.72% of cases (3108 tasks; in individual sources 10.3%–60.3%), followed by *Multiple choice questions* in 35.7% (1783 tasks; in individual sources 5.0%–35.7%) and *Alternative questions* in 10.52% (1064 tasks; in individual sources 5.2%–22.0%).

In extreme contrast to the most frequent question type (*Short answer questions*) present in e-resources, student answers to the questionnaire about their most/least liked question types revealed that the *Short answer question* type is the least popular among the elementary school population (Internet source: <http://projekt.slo-nadlani.si/sl/>). Considering the typology of questions comprises 21 different types, it is reasonable to follow the guidelines in the preparation of e-resources in the future, which will focus on a more balanced representation of all question types.

Some very good suggestions about question types for textbook writing have been offered by experts in the analysis of history textbooks (Bernik 2011, pp. 208–9), some of which could be used in preparing the Slovenian language learning material. Let us support them with concrete proposals related to the Slovenian language: *content in the form of comics* (exercises for interjections), *instructions for project work* (mini projects: search for linguistic–spelling/morphological–mistakes in online editions of newspapers, in e-mails, advertisements etc.), *work with pictorial materials* (to write down all the nouns in the picture, adjectives used with–selected–nouns, verbs–activities of people/animals in the picture etc.), *blank maps* (map of Slovenia—to enter multi-word geographical names with respect to capital letters etc.), *a glossary of terms* (a glossary of unknown/new words that can be supplemented by students themselves), *social games* (dominoes for word-formation, phraseology etc.), *Internet addresses* (search for language manuals, language counselling etc.).

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Authors

Alenka Valh Lopert, PhD

Associate professor, University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia, e-mail: alenka.valh@um.si

Izredna profesorica, Univerza v Mariboru, Filozofska fakulteta, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, e-pošta: alenka.valh@um.si

Mihaela Koletnik, PhD

Full professor, University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia, e-mail: mihaela.koletnik@um.si

Redna profesorica, Univerza v Mariboru, Filozofska fakulteta, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, e-pošta: mihaela.koletnik@um.si