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other traditions or schools which are much less obvious for external observers, and Kibrik's school is one of those. Aleksandr Evgen'evič did not impose any strong ideological or theoretical restrictions on us, apart from insisting on the basic general scholarly imperatives. He was neither a preacher nor a prophet, nor a chief executive officer, but a born gardener, both literally and figuratively. He was passionately devoted to the garden at his dacha, in which both he and Antonina Ivanovna, his wife, invested a lot of time, energy, and love, and in which they took great pride as the flowers and vegetables they had planted and nursed were thriving. We, the students of Aleksandr Evgen'evič, were plants in his garden, too, with all our diversity and peculiarities. He saw his task as helping us to grow and develop into curious and independent linguists, and he carried out this task with devotion and patience and with pride in the results.

Aleksandr Evgen'evič was an excellent gardener.

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413 **O pioneer! Kibrik and the growth of linguistic knowledge**

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415 Rita Levi-Montalcini, a neuroscientist who shared the 1986 Nobel Prize in
416 Medicine, entitles her autobiography *In praise of imperfection* (1988).¹ In her
417 epigraph she quotes Yeats's *The choice*:²

418 The intellect of man is forced to choose
419 Perfection of the life, or of the work ...

1. This paper is an edited and expanded version of my President's Message in the January 2013 edition of the ALT Newsletter. At the time of its writing in late fall 2012 Levi-Montalcini, then 103, was Senator for Life in the Italian Senate. When it appeared she had just passed away.

2. William Butler Yeats, 'The Choice'. She cites no source, but see Yeats 1983: 246–247.

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420 She describes herself as pursuing her own inclinations with total dedication,
421 thereby reconciling Yeats's irreconcilables by deriving joy from what she de-
422 scribes as imperfection of both life and work.

423 In fact I think the practicing scientist today faces not two but four irreconcil-
424 able imperatives: knowledge transmission as expansion of knowledge in one's
425 own work; appreciation and exemplification in one's personal life; transmis-
426 sion to one's own next generation; and training successful students who take
427 off independently. Not only can you not reach perfection at all four of these;
428 you probably can't hope to even do garden-variety well at all four. Severe im-
429 perfection and transmission breaks are inevitable.

430 Except that there was Sasha Kibrik (1939–2012), a founding member of
431 ALT, a linguist of enormous impact, and an all around great person. He jump-
432 started a field tradition in Moscow, later teaming up with Sandro Kodzasov in
433 an influential series of summer field trips to Daghestan and Siberia, in which
434 students together with Kibrik and Kodzasov undertook blitz intensive descrip-
435 tion, including innovative work on syntax applying the best of then-current
436 theoretical and typological knowledge and refining and expanding it in many
437 ways. Publications resulting from these expeditions changed the way we under-
438 stand ergativity, coreference, argument structure, case paradigms, and much
439 else, and definitively clarified the phonetics and phonology of the complex
440 sound systems of Daghestan, including phonation and tones. Sasha's *Materi-*
441 *als for a typology of ergativity* (published as a set of brochures 1979–1981,
442 reprinted in Kibrik 2003, translated selections in Kibrik 1985) set a new stan-
443 dard for the comprehensive description of valence, alignment, and coreference-
444 related syntactic processes. Kibrik & Kodzasov's two-volume comparative lex-
445 ical survey of Daghestanian languages (1988, 1990) is a comprehensive ac-
446 count of lexical semantics, valence and argument structure, conjugation and de-
447 clension class, etc. for a large wordlist across all Nakh-Daghestanian languages
448 for which the relevant information was then available. I have made much use of
449 it in my own research; though the wordlist does not include all the verbs I have
450 surveyed in the last several projects, it contains most of them, and the infor-
451 mation on each verb is complete, sound, and sufficient for research needs that
452 could not have been anticipated then. Atypically for field and typological work
453 of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, its brief entries contained
454 not only full information on inflection and valence but also nearly everything I
455 have sought on word formation. Squeezing all of this between four covers was
456 made possible by a complete and extremely concise apparatus which for each
457 language spelled out the sound system (segmental and prosodic) and the inflec-
458 tional paradigms and classes, and for every entry from every language there is
459 a sophisticated abstract representation of the basic root structure. (Synchronic
460 roots, not etymological ones, so for every word it had to be determined afresh
461 rather than taken over from a sister language as etymological roots can be.) To

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462 my knowledge there is still nothing comparable for any other language family.

463 Though at least in typology and fieldwork a citizen of the world, and thor-
464 oughly embedded in international linguistics, Sasha was very Russian. Though
465 I don't think I ever spoke English with him, I know that his reading knowledge
466 of English was superb. I had always thought of his writing as quite westernized,
467 avoiding the distinctive expository and analytic mode of most Russian prose.³
468 When, in the early 1980s, I set out to translate parts of his Kibrik (1979–1981)
469 into English (Kibrik 1985; translation done by Joseph Schallert and myself),
470 I anticipated that it would be a snap, given my impression of his prose. To
471 say the least, it was no snap. The original proved to be no less Russian for all
472 its international clarity. To my mind Sasha's Russian prose is another signal
473 accomplishment.

474 That, then, was perfection of the work along several dimensions. And then
475 there was perfection of the life. Sasha and his family lived a life of unexcep-
476 tional means but high quality and good cheer in the straitened Soviet and post-
477 Soviet context, and they were a standing node of conviviality in a large network
478 of colleagues and friends around the world. No pollyanna by any means, he
479 nonetheless exhibited consistent goodwill toward his fellow human beings. He
480 and Nina raised a notably fine family, and our own ALT member Andrej Alek-
481 sandrovich is a leading Athabaskanist and typologist. Several generations of
482 young Moscow linguists of the most varied interests got their field training and
483 important parts of their analytic training in these expeditions. Sasha's passing
484 leaves a large dark hole in typology, fieldwork, and linguistics of the Caucasus.
485 One thinks of the phrase "the end of an era", but it isn't. The era began with
486 his first field expedition to Daghestan, or perhaps with the publication of his
487 coauthored Khinalug grammar (Kibrik et al. 1972) or the 1970–1971 field ex-
488 peditions that produced it. That era has not closed; the tradition is going strong
489 and expanding, and Sasha's students and their students are continuing sophis-
490 ticated fieldwork, typology, and theoretical work across Russia and elsewhere.

491 In a word, Sasha was ahead of his time and his context yet, I think atypically
492 for pioneers, had enormous impact that is still growing. What an example, and
493 what a legacy. We are fortunate to have had him as a friend and colleague. Now,
494 everybody, go forth, take heart, and emulate.

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3. This mode of thinking and analysis is not just a matter of old-fashioned rhetoric or the convo-
luted and oblique exposition that sometimes had to be resorted to in Soviet times. I see it as
a surviving element of Byzantine Greek intellectual culture, and when used well by first-rate
thinkers like Sasha and a few others it is valuable evidence that more than one way of reason-
ing and using evidence can make viable contributions to the growth of scientific knowledge. I
hope that the good exemplars will eventually contribute to an improved understanding of how
we reason and how knowledge grows.

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