

Concept of Emotions in Georgian Lexicography: Challenges and Approaches

ემოციათა ცნება ქართულ ლექსიკოგრაფიაში: გამოწვევები და მიდგომები

ანი ფარასტაშვილი

თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

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კვლევა შეისწავლის ლექსიკონებში ემოციების განმარტების სირთულეებს და განსაკუთრებულ ყურადღებას უთმობს არნოლდ ჩიქობავას რედაქტორობით გამოცემულ „ქართული ენის განმარტებით ლექსიკონს“. თვისობრივი მიდგომის გამოყენებით, კვლევა აანალიზებს ძირითად და მათთან დაკავშირებული ემოციების აღმნიშვნელ რვა სალექსიკონო ერთეულს: *ბედნიერება* (happiness), *სევდა* (sadness), *შიში* (fear), *ბრაზი* (anger), *გაკვირვება* (surprise), *ზიზღი* (disgust), *სიყვარული* (love) და *სიძულვილი* (hate).

ანალიზი აჩვენებს, რომ ლექსიკონი იყენებს მოქნილ განმარტებით სტრატეგიებს და არა ერთ უნივერსალურ ფორმულას. სიტყვა-სტატიები, როგორც წესი, მიჰყვება ისეთ მოდელს, როგორიცაა „X არის Y-ის გრძნობა“ ან „X არის Y-ის გრძნობა რომელიც გამოწვეულია Z-ით“, ასევე ხშირად არის გამოყენებული სინონიმები, ინტენსივობის მარკერები, გამომწვევი მიზეზები, ლიტერატურული მაგალითები და ფრაზეოლოგიური ერთეულები. მიღებული შედეგები მოწმობს, რომ განმარტებები ერგება თითოეული ემოციის სემანტიკურ თავისებურებებს, ისინი ასახავენ პოლისემიას, სცენარულ განვითარებასა და შეფასებით ბუნებას. ინგლისურ ლექსიკონებთან შედარება კი ავლენს როგორც თანხვედრას საბაზო ფორმულებში, ასევე განსხვავებებს სიღრმესა და ილუსტრაციულ მხარდაჭერაში.

აღნიშნული კვლევა ხაზს უსვამს ემოციათა ლექსიკოგრაფიაში მნიშვნელობაზე ორიენტირებული, ადაპტაციური მიდგომის ღირებულებას და აჩვენებს თუ რამდენად ეფექტურად ასახავს „ქართული ენის განმარტებითი ლექსიკონი“ ემოციური კონცეფციების კომპლექსურ, გარდამავალ ბუნებას.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ემოციები, ცნებები, განმარტებები, სიტყვა-სტატია, ლექსიკა.

Keywords: *emotions, concepts, definitions, entry, lexis.*

1. Introduction

It is a common observation that people believe they have considerable intuitive knowledge about their own emotional experiences and those of others. They assume they clearly understand the meanings of basic emotion concepts such as *love*, *anger*, *fear*, and *joy*. Yet this confidence typically disappears the moment they are asked to provide explicit definitions. Indeed, the difficulty of formulating accurate definitions for even the most everyday lexical items has been noted repeatedly by both ordinary native speakers and professional lexicographers (see Swanepoel, 1992, citing Fodor, 1981; Johnson-Laird, 1987; Hanks, 1990; Taylor, 1992).

This challenge highlights two broader issues in lexicography: first, the lack of direct access to lexical meanings, which exist only as internal mental entities; and second, the inherent limitations of the sources and methodological tools available to lexicographers when attempting to determine word meanings. Dictionaries vary in their approaches. For example, *Collins Dictionary* defines an emotion as “a feeling such as happiness, love, fear, anger, or hatred, which can be caused by the situation that you are in or the people you are with” (Collins Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1). According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, an emotion is “a strong feeling such as love or anger, or strong feelings in general” (Cambridge University Press, n.d., Definition 1).

Unlike concrete physical objects, emotions cannot be directly observed or pointed to. Lexicographers therefore rely on abstract descriptors such as *feeling*, *state*, or *experience* – terms that are themselves polysemous and potentially ambiguous. As a result, dictionary users frequently encounter broad, rather than sharply delineated, definitions, which may raise questions about the reliability and precision of lexicographic descriptions.

