

FROM THE HISTORY OF LEXICOGRAPHY: V.K.MULLER

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Abstract.

The paper deals with the biographical data and creative legacy of V.K.Muller, the compiler of the universal all-purpose bilingual dictionary, popular both with experts and English learners. While the dictionary has been highly appreciated for compactness, user friendliness, scientifically grounded lucid approach to lexis selection, the personality of the scholar remains underestimated and his life path mainly unknown. The author aims at offering insights in history of linguistics in general and shedding light on theoretical assumptions and practical contribution of the outstanding lexicographer in particular, meaning to pay tribute to V.K.Muller.

Анотація.

У статті розглядаються біографічні дані та творча спадщина В. К. Мюллера, укладача універсального двомовного словника, популярного як серед експертів, так і серед тих, хто вивчає англійську мову. Хоча словник високо цінується за компактність, зручність користування, науково обґрунтований усвідомлений підхід до вибору лексики, особистість вченого залишається недооціненою, а його життєвий шлях головним чином невідомим. Автор прагне дати уявлення про історію мовознавства загалом та висвітлити теоретичні припущення та практичний внесок, зокрема, видатного лексикографа та віддати належне В.К. Мюллеру

Lexicography is usually determined as a theory of editing, compiling, writing or making of a dictionary as well as principles and practices of dictionary making. Considered from the practical point of view it can be defined as the art and craft of dictionary making. The vital importance of all sorts of word-lists, vocabularies and dictionaries applied to international exchange practices is obvious, so they have been rigorously developed and enhanced since Ancient Times. They were created to equip traders, missionaries, diplomats, travelers, researchers and adventurers with a powerful tool to understand local languages and dialects, technical terms and specific notions. Identifying the needs of the target users and in this way determining functions of a dictionary has always been an essential issue for compilers (or rather, creators) when selecting and clustering the material. Evidently it's a demanding and challenging craft.

The fact that the main fruit of V.K.Muller's labours is still popular, in demand and applicable corroborates his profound linguistic expertise and perfect lexicographical skills. Strange as it may seem there had been desperately little known about the personality of the outstanding scholar, his life path and career up to 2010s. His name is not mentioned on the official sites of the universities where he used to teach for many years. All we know about V.Muller today is the result of enthusiastic research of professor D.I.Yermolovich, a well-known linguist, teacher, literary translator and synchronous interpreter. Inspired by gratitude he studied the archive materials from St.Petersburg State Public Library and analysed the only authentic document containing biodata and thought-provoking reflections of V.Muller. D.I.Yermolovich's passionate essay named "Discovering Muller" is worth being read by every English learner [1]. His work brought considerable shift to the scholar's memory status quo: the appropriate Wikipedia article appeared with the only available photo.

Born in Moscow in 1880 into a well-off family of German origin from Riga, Vladimir Muller got brilliant education at the Department of Languages of Historical-Philological Faculty of Moscow State University. Graduated in 1903 he was offered a position at the chair of European Literatures. In a year in May 1904 V.Muller was sent for an internship to Britain – to Oxford and London. Later in summer of 1908 he worked in the library of the British Museum. The result of his research was publishing a monograph "Pushkin and Shakespeare. Drama and Theatre in the Epoch of Shakespeare" and an essay about Sir Francis Drake "Her Majesty's Pirate". Having completed a course in English and Roman Philology at Heidelberg University in Germany in 1910 V.Muller started lecturing and in 1918 got the Professor's title.

In 1915 V.Muller married his former student A.P.Gneusheva, who became an eminent art critic and a historian. She fruitfully worked for the Rumiantsev Museum, the Tsvetkov Art Gallery, the Historical Museum in Moscow and later for Leningrad Public Library and the Hermitage. V.Muller was successfully teaching and lecturing in Moscow University and Higher Women Courses (which later became for some

time the Second Moscow State University) when in 1925 he accepted the invitation and got the position of Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philology and Material Culture, which later was reorganized into the Roman-Germanic section of Historical-Linguistic Faculty.

