

FOREWORD

About a decade ago I was approached by the Selection Committee for the Blaise Pascal Scholarship with a request to review the academic career of Igor Mel'čuk, who was then being considered as a nominee for this high award. I wholeheartedly seconded the nomination. Since that time, the only thing that has notably changed about Igor is the list of his scholarly publications — it has grown considerably. Otherwise, Igor has remained what he always used to be, so that to update my account of his career I just need to add a couple of figures and titles here and there.

I have known Igor Mel'čuk for over fifty years and have closely followed his spectacular academic career. I consider him to be one of the greatest linguists of our time. He made thoroughly innovative contributions to many domains of contemporary linguistic theory and practice. To be more specific:

1. He worked out a fundamentally new approach to linguistic description known as the “Meaning \Leftrightarrow Text” theory of language, which serves as a basis for the construction of functional models of particular languages, each such model being a speaker oriented multilevel logical device for a stepwise translation of the meaning the speaker wishes to convey into a sufficiently complete set of synonymous sentences which express it. Being highly innovative, I. Mel'čuk's theory on the other hand incorporates all the basics of the previously accumulated knowledge on semantics, syntax, morphology, word-formation, phonology, and other important linguistic domains. In my view, this is the most universal, profound and robust of all current linguistic theories.

2. In order to work out a full-fledged conceptual framework for a “Meaning \Leftrightarrow Text” model, it was necessary to invent forms of representing the meaning to be expressed at all levels of transition from pure semantics down to real synonymous sentences which express the required meaning. I. Mel'čuk has been able to propose well-founded solutions for many problems in this domain as well. His most remarkable achievements are sets of dependency relations for representing deep- and surface syntactic structures of sentences, a graph formalism for representing se-

mantic structures, and the language of universal lexical functions for representing combinatorial properties and semantic relations among lexemes (the latter developed jointly with A. K. Zholkovsky).

3. Unlike the majority of other theoreticians, I. Mel'čuk went far beyond merely outlining the general conceptual framework of a new theory. He wrote large fragments of "Meaning \Leftrightarrow Text" models for such diverse languages as Russian, English, French, Spanish, Hungarian, Alutor, Bafia, Rwanda, and Dyrbal (mostly syntax, semantics and morphology).

4. An integral part of the "Meaning \Leftrightarrow Text" model for a particular language is its Explanatory-combinatorial dictionary (ECD). The conceptual framework of ECD and many Russian entries were elaborated jointly with A. K. Zholkovsky. This is an innovative type of speaker-oriented (active, or production) dictionary storing an enormous amount of rigorously ordered and semantically interpreted information on the meaning, government patterns, combinatorial potential and semantic relationships of every lexeme. Again, I. Mel'čuk did not confine himself to just outlining a theoretical proposal for a new type of dictionary, but he also produced, with teams of collaborators in the Soviet Union and Canada, a one-volume Russian ECD and four volumes of a similar but more advanced French dictionary.

5. One of I. Mel'čuk's principal concerns, apart from this purely linguistic work, is metalinguistic research. In a titanic single-handed effort extending over forty years of his academic career, he has written a five-volume "Cours de morphologie générale". This monograph, written in French and translated into Russian, is a compendium of the most important linguistic notions bearing on the concept of "word". I. Mel'čuk formulated about 250 definitions, constructed from a set of indefinibilia on a strictly deductive basis, and exemplified them with the material of over 200 languages, which makes this monograph a landmark in linguistic typology as well. Several years ago he started work on a similar project in semantics; the first volume of this work came out of print in 2012.

6. It would be impossible, even in a much more extensive survey, to do justice to all of I. Mel'čuk's theories, descriptions, findings, insights and genuine linguistic discoveries (let it be reminded that, all in all, he has written 38 books and about 250 papers and that three of the volumes of his unique "Cours", the fourth volume of the French ECD and an entirely innovative book on the communicative organization of utterances in natural languages were published or written within the period of six years). I have not mentioned, for example, his contribution to field linguistics and mathematical linguistics, his approach to language description by

means of linguistic calculi, and many other large and small things. Nor have I talked about the impact of I. Mel'čuk's work on computational linguistics, in particular, the fact that most of what he wrote on Russian and English syntax, as well as much of the ECD conceptual framework, has been effectively used in high quality machine translation systems and other applications developed by a group of his followers in Russia. But even the little I have said is enough to understand the calibre of I. Mel'čuk's scholarly personality.

7. Last but not least, I should like to mention I. Mel'čuk's unique accomplishments as a lecturer capable to electrify any audience; his tremendous and noble gift for team work in which he always shoulders the greatest burden and responsibility; his great human charm, his sparkling humour, the overpowering brilliance of his whole personality; his openness and communicability. To be counted among his friends is an honour, a privilege and a pleasure.

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In October 2012, Igor Mel'čuk will celebrate his eightieth birthday. This volume is a tribute of love to a distinguished scholar from his followers (from the Old and the New Worlds), disciples (of the first, second and third generations), and admirers (both women and men). The diversity of topics covered in more than 50 papers making the volume is but an imperfect reflection of the multiplicity and variety of Igor's linguistic interests.

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