

Jānis ENDZELĪNS

1873—1961

Linguist, Baltic languages specialist, creator of the contemporary literary Latvian language



Jānis Endzelīns was the creator of the contemporary literary Latvian language. He revised, enriched and studied Latvian, as at the beginning of his activities the Latvian language was under strong influence of the languages of the neighbouring countries. His most distinguished work was "Grammar of the Latvian Language" in German, written in Kharkov and published in Latvia in 1922. An enlarged edition of his "Latvian Grammar" was issued in Latvian in 1951.

"The Ancient Prussian Language" (1943), "Introduction to Baltic Philology" (1945) and "Sounds and Forms of the Baltic Languages" (1948) are the most important works about the Baltic languages.

In 1922 a "Latvian Reader" in German was issued for the needs of scientists. A review on the dialects of the Latvian language was presented here. In the same year Endzelīns published "Latvian Place-names" (part 1) with toponyms of Vidzeme — mostly farmstead names. The second part of this book with a collection of place-names of Kurzeme, Zemgale and Latgale was issued in 1926.

Jānis Endzelīns prepared and published a "Dictionary of the Latvian Language", which was partly developed by Kārlis Milēnbahs. Its six volumes comprise approximately 110 000 words. Up to this day it is the most informative dictionary of the Latvian language, being an explanatory, translating, etymologic and literary pronunciation dictionary at the same time. In the dictionary Jānis Endzelīns has written all references regarding the origin of the words and their relations to affined languages.

As a scientist, a Baltic languages specialist, who is justifiably regarded the most prominent Latvian linguist. His works are indispensable to every scientist studying the Baltic, Slavic and other Indo-European languages. Jānis Endzelīns researched the Baltic languages as a whole and separately — mostly Latvian. He also worked on many issues of Lithuanian and ancient Prussian, studied Slavic and classical languages, the relationships of the languages and ethnic questions. Jānis Endzelīns made an invaluable contribution in the acknowledgement of the Latvian language as equivalent to other languages.

Jānis Endzelīns was born on 22 February 1873 in Valmiera District. He graduated from Riga Grammar School in 1892, the Department of Classical Philology in 1897 and the Department of Slavic Philology in 1900 of Dorpat (Tartu) University. During his studies Endzelīns published the reviews "Pronunciation of Diphthongs and Long Vowels in Latvian" and "About Latvian Prepositions". An article about the three-intonation system in Latvian attracted specialists' attention at once. As J. Endzelīns was such a talented scientist, he was asked to become a lecturer at Dorpat University right after graduation. In 1905 he defended his master's dissertation on Latvian prepositions. In 1909 Endzelīns moved from Dorpat to the University of Kharkov where he lectured on different subjects — introduction to linguistics, comparative grammar of the Indo-European languages, comparative grammar of the Germanic languages, gave courses in ancient Prussian, Lithuanian, ancient Armenian, ancient Icelandic, ancient Irish, Gothic and other languages. In 1912 in St Petersburg J. Endzelīns defended his doctor's thesis "Slavic and Baltic Études" in Russian about the relationship between the Baltic and Slavic languages, published many articles, collected dialect materials in Latvia.

From 1920 to 1950 Jānis Endzelīns worked at the University of Latvia and helped in creating an unique Baltistics department there. The Department of Baltic Philology was established at a very high level because of the great linguistic erudition of

Endzelīns and his strict and large-scale scientific requirements. J. Endzelīns lectured on Baltic languages, comparative historical linguistics, Latvian dialectology, toponymy, history and contacts of the languages. He took over the archive and materials prepared for the dictionary by Kārlis Milēnbahs who had died in 1916. Endzelīns edited, supplemented and completed this dictionary, which was published in four volumes under the name "Dictionary of the Latvian Language" (1923—1932; two additional volumes were published in 1934—1946).

Jānis Endzelīns regarded that a language was alive and had to develop. Not only he clarified theoretical linguistic issues, but was also interested how these ideas were put into practice. Already at the beginning of the 20th century (1907—1910) J. Endzelīns and Kārlis Milēnbahs had worked out the new Latvian orthography. It was discussed publicly in 1920 and was introduced in 1922. Endzelīns was one of the founders of the Society of Philologists in 1920. Starting in the same year, he participated in the Commission of Terminology, which created many terms in different fields in a short time. Endzelīns also dealt with phraseology and made serious efforts to free the Latvian language from Germanisms and Russianisms.

Jānis Endzelīns was Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology of the University of Latvia, a member of the Board of the Folklore Depository of Latvia, a full member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (1946), a foreign member of many academies and societies, and a honorary doctor of a number of universities. He has written more than three hundred publications, including fifteen books. Jānis Endzelīns gave back to the Latvians their own language — pure, neat, precise and correct.

Jānis Endzelīns died on 1 July 1961 in Koknese. He was buried in *Raiņa kapi* [Rainis Cemetery] in Riga. A prize of the Latvian Academy of Sciences was named after Jānis Endzelīns and since 1967 it has been awarded for distinguished achievements in Latvian linguistics and Baltistics.



A young and talented philologist. Jānis Endzelīns at Dorpat University (late 19th century). Jānis Endzelīns was a polyglot who wrote poems in Latin and Classical Greek. His linguistic attainments allowed him to do research of international value regarding the history of the Baltic languages and affinity of this language group to other Indo-European languages, especially the Slavic ones.



The most celebrated authority in Latvian linguistics. The academician Jānis Endzelīns in 1960. There are only two eminent Latvian scientists, whose names the world still remembers. They are Paul Walden, the chemist and Jānis Endzelīns, the linguist. He returned their language to the Latvians: pure, neat, precise and correct



Together with students on an expedition. The research of toponyms was a significant area of Endzelīns' work and he devoted considerable time to it during the period of the first Republic of Latvia. "Toponyms are an archive of the land, which can provide information about the old times, rather like documentary archives," wrote Endzelīns. Pictured: In the ruins of Koknese Castle (1935)



The Professor of the University of Latvia after returning to Latvia in 1920. Jānis Endzelīns: third from the right in front, Teodoris Zeiferts: fourth from the right, Jēkabs Velme: fifth from the right

Initiator of the Society of Philologists



Jānis Endzelīns celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday. 28 February 1948



Jānis Endzelīns celebrating his final birthday. 22 February 1961

With his co-workers in the 1950s Jānis Endzelīns received admonition and criticism during the Soviet period; his activities were often prohibited, and he was banned from the University of Latvia before the end of the study year in the spring of 1950