For over five years V.Muller provided teaching in the two capitals, which was extremely exhausting and time-consuming. He was popular with the students. D.Likhachev who was his student in the 1920s in his memoirs characterized him as “a kind-hearted, utmost lovely and naive old regime professor”. In Leningrad circa 1927 V.Muller started his lexicography pathway in collaboration with S.K.Boianus, a philologist, phonetician, L.Shcherba’s disciple, who emigrated to France at the beginning of 1930s, which meant hazardous consequences for his coauthor at that time.

As English was not the most actively learnt foreign language on the territory of Russian Empire at the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX centuries, the lexicography state of the art was special. The only bilingual source available was “A Complete English-Russian Dictionary” by A.Alexandrow first published in 1879 containing 70,000 words on 748 pages. A.Alexandrow is a pseudo of a group of authors (navy officers, according to some sources) without any philological education or lexicography training who were driven by practical need considerations. A whole family of dictionaries was compiled later based on this book, exacerbating the situation.

Professor Muller strongly criticized the dictionary for abundant archaisms, confusing information and rude mistakes. His statement was stark direct: such dictionaries discredit and deface lexicography as a science. At the same time the main reason why a new bilingual dictionary was needed immediately was the cardinal root and branch change of life in Russia: the society, politics, education, everyday routine etc. V.Muller wrote an article “Main Principles of Compiling the English-Russian Dictionary”, in which he described linguistically grounded approaches to lexicographic craft. For unknown reason the article was not published. But eighty years later it sounds quite relevant and reveals the talent and academic expertise of the author.

In 1928 V.Muller and S.Boianus issued their English-Russian Dictionary followed by the Russian-English Dictionary in 1930. The books were highly evaluated by the users and appreciated in the British journal *The Slavonic Review* in March 1931. N.B.Jopson in his review emphasized the quality of the work especially when compared to the A.Alexandrow’s dictionaries criticized for “multitudinous ballast”.

Creating the novel dictionaries based on new lexicographic principles in the Soviet Russia in 1930s could not be a smooth sailing. The demand for them was great and growing. The coauthors tried hard to improve each edition, wrote the concise grammar instructions and were often behind the schedule. The editors demanded throwing away the “obsolete” concepts and enriching the vocabulary with technical terms necessary for reading “literature required for industrialization of the country”. The coauthors strived at creating a philologically grounded dictionary similar to the famous Murray’s Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles. Another much more threatening aspect was the ideological pressure. F.A.Rotshtein, a former intelligence officer, was appointed to pursue the ideological supervision over the work of V.Muller and S.Boianus. He insisted on adding political lexis “of the new time” to the vocabulary, promoting soviet socialist concepts. Inevitable conflicts aroused. Hot arguments touched some words and phrases which were claimed irrelevant in the new soviet reality. The coauthors were accused of not strong enough desire to renovate the word lists. The situation became still worse after Boianus’ emigration. The ideological pressure was getting tenser, but V.Muller continued his work elaborating the fundamentals of linguistic lexicography and started compiling a new bigger English dictionary. Eventually he was suspended from the project, but he continued revising and expanding the manuscript of the English-Russian dictionary introducing numerous innovations.

In 1935 V.K.Muller decided to resign and wrote the autobiography, that D.I.Yermolovich found in the archive, applying for a pension. Nothing is known as to the feedback on his appeal. June 1941 caught the Mullers in Leningrad. The childless couple had no one to take care of them. They were found dead in their apartment presumably in December 1941. Their library, paintings and drawings were transferred to the State Public Library. In 1943 “English-Russian Dictionary”, submitted to the editor in 1941, was published. So the book appeared widely used today that made the authors name a brand and consigned his personality to oblivion.

анV.K.Muller’s contribution to linguistics can hardly be overestimated. Actually it was he who initiated creating the New English-Russian Dictionary (the ubiquitous БАРС) which was completed by a numerous group of linguists in 1972 under the supervision of prof. I.R.Galperin. V.K.Muller had worked out the technical instruction and innovative lexicographic system: the run-on layout was revised, homonyms

were presented as separate entries, tilde was introduced, a new system of labels and references was elaborated. All these novelties affected the ways of lexicographic presentation of semantic structure and seems only fair to think of V.K.Muller as a forerunner of computer-aided approach and corpus linguistics in general.

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