Emotion concepts are also inherently *fuzzy-edged*, with overlapping boundaries. Terms denoting degrees of the same emotion (e.g., fear, terror, panic, unease) blur distinctions based on intensity, duration, or appraisal. Emotional experiences are highly subjective: the same label may evoke markedly different personal associations depending on an individual’s background. For instance, darkness may trigger fear in one person and calmness in another. These factors complicate the lexicographer’s task of balancing generality with cultural and individual specificity.

This paper investigates how the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language* (Chikobava et al., 1960) addresses these challenges. It analyses the structure and content of emotion entries and compares Georgian practices with those found in major English dictionaries to highlight both universal tendencies and language-specific solutions in emotion lexicography.

2. Background

As Wierzbicka (1992) observes *“One cannot define everything. To define anything (without direct or indirect circularity) we need some indefinables. If our indefinables, or primitives, are not intuitively intelligible and self-explanatory, then our definitions will explain nothing”* (p. 541). As Anna Wierzbicka states we cannot build a system where every single concept is defined using other concepts, because definitions themselves rely on some starting points. If we tried to define everything, we would either end up going in circles or never actually finish defining anything. So, any system must begin with a small set of basic terms called indefinables or primitives. These words are not defined in terms of anything simpler, instead, they are understood intuitively. According to this approach we only need one general term to combine with basic concepts. So, the best term for this theory is *“feel”*, which we can combine with concepts such as good, bad, think, want and say. This approach became the basic system for defining emotion concepts.

Majority of dictionaries define emotion words using a standard form, typically beginning with the phrase X is a feeling of Y, and in that formula X and Y often are closely related or synonymous words. Definitions of this kind can be regarded as confusing because it is not direct and clear definition. In this case feeling should be understood in broader concept. Dictionaries often show that emotion and feeling refer to open-ended categories that cannot be defined by a single set of necessary features. They frequently use extensional definitions, which means listing synonymous words. Feeling is highly polysemous, it includes sense of touch, belief or opinion and emotion. This shows that feeling reflects a concept based on multiple cognitive abilities like touch, thought and emotion. So in the process of creating and forming definitions, lexicographers seeking to include all the possible meaning and aspect that the emotion word can cover in order to meet the needs of the dictionary users.

Many of the dictionaries distinguish between specialist and folk models of emotions. Sometimes emotions are defined in cognitive terms, which involves sensation, desire and emotion but exclude thought. Folk definitions frequently associate feelings with ways of thinking or believing and this leads to definitions that seem to contradict each other, where emotions are described both as the opposite of analytical thinking and as something that involves thinking and evaluation.

Another important concept is script- like nature of emotions, which implies that emotions have scenarios and are rising from specific beliefs and recognition of situation. Formula for this type of definition is *“X is a feeling of Y caused by the belief that Z”*. in this case *“caused by”* refers to the idea that emotions have a cause, usually an appraisal of events, situations or people. This formula resonates positively with the theory suggested by Carolin Ostermann that combining Cognitive Linguistics with Lexicography would be fruitful as Cognitive Linguistics tries to describe language according to how humans perceive and conceptualize the world (Ostermann, 2012).

Kövecses (1990, 1991) has shown that a variety of metaphors, metonymies and idioms that we use to talk about emotion concepts and emotional experiences directly reflect on various aspects of the above gross structure of an emotion concept, or, as in the case of metaphors, constitute the conceptual content we have of a specific aspect of an emotion.

Metaphors focus on different, sometimes overlapping, aspects of a concept, or add to a clearer understanding of the nature (ontology) of the emotion. Furthermore, this perspective aligns directly with recent Georgian scholarship on the cognitive and cultural dimensions of emotion concepts. As Rusieshvili et al. (2023) emphasize, the conceptualization of complex emotions in the Georgian language is deeply embedded in metaphoric models that reflect both universally shared contexts and culturally specific worldviews. Understanding these underlying cognitive-cultural models is essential for lexicographers who must encapsulate culturally embedded meanings within the structural constraints of a dictionary entry.

