FROM THE HISTORY OF THE GEORGIAN–LATVIAN SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION: GEORGE AKHVLEDIANI AND JĀNIS ENDZELĪNS

Dedicated to the memory of academicians George Akhvlediani and Jānis Endzelīns

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Academician George Akhvlediani (1887–1973) was a great Georgian scholar, who worked in several branches of linguistics. To his pen belong major studies in general linguistics, general and experimental phonetics, logopedics, Indo-European and Kartvelian languages. A man of broad social interests, he took an active part in the foundation of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Several pedagogical institutes in Georgia were also established with his active participation.

He had intensive scientific collaboration and friendly relationship with the prominent Latvian linguist, academician Jānis Endzelīns (1873–1961). A clear demonstration of this is their correspondence. The five letters of Jānis Endzelīns, sent to George Akhvlediani are preserved in the Museum of Ivane Javakhishvili, Tbilisi State University.

Origin of the linguistic research in Georgia

It has been known that Ioseb Kipshidze (1882–1919), Akaki Shanidze (1887–1987), and George Akhvlediani (1887–1973) — prominent Georgian linguists — laid the foundation to the scientific study of language in Georgia.

As stated by academician Ivane Javakhishvili (1876–1940), the great Georgian scholar and public figure and a founder of Tbilisi State University, “establishment of the branch of linguistics at Tbilisi State University is to the credit of three individuals: Prof. I. Kipshidze, Prof. A. Shanidze, and Prof. G. Akhvlediani. Unfortunately,
owing to the premature death of the former, a heavy burden fell on the shoulders of the latter two.”

George (in Georgian — Giorgi) Akhvlediani was a scholar with multiple interests. He worked in several areas of linguistic inquiry. He wrote major works in general linguistics, general and experimental phonetics, speech therapy, Indo-European and Kartvelian languages, some of them being seminal.

George Akhvlediani — the descendant of ancient Georgian princely and noble families

The great Georgian scholar George Akhvlediani was a descendant of ancient Georgian princely and noble families. He was born on 1 (13) April 1887, in the village of Derchi, Lechkhumi District (West Georgia), to the family of Prince Saridan (Sardion) Akhvlediani (1844–1932) and his wife Princess Egrasti (Epraksia) Asatiani (1855–1842). Her father was nobleman Okropir Asatiani from Lechkhumi. Saridan and Egrasti were married on 12 February 1881.

The oldest paternal ancestor of Saridan Akhvlediani, whose name has been preserved in Georgian historical sources, was his grandfather’s grandfather, Prince George Akhvlediani. His direct (male) genealogical line till the great-great-grandson is the following: 1) George — 2) Ramaz — 3) Svi- mon — 4) Katsia — 5) Saridan.

Based on the materials furnished by academician Yuri K. Chikovani (1937–2018), chairman of the Georgian Genealogical Society, the wife of Prince Ramaz G. Akhvlediani (the source states the year 1806) was Princess Anna Eristavi (of Racha); the wife of their son, Warrant Officer Svimon R. Akhvlediani (1773–1858) was Princess Mzekhatun (1793–1854), whose surname is unknown; the wife of their son
Katsia S. Akhvlediani (1814–1867) was Princess Leikhatun (1817–1867), a daughter of Prince George Chikovani of Utskheri (in Lechkhumi).

George Akhvlediani’s endowment in founding of Tbilisi State University and in the development of linguistics in Georgia

After having received higher education at Kharkiv and Petrograd universities, G. Akhvlediani returned to Tbilisi in 1917. He took part in activities of the academic commission “Society for the Georgian University” concerned with the establishment of a national higher education institution. On 26 November 1917, he joined the first board of professors and became one of the founders of Tbilisi State University which was inaugurated on 26 January (8 February) 1918. As a professor, he taught at the University for more than half a century.

