

The First Georgian Textbook 'Dedaena' from a Typological Perspective

The first reading and writing experience began with single-sided alphabet tablets known as *hornbooks*, which emerged in Europe during the 15th century. These early predecessors of modern ABC books consisted of thin plates affixed to a wooden frame, typically covered with cow horn material. On these tablets, a brief religious text, often the Lord's Prayer (*Our Father*), was inscribed alongside letters and symbols. Over time, the materials used evolved with parchment, metal, silver, ivory, and other substances utilized for these instructional aids.

Starting from the mid-18th century alphabet symbols began to gain significant popularity, often displayed on *battledores*: a more complex type of hornbook printed on thick paper folded in three parts containing enlarged text with word-to-object illustrations. During this period, religious texts started to give way to stories depicting everyday life scenes, accompanied by illustrations. Additionally, there was a shift in materials used and cardboard became the predominant choice. Such *battledores* resembled a book more closely.

From the 1880s onward, modern-style printed textbooks designed for children to learn the alphabet began to appear.

Iakob Gogebashvili's first study guide titled “Georgian Alphabet and the First Reading Book Compiled for Students” (the title later transformed: “Deda Ena” → “Dedaena”) was initially published in 1865, when Gogebashvili was only 25 years old. Subsequent editions followed in 1867, 1868, and 1869. Unfortunately, the original first edition of the book, initially preserved in the Georgian National Library, has been lost. The publication of this manual with minimal changes continued until 1876. Gogebashvili's manual already titled “Deda Ena”, which begins with the minimalistic sentence *ai ia* (“Here is a violet”), was completed in 1875 but was not published until 1876.

While analyzing Gogebashvili's *Dedaena* it is productive to apply two provisions elaborated within the framework of theories established in general linguistics. 1. Writing practice constitutes an

experience based on the semiotics of writing systems. 2. The stages of the phylogenetic development of language cognition are typically reflected in the ontogenetic linguistic development of a child.

When teaching reading, Gogebashvili, in each lesson, initially presents children with an iconic image of a sign, such as a picture of a finger, embodying the principle of Pictography.

Then, he presents the fully written word *titi* ("finger"), which is perceived as a conditional graphic representation of the picture given above. So, Ideography → Logography. Typically, students interpret a fully written word as a logogram based on their knowledge and experience, which may sometimes differ from the intended naming assumed in a manual.

At the subsequent stage, syllabic reading is introduced, where the word is spelt out by syllables: *ti-ti* ("fin-ger"), corresponding to the next stage of writing systems development. During the reading process, particularly among children, the syllabic-consonantal stage also emerges. Students may have certain problems when distinguishing syllabic signs. They often hesitate because of the vowel component of the syllable (e.g., *is it the syllable **ti** or **ta**?*), while a consonant component is mostly clear.

At the final stage, Gogebashvili divides the word into sounds and writes it using graphically separated letter signs: *t-i-t-i* ("f - i - n - g - e - r"); That is, he spells it. Each grapheme now called a *letter* corresponds to a separate phoneme. A letter is a graphic sign of the alphabetic writing system.

This comprehensive process significantly facilitates the perception, understanding, and memorization of signs, especially in children.

According to the structure of Iakob Gogebashvili's *Dedaena*, the process of appropriating writing by a child, in a certain way, mirrors the main trajectory of development of writing systems as historically confirmed.

Iakob Gogebashvili's *Dedaena* ("Mother Language") stands out from other textbooks available at that time thanks to its unique principles and compilation structure. These principles and structure are influenced by the specificity of the Georgian script, characterized by its strict phonological nature.

Moreover, it reflects an isomorphic relationship between the ontogenetic stages of script acquisition and the phylogenetic stages of historical script development. This underscores not only the Georgian "mind-gene" of Iakob Gogebashvili but also highlights his intuitive understanding of the essence of language.