Dictionaries often use qualifiers to indicate intensity or to differentiate between related emotion concepts using the formula: Qualifying adjective + feeling/passion/emotion + of + noun. For instance, in the definition of anger as "*a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism*" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1), the adjective **strong** points to the intensity of the anger. Finally, emotion terms are frequently differentiated through qualifying adjectives and near-synonyms, most often in terms of intensity or evaluative polarity. Expressions such as "*strong feeling*" or "*intense emotion*" establish graded relationships between emotions. However, intensity is only one of several differentiating features. Other distinctions involve differences in appraisal, typical response, or degree of emotional control. Synonym sets highlight different aspects of a shared emotion model as well.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the challenges of defining emotions and how is it applied in *Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian language*. A qualitative approach is suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth analysis of meaning, structure, and definitional strategies. The primary focus of the study is the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian language* edited by Arnold Chikobava, which serves as the main data source. Fundamental aim of this article is to identify how emotions are defined in the dictionary and analysis of how are the word entries structured.

The data consist of selected entries denoting basic emotions. In order to identify a set of central emotion terms, an artificial intelligence tool, ChatGPT, was consulted and prompted for "basic emotions in psychology" to ensure universality. Choosing artificial intelligence tool like ChatGPT to identify basic emotions was intended to ensure the objectivity of the selection by reducing researcher bias. Based on this initial list six basic emotions were identified: *happiness* (ბედნიერება), *sadness* (სევდა), *fear* (შიშ), *anger* (ბრაზი), *surprise* (ვაკვირვება) and *disgust* (ზიზღი). These word entries will be analyzed to identify the structure and features of forming word entries.

The principle of selecting these specific units rests on their status as primary affect categories representing universal human experiences. Rather than focusing on complex or secondary emotional terms that depend heavily on specific cultural contexts, these six core terms were chosen because they serve as the foundation of the emotional vocabulary. They are representative material for the purpose of this research because they cover a full spectrum of emotional capacity, ranging from positive (*happiness*) and negative (*sadness, fear, anger,*

disgust) to neutral or context-dependent (*surprise*). Moreover, because these lexemes denote abstract, non-physical states rather than concrete objects, they represent a key testing ground for dictionary definition strategies.

This targeted sample of six central lexemes is methodologically sufficient for the scope and aims of this research. In qualitative lexicographical analysis the objective is not statistical generalization across the entire dictionary but the deep structural examination of definitional models and micro-structures. Because these six terms represent the primary, high-frequency anchors of affective language, the lexicographical strategies used to define them such as synonymy, hypernymy or circularity, recur systematically throughout the dictionary when defining related secondary emotions. Consequently, an analysis of these six core entries provides a robust, representative framework to evaluate how Georgian lexicography addresses the challenges of defining abstract concepts, managing metalanguage and avoiding circularity.

4. Results

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language provides substantial definitions for *ბედნიერება* (*happiness*), *სევდა* (*sadness*), *ბრაზი* (*anger*), *შიში* (*fear*), *გაკვირვება* (*surprise*), and *ზიზღი* (*disgust*).

4.1. Happiness, Sadness, and Anger

The entry for *ბედნიერება* (*happiness*), which is polysemous, follows the standard formula “X is a feeling of Y” - „დიდი სიხარულისა და სრულყოფილების განცდა“ (a feeling of great joy and fulfillment) (*Georgian Explanatory Dictionary*, n.d., Definition 1) and includes synonyms (*ნეტარება*, *ლხენა*, *სიამე*) along with literary examples and fixed phrases.

Unlike *happiness* the word entry *სევდა* (*sadness*) does not use a descriptive definition. Instead, the word is defined with the list of synonyms (*დარდი*, *ნალველი*, *კაემანი*, *ვარამი*) and is followed by a proverb and contextual illustrations from Georgian literature.

The word *ბრაზი* is defined with a slightly different formula. The word entry suggests qualifier (*ძლიერი*) + synonym (*გაჯავრება*) frame which may not be common but totally understandable for the dictionary users. Traditionally the definition is accompanied with examples from Georgian literature.