At Tbilisi State University, G. Akhvlediani pioneered in such disciplines as general linguistics and general phonetics. He was in charge of the Department of General Linguistics which played a historical role in the emergence and development of the linguistic thought in Georgia. At various periods of time, he delivered the following university courses: Introduction to Linguistics, General Linguistics, History of Linguistic Studies, General Phonetics, Sanskrit, Greek, Armenian, Ossetian, History and Dialectology of Russian, Comparative Indo-European Grammar. For a certain period of time, he even lectured in the history of Western European literature, speech therapy, etc.3

He worked at the Ministry of Education of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–1921) where he was in charge of the division of secondary education. In the same period, he published the textbooks in Georgian for Tbilisi State University: Introduction to Linguistics4 and Sanskrit.5

Publication of the young scholar’s books (particularly, of the latter one) was an event of great cultural significance in the history of education of our homeland testifying to the prestige of the young Tbilisi State University and to the diversity of scientific disciplines studied here. In the oeuvre in point, a precise and concise description of the grammatical structure of the classical language
of ancient India is followed by selected reading material, spelt in the Indian script and transcribed in Latin characters, and with a vocabulary at the end.

One of the directions of his activities was Indo-Iranian Studies. In this area, he explored the Ossetian language, phonetics of the Kartvelian and highland Caucasian languages. He investigated problems of general linguistics (phoneme theory, problems of phonemic syntagmatic, issues of experimental phonetics). G. Akhvlediani’s observations on Ossetian (belongs to the Iranian groups of the Indo-European family of languages) generated new issues and shed light on hitherto unknown phonetic regularities. He intensively explored problems of Georgian and Ossetian studies, language contacts through long-term and close interrelationships between the Georgian and Ossetian peoples.6

G. Akhvlediani initiated convening a constituent assembly of Georgian linguists and philologists having founded the “Georgian Linguistics Society” (1923) and its Yearbook. Presently, the Society bears the name of its founder. Initiated and facilitated by G. Akhvlediani, a laboratory of experimental phonetics was opened at Tbilisi State University and a laboratory of phonetics was established at Nikolai Marr Institute of Language, History, and Material Culture. The laboratories, managed by him, laid the foundation to kymographic and phonographic recording of the Kartvelian languages, as well as of colloquial Arabic of Central Asia.


G. Akhvlediani designed a classification of sounds of Georgian. He made an invaluable contribution to the development of Georgian scientific terminology, having participated in the coinage of terms for various disciplines, including both the humanities and technical sciences.

He has been known as a speech therapist having developed theoretical and applied issues of the field. In the study of speech disorders, he laid a special emphasis on phonetics. Under his leadership, a number of investigations were undertaken on theoretical and applied issues of speech therapy, including: “A typology of stuttering,” “Prevention of speech disorders”, “Speech disorders and their correction”, “Sigmatism and its correction”, “Disadvantages in Georgian schoolchildren’s pronunciation”, “Collective correction of sounds”, “Peculiarities of writing by children with deficiencies in pronunciation”, “A history of speech therapy work in Georgia”, and “The teaching game exercises in speech therapy work”.

In 1951, he headed the Sector of Speech Therapy of Iakob Gogebashvili Research Institute in Tbilisi. He was a president of the Georgian division of “Tsodna (Knowledge) Society” and of the Georgian Linguistics Society. The following renowned Georgian speech therapists belong to the scientific school established by him: N. Asambadze, A. Kaishauri, Z. Gabashvili, T. Peradze, A. Kelbakiani, etc. A team of speech therapists, initiated by G. Akhvlediani, undertook a great deal of activities for treatment of shell-shocked and speechless military personnel at evacuation hospitals during the Second World War.

G. Akhvlediani was one of the founding fathers of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. He was among the initial members of the Academy and, at various periods of time, held responsible positions, such as Secretary Academician, head of the Department of Social Sciences, director of the Institute of Linguistics, Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (1949–1950).
As a prominent scholar, he was elected (in the chronological order): member of the International Society for Experimental Phonetics (1932), Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1939), member of the Linguistic Society of America (1940), Full Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (1941), Honored Scientist of the Georgian SSR (1943), Honored Scientist of the North Ossetian ASSR (1967), etc.

