

When the world loses a person of Alexandr Evgenyevich's calibre, everyone mourns, misses, and remembers different things. However, there is something in common to many mourners among Alexandr Evgenyevich's former students: we feel we didn't show enough gratitude because we took for granted many things that he did for us.

Imagine a first-year student at a university linguistics department, who has just gone through her first set of exams in a few ongoing theoretical disciplines and is about to start her second semester. How many students do you know who at this stage in their academic life were offered to participate in highly creative practical field work aiming at describing an exotic language? That was what Alexandr Evgenyevich offered us, students at the Department of Structural and Applied Linguistics at Moscow State University back in Soviet times, as early as the 70s, and excited as we were about the trip to the far-away Caucasus, we never considered it a special privilege. Now, having lived through a few periods of introducing others into university education, I can understand how much ahead of the time Alexandr Evgenyevich was!

Imagine now a group of students of different age and a few professors on their first day in a remote village in the Caucasian area. What would you think a respected university professor eager to advance his break-through studies will be doing first thing? No, not finding the best native speakers; instead, together with his life-long friend and great phonetician Sandro Vasilyevich Kodzasov, Alexandr Evgenyevich would build a toilet for his students first and negotiate rules of conduct towards his students with the local men second. Those were his priorities. And on the same first day we would be too overwhelmed with the sights to actually say thank you to our professors.

If you learn that our work before, during, and after those field trips was organized according to the best principles of teamwork -- the more experienced and talented working together in groups with the less so -- you will probably be thinking, "Of course it was!" But those who studied or taught in a Soviet university know only too well that the time of group work in class was to take long to come to Russia -- no less than 25 years, and even then with much resistance from the majority of educators. Again, Alexandr Evgenyevich was ahead of his time, and was then not even publicising his innovative methods. However, Alexandr Evgenyevich's book, *The methodology of field investigations in linguistics*, when it was published in 1977 (Den Haag: Mouton), became a bible for the then narrow circle of linguists interested in this area, soon to be joined by new generations of syntactic and lexical typologists.

Another notorious feature of Soviet academic life was being introduced in minute detail to all achievements of Soviet research, both really or only seemingly important, while Western research results would only be given a brief mention. Thus, even the best libraries accessible to students never bothered (or were not allowed) to order the most recent books published in the West. Alexandr Evgenyevich knew his students were not going to get a decent education if they were not exposed to the highest achievements or the newest trends, so he did two very important things: he organized and supervised a series of translations of breakthrough works into Russian (*New in linguistics/Novoe v lingvistike*), and he kept the original versions of the best books that he managed to get hold of in his office at Moscow State University, the famous Room 949, where everyone could sign in on a waiting list to borrow them. That was a real "window to the world" for many linguists-to-be.

I suppose many people agree that university life is not only about research: it is also about how to live one's life. It wasn't surprising, therefore, that at some point in our conversations Alexandr Evgenyevich would mention a particular song or poem, or an artist or an art exhibition that many of us students had not heard of. And if we admitted it, he sometimes let some information slip into the conversation: to me, it was a concert by Yuliy Kim, the author of many songs loved by Soviet dissidents; to a friend of mine, it was a party to honour an underground artist. He often sang songs in the lorry going up the Daghestan mountains, among them his favourite songs by Alexandr Galich, a famous dissident poet. I don't want to make a dissident figure out of Alexandr Evgenyevich, but nevertheless for some of us, his students, it opened a crevice showing a glimpse of life different from the ideological flooding we were in. This small opening may have left the flow of life unchanged for some; it may have led others further through the crevice; for a few, it must have changed life altogether.

I doubt that all people in whose lives Alexandr Evgenyevich was an important figure managed to find the occasion to express their gratitude to him, so I will take the liberty of saying on their behalf: Thank you for being there for us, for sharing with us, for caring about us. The seeds that you planted are now living.

*Received: 2 September 2013*

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