4.2. Fear, Surprise, and Disgust

These word entries (*შიში*, *გაკვირვება*, *ზიზღი*) are descriptive and follow the same formula, “X is a feeling of Y caused by Z”. Phrases such *რომელსაც იწვევს, გამოიწვევს, გამოიწვევს* (being caused, causes) indicate that these feelings are evoked by scenario, seeing, feeling or touching something. Synonyms are omitted, but word entries are full with examples which help the dictionary users to better understand the core meaning of an emotion word. These definitions also correspond with Andrew Ortony’s theory of valence that claims “it is not possible to have an emotion about something while maintaining an attitude of

indifference” (Ortony, 2025, p.6). Emotions are always positive or negative feelings, the word **წეხილი** points out that the emotion **შეშ** is a negative concept.

4.3. Love and Hate

To go deeper into the analysis of definitions we will scrutinize three additional words **სიყვარული** for love and **სიძულვილი** for hate.

In case of the word **სიყვარული**, we have polysemy and for each definition the formula “*X is a feeling of Y*” is used with a qualifier adjective in the third definition. Also the first definition highlights the theory that every emotion has a stimulus and “*Simple associated memories are mostly responsible for arousal of emotions*” (Das, 2017, p.6). In this case the sentence „*გამოწვეული მისი მაღალი ღირსების აღიარებით*“ (Georgian Explanatory Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1) (evoked by the recognition of their high merit) indicates the pros or stimuli that evokes the emotion. In the third meaning we have the qualifier word *strong* that indicates the degree. The word **სიყვარული** can be used figuratively as well, denoting the person who is loved or admired, and this meaning is shown in the section of the second meaning. These definitions are confirmed with examples from Georgian literature and proverbs. At the end word entry ends with commonly used collocation **სიყვარულის ახსნა**.

The word **სიძულვილი** also follows the standard formula but in this case we have to pay attention to the so-called primitive word as suggested by Wierzbicka (1992). The word is defined as a feeling you feel towards someone you hate, and we can consider the word **ვნეც** (someone) as primitive. This proves the point that in the process of creating definitions, it's necessary to use “intuitively understandable” words in order to actually define lemma and not go in the circle. The word entry also provides a synonym **სიყვარული** to create as clear definition as possible.

Comparing these two word to the ones provided by AI we can say that definition frames change according to the nature of the word, if there are specific stimuli that needs to be highlighted or a certain degree of the word. This one again proves that emotions are fuzzy-ended and as Wierzbicka claims emotions, or more precisely emotion concepts words like *sad*, *angry*, or *happy*, might seem definable because many of them are clearly related and overlap in meaning (1992). Table 1 below shows that there is no one universal formula to defining emotions as every emotion concept is wide-ranging. Columns of key features and strengths/limitations identify the reasons why meanings can overlap and what can be drawbacks of definitions.

4.4. Definitional Summary

Table 1 below shows that there is no single universal formula for defining emotions, as every emotion concept is wide-ranging. The columns for key features and strengths/limitations identify the reasons why meanings can overlap and what can be the drawbacks of certain definitions.

Table 1. Comparative Lexicographical Analysis of Emotion lexemes

Emotion term	Definitional formulas	Key features	Strengths / limitations
ბედნიერება happiness	“X is a feeling of Y”	Polysemous; figurative meaning	Comprehensive but evaluative
სევდა sadness	List of synonyms	Often literary or poetic	Contextual but vague
ბრაზი anger	Qualifier + synonym	Reactive, triggered by someone's negative actions	Understandable but doesn't show the intensity
შიში fear	“X is a feeling of Y caused by X”	Scenario- based; idioms (◇)	Functional but assumes shared feelings
გაკვირვება surprise	“X is a feeling of Y caused by X”	Cognitive; Scenario – based;	Comprehensive but neutral (can be positive or negative)
ზიზღი disgust	“X is a feeling of Y caused by X”	Strongly physical; scenario based; often triggered by something “unclean” or “immoral”	Comprehensive but can be culturally biased
სიყვარული love	“X is a feeling of Y”	Polysemous; ranges from romantic to friendly love	Comprehensive but it has very large range of usage
სიძულვილი hate	“X is a feeling of Y”	Evaluative; the antonym of love	Strong and clear, but can be limited by subjective morality

5. Discussion

The results of the analysis highlight important tendencies in the structuring of emotion lexemes in *Georgian Explanatory Dictionary*. The comparison between the word entries demonstrates that the dictionary does not apply a single universal method of definition. It selects among lexicographic formulas depending on the internal structure of meaning. This adaptive approach aligns with contemporary Georgian lexicographic practice that emphasises context-sensitive and user-oriented microstructures (Rusieshvili-Cartledge, Makhatadze, 2025).