G. Akhvlediani’s professionalism, profound erudition, tactfulness, and pedagogical capability became a solid foundation enabling him to train a whole galaxy of young professionals in the following disciplines: general linguistics, general and experimental phonetics, Russian linguistics, Indology, Germanic Studies, Romance Studies, Iranian Studies, Ossetic Studies, and speech therapy. He was a supervisor of more than twenty dissertations.11

Academician Simon Janashia (1900–1947) laid a particular emphasis on G. Akhvlediani’s tremendous contribution to the study of the Ossetian language in Georgia.12

In 1945, academician Arnold Chikobava (1898–1985) stated: “26 years have passed since An Introduction to Linguistics (in three parts) was published by G. Akhvlediani. It was the first “General Linguistics” in Georgian. As different from the then available similar textbooks in Russian, the oeuvre was distinguished with richness of content and a high level of the elaboration of problems. It was thanks to that textbook that a number of generations got familiarised with the foundations of linguistics in Georgian.”13

Jānis Endzelīns’ endowment in forming George Akhvlediani as a scientist

It should be noted that academician Jānis Endzelīns, the great Latvian philologist and linguist, immensely contributed to G. Akhvlediani’s training as a scholar. He has been acknowledged as a major expert of the Baltic languages and an ornament in the field of comparative-historical linguistics.14 They enjoyed long-term and close collaboration and friendly relationship.15

In 1910, G. Akhvlediani was admitted to the Slavo-Russian Division of the Faculty of History and Philology, Imperial University of Kharkiv. During his studies at the University, he gained more knowledge of classical and modern European languages, learnt Sanskrit, Ancient Germanic and Ancient Iranian languages. As for historico-comparative linguistics, he was trained in association with such eminent linguists as aforementioned Professor J. Endzelīns.

G. Akhvlediani was awarded a gold medal for his oeuvre “An essay of the history of liquid and nasal consonants in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Slavic languages.”16 Professor J. Endzelīns wrote a comprehensive review on the work and highly appreciated it. The review was published in 1914 in the Bulletin of the Imperial University of Kharkiv.17 It is a part of the chronological bibliography of the works by J. Endzelīns published in Riga in 1958.

A high academic level of the aforementioned oeuvre and the recognition it received in the review by the prominent Latvian scholar forever determined the future and the scholarly prospects of the Georgian graduate of the Imperial University of Kharkiv.

After having graduated from the University, G. Akhvlediani returned to Georgia where he began teaching at the Gymnasium in Kutaisi.

J. Endzelīns paid a special visit to Valerian, G. Akhvlediani’s elder brother, who was in Kharkiv then, and suggested the following: “George is a talented man. It’s a pity that he works as a teacher; his vocation is science. I beg you to write to him to come here urgently; I want to recommend him to a PhD course of the University.”18
In 1915, G. Akhvlediani went back to Kharkiv where, recommended by J. Endzelīns, he was admitted to the Department of Comparative Linguistics “to be trained as a professor” (in the present-day terminology, to a PhD course).

Shortly, G. Akhvlediani was sent to Saint Petersburg (then Petrograd) Imperial University where he attended lectures by such major scholars as Nikolai Marr (1864–1934) — Georgian philology, Karl Gustav Hermann Salémann (1850–1916) — Iranian philology, Fyodor Shcherbatkskoy (1866–1942) — Indian philology, Lev Shcherba (1880–1940) — general and experimental phonetics, and others.

In 1917, G. Akhvlediani returned to his homeland. In the foregoing, I have already dealt with his productive scholarly activities in Georgia.

It is noteworthy that with great gratitude G. Akhvlediani recalled consideration and care on the part of Endzelīns. The Georgian scholar dedicated his seminal work Fundamentals of General Phonetics, published in 1949, to his Latvian tutor. The first page of the work reads: “I dedicate this book to my dear tutor who has taught me commitment for the sake of science, to J. Endzelīns, Full Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR.”

