

REVIEW

by prof. Dr. Romyana Balinova Todorova,
Konstantin Preslavsky University in Shumen,
academic field 2.1. Philology
for awarding the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy”,
Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures,
for the needs of New Bulgarian University,
in the field of higher education Humanities,
academic field 2.1. Philology,
doctor habil’s programme General and Comparative Linguistics,
candidate: prof. Dr. Irena Georgieva Vassileva,
Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, NBU

1. Data analyzed in relation to the compliance of the application with the minimum and additional requirements for awarding the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy”

The candidate in the procedure, prof. Dr. Irena Georgieva Vassileva, has submitted all documents required for awarding the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy” certifying the compliance of her application with the requirements of the Law about Scientific Degrees and Titles, as well as the Rules of Procedures of the New Bulgarian University. The submitted documents confirm the correctness of the aggregated indicators of the scientific data for her research, teaching and expert work, which correspond to the minimum national requirements under bl. 2b, para 2 and 3 of the ODARB, as well as to the additional requirements of the NBU.

2. Presentation of the candidate

As can be seen from the documentation presented for the procedure, prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva, has a rich academic and professional career, which can be defined as a process of a continuous educational and training development and upgrading beginning with her school education through the MA programme in the field of English and American Studies, as well as a process of connecting her academic career with the teaching practice in the mentioned fields to

university students. The candidate's professional development is due to her participation in various trainings, internships, study visits to foreign universities of a different duration, thematic orientation, etc., as well as conducting different courses there.

Irena Vassileva's academic career started back in 1985 when she graduated from Veliko Tarnovo University *St. St. Cyril and Methodius* in her MA degree in English Studies, specialist of English Language and Literature. From 1987 to 1996 she worked in the English Department at the Institute for Foreign Students – Sofia, first as an assistant professor and then from 1993 as a senior lecturer. She had classes for adult learners. In 1993 she got a PhD degree at the Institute and in 2006 she became a habilitated doctor in Applied Linguistics at the Philological Faculty, Leipzig University, Germany. In the period 1996-2011 she worked at the South-West University in Blagoevgrad as an associate professor and since 2009 she has been a professor. She taught theoretical disciplines in BA and MA programmes. From 2011 up to 2013 she was a full professor in English and German at the European Polytechnical University in Pernik and was the head of the Language Centre there. From 2008 up to 2020 Irena was a part-time lecturer in English and German at NBU and since December 2020 up to now she has been a full-time lecturer at NBU in English and German. Since 2014 up to the present prof. Dr. Vassileva has conducted summer courses in English for academic purposes to foreign students at British universities, some of which in Sheffield, Reading, Bristol, Warwick, Edinburgh.

All those years she has had classes related to academic discourse and communication, and has had consultation hours with students, developed academic projects, and was also a contact person of international academic projects as well as participant, funded mainly by the *Alexander von Humboldt* Foundation and enumerated in the documentation for the procedure. She has a great number of qualifications related to her teaching and academic activities pointed out in her CV, which speaks a lot about her preparation in the field of English and German Studies, more specifically linguistics (English, German and Bulgarian), (inter/ cross) cultural studies, etc. Some of her publications are in the above mentioned fields.

The fact that prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva has had courses at NBU and at universities abroad is demonstrative enough about her knowledge and skills which she uses in her classes in an appropriate way. Part of the disciplines she has had are oriented towards issues in academic communication on a comparative basis. Her participations in conferences with presentations all end with publications. Irena is a reviewer of a couple of national and international journals as well as of books and conferences, listed in her documentation.

Her documentation shows that there is sufficient proof of the fulfilment of the minimum and additional requirements for awarding the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy”. The candidate’s research, qualification and publication activities are really impressive.

The candidate’s academic interests are in the field of general and comparative linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies and a lot more.

For the current procedure prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva has presented a list of publications, which are enough for awarding the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy” to her according to the requirements of the procedure. Her publications are: on the topic of her dissertation – 3, papers presented at conferences – 6, a dissertation for acquiring the academic and educational degree of “doctor of philosophy”, after the professorship – 23 publications, out of which 10 in co-authorship.

Prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva has 280 citations in SCOPUS, pointed out in the respective reference. Her dissertation *Confrontation in Academic Communication* presented for the procedure is created by her personally and does not repeat in any way the topic and the content of her PhD thesis. It is a natural continuation of some of her previous studies on various topics related to academic discourse and academic communication. It shows her knowledgeability when applying quite successfully some of the linguists’ viewpoints in her analysis as well as presenting her own interpretations. The information is quite detailed and exhaustive as it relies on the applicability of various language models and on her own ideas about the discussed issues, which speaks about her knowledge about the discussed issues and the used literature

in depth. The thesis definitely makes an attempt to find answers to a number of questions presented in multi complex ways. It outlines the aims and the tasks of the study oriented towards the issues of confrontation in academic communication and the various ways of rendering a negative opinion or lack of agreement in the different cultural communities. It puts an emphasis on the language used by them with their specificities, ensuing from various peculiarities and reasons. The theoretical prerequisites from different researchers' references are quoted correctly and adequately. There is a rational theoretical model in the analysis of the concrete materials.

The object of study is rhetorical strategies in reviews of academic works written in English and in German with an explicit negative orientation. The reasons for that are mainly of a verbal rather than of non-verbal nature and often acquire a personal note thus breaching ethical principles. The aims, the prerequisites and the objectives about the relevance of the research are well presented in Chapter 1. The thesis has an interdisciplinary character and is a natural continuation of a previous study of the author on the rhetoric of intercultural academic communication.

Chapter 2, quite appropriately, clarifies the methods of analysis, related to comparative studies and the fact that context based analyses are more suitable for the aims of the current study than corpus-based ones because a wider context is needed for the argumentation, and apart from the text some extralinguistic factors which are of crucial importance for the analysis of the information are taken into consideration as the latter is multifunctional. Besides, attention is paid to the fact that in contrastive rhetoric it is not the meaning in a text that plays a decisive role but rather the way of constructing that meaning. The role intertextuality has in the confrontation in academic communication is also pointed out. The chosen methodology is in unison with the aims and objectives of the thesis. What is more, a comparative rhetorical analysis is used for the comparisons of the ways of expressing a negative evaluation in reviews written in English and in German. The corpus containing two types of book reviews in English and in German is presented.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical prerequisites related to the literature on the issues of confrontation in academic communication and its evaluative essence. Some basic concepts such as *criticism*, *critique*, *negative evaluation* and *confrontation* in academic communication are clarified. Different views of *culture* and *identity* with their lack of linear character and dynamism are pointed out.

Chapter 4 dwells upon the issues of academic book reviews with their two functions, informative and evaluative, as well as of their role. The formal parameters of the reviews according to the requirements of different publishers and the guidelines students get are pointed out. The classical argumentation theory is also presented. The criticism in both languages, English and German, is based mainly on prerequisites connected with the content rather than with the formal parameters. The conclusion is that reviews as types of academic genres are strongly personalized. It is pointed out that there are hardly any negatively evaluated reviews in German academic discourse and culture.

The results from the analysis show that taking into account the aim of the speaker, out of the three types of argumentation (epistemic, deontic and ethic), the prevailing one is the epistemic. The conclusion made is that most negative reviews are mostly written by authoritative people in the respective field and it is difficult for young researchers to fit in.

Chapter 5 discusses various types of argumentative strategies in using linguistic means by authors belonging to two opposing linguistic schools. The criticism is oriented towards the narrative and the validity of the review as well as towards four types of prerequisites represented in percentages. The schemes point out analyses which the supporters of the opposite opinion consider wrong and they suggest correct ones from a theoretical perspective. The percentages as regards the topoi used are also presented. The topos from the person has the highest percentage while the topos from the contrast comes next aiming at refuting and denigrating opponents' statements. Argumentation schemes are pointed out. In some cases, there is a firm rejection of a whole academic book or critical statements about the opponent, related to the validity of the suggested analysis. A conclusion is made that the language used

is highly personalized, as well as the fact that the metaphors and the irony applied, personal attacks, direct interaction with the reader by using the pronouns for the plural *we* and *you*, preaching of intellectual research ethics, etc. outnumber the expectations about suggested tolerance in academic communication in a number of cases and go beyond the accepted norms of behaviour.