The entry *ბედნიერება* (happiness) illustrates that its primary definition follows the standard and widely-used form of definition, “X is a feeling of Y”. The presence of explicit markers for figurative meaning and phraseological usage suggests that lexicographic practice aims to denote not only primary meaning of the word, but its stylistic modifications. Similarly, *Cambridge Dictionary* uses the same formula to define the word *happiness* - the feeling of being happy. In contrast, *სევდა* (sadness) is defined with a list of synonymous words. In this case Cambridge Dictionary uses different approach to this entry, “*the feeling of being unhappy, especially because something bad has happened*” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.,

Definition 1). Here we can see the traditional formula is being used with additional information about the cause of the emotion and how negative it is. The comparison also reveals that illustrative examples play a central role as they provide contextual and grammatical information.

As for fear it follows a descriptive explanatory model similar to that observed in **ბედნიერება** (happiness), yet it is semantically more focused. Its primary definition “**მოსალოდნელი (ან თავსდატეხილი) საფრთხის განცდით გამოწვეული წუხილი**” (Georgian Explanatory Dictionary, n.d.) (Distress caused by the feeling of an impending (or sudden) danger) is structured through a formula *X is a feeling of Y caused by Z*. This shows that it's connected to its triggering condition. As Ostermann (2012) notes in analyses of English emotion terms, Georgian entries similarly rely on appraisal triggers, suggesting a cross-linguistic ‘script’ model for affective lexemes. The entry contains phraseological forms marked by the symbol ◇, such as “**შიშის ზარი დაეცემა**” (To be struck with terror), “**შიშის ქარი უვლის**” (A wave of fear washes over them) and “**შიში აიტანს**” (to be seized by fear). The entry **გაკვირვება** (surprise) follows the same structure and is formulated in that manner.

Disgust follows a formula similar to **შიში** (fear), defining the emotion as „**განცდა, რომელსაც იწვევს**” (an emotion which causes). The structure identifies sensory triggers like sight, touch, smell. Compared to **შიში** (fear), **ზიზღი** (disgust) contains fewer idiomatic constructions, suggesting lower phraseological usage. Cambridge Dictionary still manages to maintain “*X is a feeling of Y*” formula to define the word disgust – “*a strong feeling of disapproval and dislike at a situation, person's behavior, etc.*” (Cambridge University Press, n.d., Definition 1) Disgust is an easily triggered emotion and capturing its script-like nature is essential to create reliable definition. In this case it would be fair to say that Georgian Explanatory Dictionary provides a more comprehensive definition of the lexeme **ზიზღი** (disgust). The shift to a causal-descriptive model in entries like fear and disgust is not accidental. Highly reactive, embodied emotions naturally resist simple taxonomy and demand a script-based definition that captures external triggers and sensory responses.

Lastly, we have two contradictory words **სიყვარული** (love) and **სიძულვილი** (hate). For the word **სიყვარული**, multiple meanings are presented, each structured around the pattern “*X is a feeling of Y*.” The first definition emphasizes that emotions arise from stimuli, illustrated by the phrase “**გამოწვეული მისი მაღალი ღირსების აღიარებით**” (Georgian Explanatory Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1) (evoked by the recognition of their high merit). In the third definition, the adjective **ძლიერი** -‘strong’ signals the intensity of the emotion but still, it cannot be fully defined as it has varieties of usage. Love can be romantic, love in friendship, motherly love or the love we feel towards relatives and friends. The word **სიძულვილი** (hate) also follows the standard formula, but here it is important to consider the notion of a “primitive” word, as proposed by Anna Wierzbicka (1992). It is defined as a feeling directed toward someone you hate, where the term one can be viewed as a primitive element. As for the definition provided by Cambridge Dictionary- “*to dislike someone or something very much*” (Cambridge University Press, n.d., Definition 1) we can see that primitives like *someone* and

something are also used effectively. Conversely, complex conceptual emotions like love or hate rely on relational and intensity-focused models because their semantic boundaries are defined by target, moral orientation, and social context rather than immediate physical stimuli.