Letters by Jānis Endzelīns sent to George Akhvlediani in Georgia

A significant source, attesting to academician G. Akhvlediani and academician J. Endzelīns’s close scientific collaboration and friendly interrelationships, is their correspondence. Five letters, sent by J. Endzelīns to Georgia addressed to Akhvlediani, have been kept in the History Collection of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The framework of time of the letters spans across ten years. The first letter dates back to 30 April 1948 and the last — 22 December 1958. The texts of the letters, written in Russian, are published for the first time in the present paper.

On 30 April 1948, Jānis Endzelīns sent a letter to George Akhvlediani, his Georgian student and friend, which begins in the following way: “Greatly esteemed Giorgi Saridanovich”. As it turns out from the letter, the scholars were to meet soon in Moscow. The final part of the letter reads: “See you in Moscow! I hope that you have already received Mühlenbach’s supplemented dictionary which was sent to you. With kind regards, yours, J. Endzelīns.”

The letter, sent to G. Akhvlediani on 6 September 1950, reads: “Greatly esteemed George Saridanovich, you can imagine that with great pleasure I read your article in Pravda, as well as that by L.-A. Bulakhovsky. This time I express my gratitude to you in writing for the book dedicated to me and L. V. Shcherba! Unfortunately, aside from the trifles here, I cannot send anything on my part. Wishing you all the best, with kind wishes, your J. Endzelīns. P.S. Since in spring I was attacked here for not adhering to Marr’s teachings, I left the University and remain only at the Academy.”

On 16 November 1950, academician Endzelīns sent academician Akhvlediani a letter reading the following: “Greatly esteemed George Saridanovich, I am once again sending you a little thing. I hope that now you have calmed down and are able to work again! With cordial regards, yours, J. Endzelīns.”

The letter, sent by Endzelīns to his Georgian colleague on 8 October 1950, reads: “Greatly esteemed George Saridanovich, I gratefully acknowledge your favourable review on my Latvian toponymy! However, without having let me know, they imposed on you reading and assessing (a part of) my oeuvre. And, contrary to my desire, they intend to publish it: the oeuvre is not completed (I will have to work on it at least
Глубокоуважаемый
Георгий Сарацевич!

На сей раз я, признателен, не совсем довольен Вашей.
Писать еще в Китае, что бы быть письмом никогоже посвященного мне сборника филологических статей,
и если так, то где же поместить Вашу статью?
Ведь, если подписался такой сборник, то ведь ведь меня
было бы нелепительно, чтобы там было помещено как
мой очень большой статьи, даже если бы в её существе
не было согласия с Вами. И на каком основании я
мог бы считать ещё статью кем-нибудь, что я
мог бы выразить против помещенной Вашей статьи
в посвященной мне сборнике, если бы такой издался?
Ведь и Вам об этом писать, а не другим, то это мне
помогает, что моим сотрудникам было невозможно
статье Вашей несвоевременной.
Во всяком случае, я в Москве: надеюсь, что я в скором
последнем Вам словарь Мюллера и сопутствующий.
С уважением и приветом
Ваш И. Сарцевич.
for another three years; and will I live that long?), and the already written part should be improved (in many cases, I am still not aware of precise pronunciations of names, and elicited data sometimes do not match each other). I wish you all the best and, first of all, good health. Yours, J. Endzelīns.”

The letter, sent by Endzelīns to Akhvlediani on 27 December 1958, reads: “Dear George Saridanovich, thank you very much for your congratulations and the parcel! I wish you good health and success in your scientific activities! Yours, J. Endzelīns.”
Conclusions

Thus, academician George Akhvlediani always recalled the consideration and care shown by academician Jānis Endzelīns with great gratitude, evidenced by their correspondence. Close scientific collaboration and friendly ties between the prominent scholars have been one of the brightest facts in the history of Georgian–Latvian relationships.

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Par autoru


NO GRUZĪNU–LATVIEŠU ZINĀTNISKĀS SADARBĪBAS VĒSTURES: GEORGIJS AHVLEDIANI UN JĀNIS ENDZELĪNS

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