Chapter 6 summarizes the results from the analyses from a more theoretical perspective. The conclusions point out that there are cultural differences in the reviews in both languages – English and German. The German community is more tolerant, which is most probably due to the fact that the Germans are more disciplined. One of the stated reasons is that this group is smaller and according to the author it is more likely for its members to know one another. At the same time, she argues that the Anglo-Saxon academic community is more idiosyncratic and manifests a lower degree of unification, which is the reason for personal attacks.

The bibliography is quite exhaustive and contains some of the latest references in the respective field of study. The publications are relevant to the topic, the aims and the objectives of the research. The candidate is obviously well acquainted with the academic literature on the discussed issues as she uses the references quite appropriately and to the point.

The Summary of the doctoral thesis presents the content in a concise and clear way. The author has pointed out the contributions of the dissertation in it as well.

As regards her other publications, I am acquainted with some of them as I have participated with presentations in a number of highly specialized national and international conferences, symposia and forums in which a great number of high level specialists usually participate. Her investigations are deep and always supported by rich evidential material.

Irena Vassileva's organizational and administrative activities are of a various nature, connected with the conducting of national and international conferences as well as of seminars. All these responsibilities are the result of the personal qualities of the candidate as she is a very active, initiative and efficient colleague who I know well and guarantee for all her engagements in an administrative, organizational and professional aspect.

3. Assessment of the applicant's quality of his scientific productivity and contributions

The documents presented by the candidate for the procedure on the scientific and applied contributions highlight the most important conceptual and applied aspects of the innovation of her scientific endeavours. What I would like to add is the fact that I appreciate highly prof. Vassileva's investigations to explore in depth and adequately apply the existing theoretical prerequisites in the field of linguistics, comparative research, cognitive linguistics and to more specific grammatical phenomena in English and Bulgarian, which is undoubtedly a contribution to the more general linguistics as well as to its more concrete manifestations. The studied grammatical issues are also applied in the teaching of English.

The candidate's doctoral thesis' contributions are outlined in detail in her Summary of the dissertation. One of the major contributions is that such a multi aspectual study oriented towards issues about academic communication and more specifically confrontation and negative evaluation in book reviews is hardly ever made so far. The argumentation schemes are categorized and analyzed. There are no studies in this field and the investigation definitely fills a vacuum in this respect.

The review of the scientific production and academic work of Dr. Irena Vassileva's gives me strong reasons to declare that her candidacy fully meets the requirements for the academic degree of "habilitated doctor of philosophy".

4. Recommendations

The corpus consists of two types of reviews of academic books in English and in German which are pointed out in two different ways – the first one only by presenting the number of texts while the other one is presented not only by the number of texts but by their volume, including the number of words as well. They should be described and analyzed in the same way. The other corpus is compiled by critical reviews of articles and books in English together with their answers and reactions.

One of the methods of analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis which is actually used in Chapter 5, but it should have been mentioned from the very beginning in Chapter 2.

In my opinion, cooperation typical for academic discourse goes together with the so-called constructive and/ or gradable criticism.

J. C. Sager who has a whole chapter on the communicative dimension in academic discourse and the academic discourse community can also be included in the References and quoted in the thesis (Sager The communicative dimension in Sager, J. C. *A Practical Course in Terminology Processing*. Amsterdam/Phil.: J. Benjamins. 1990. pp. 99-128).

5. Conclusion

Taking into account both the quantitative scientific minimum requirements for awarding the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy”, as well as the qualitative analysis of prof. Dr. Irena Georgieva Vassileva’s scientific production, work and contributions, as well as her personal features and skills, I strongly support her candidacy in this procedure and give my positive assessment about her scientific and applied achievements, as her academic and professional orientation in the field of philological sciences fulfils the requirements of the *Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria* and its accompanying regulations. I recommend to the Academic Selection Committee to vote positively for awarding **the academic degree of “habilitated doctor of philosophy” to prof. Dr. Irena Georgieva Vassileva in the area of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, doctor habil’s programme General and Comparative Linguistics for the needs of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, New Bulgarian University.**

July 17th, 2023

Signature:


(prof. Rumyana Todorova, PhD)