Overall, the findings suggest that Georgian Explanatory Dictionary employs a flexible and meaning-oriented approach to defining emotion lexemes rather than relying on a single fixed model. This variation reveals a core characteristic of Georgian lexicography: rather than imposing a rigid structural template across the macrostructure, lexicographers adapt their definitional strategy to the cognitive and semantic nature of each specific emotion. Abstract or highly polysemous concepts trigger relational formulas, while embodied, reactive emotions prompt causal-script definitions. While the formula “*X is a feeling of Y*” serves as a central structural pattern, it is frequently adapted or expanded to reflect semantic nuances such as cause, intensity, and contextual usage. This indicates that Georgian lexicographical practice prioritizes descriptive precision and psychological authenticity over formulaic uniformity. The comparison with the Cambridge Dictionary further highlights both convergence and divergence in lexicographic practices. Although Cambridge Dictionary often relies on the same basic formula, it tends to incorporate additional explanatory elements, such as causation or degree, within a more compact definition. At the same time, both dictionaries make use of intuitively understandable terms, so called primitives.

6. Conclusion

Defining words for the dictionary and creating word entries is challenging, especially when it comes to emotions which are something so familiar but at the same time baffling. People label different experiences with the same emotion word, according to their experiences and cultural background, which results in perceiving emotions in different ways. So the word entries must maintain balance between general and individual meanings and do not leave out aspects of emotions. To overcome these difficulties lexicographers have identified several ways to include all the information in a word entry, which implies establishing standard forms that will be applied to it. Most dictionaries do in fact revert to this definitional format, but cognitive research on emotions gives an explanation for the fact that beliefs, as opposed to responses, are best suited as differentiating characteristics.

This study examined the challenges of defining emotions in dictionaries, with a specific focus on the Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language edited by Arnold Chikobava. The analysis revealed that the Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language provides word definitions that not only thoroughly defines the words but also maintains cultural objectivity. It obviously follows identified formulas like “*X is a feeling of Y*” or “*X is a feeling of Y caused by X*” but considering the words nature it arranges and adapts the word entries in a way that it consists all the information necessary for the use, it can be triggers of emotions, polysemous meanings or antonyms. Comparing it with the Cambridge Dictionary revealed that both dictionaries provide sufficient explanations and the Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language is no less useful or helpful.

Overall, research revealed that Georgian Explanatory Dictionary follows these standard formulas, depending on the specific nature of the emotion concept, and successfully creates word entries which denote all the necessary information for the dictionary users to fully comprehend the meaning of an emotion word.

AI Disclosure

An artificial intelligence tool, ChatGPT, was consulted solely to generate an initial list of basic emotion categories in psychology in order to reduce researcher bias in term selection.

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ავტორის შესახებ:

ანი ფარასტაშვილი არის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის, ჰუმანიტარულ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტის, ლექსიკოგრაფიის მოდულის პირველი კურსის მაგისტრანტი. დაასრულა თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ინგლისური ფილოლოგიის საბაკალავრო პროგრამა. მას ასევე მონაწილეობა მიღებული აქვს სხვადასხვა სალექსიკონო პროექტსა და აქტივობაში, ხოლო მისი აკადემიური ინტერესები მოიცავს ენის კვლევასა და პრაქტიკულ ლექსიკოგრაფიას.

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სამადლობელი:

მინდა გულწრფელი მადლიერება გამოვხატო ჩემი ხელმძღვანელის, ქალბატონი მარინე მახათაძის მიმართ, გაწეული შრომისა და მხარდაჭერისათვის. სწორედ მისი მითითებების, რჩევებისა და მუდმივი გულშემატკივრობის წყალობით მომეცა შესაძლებლობა რომ წარმომეჩინა ჩემი აკადემიური შესაძლებლობები.

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