REVIEW

by prof. dr. Alexandra Bozhidarova Bagasheva, Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", in the field of higher education "Humanities", professional sphere 2.1. Philology (General Linguistics - Cognitive Linguistics and Word Formation - (English)) for the degree of Doctor of Science in the field of higher education "Humanities", in the professional sphere 2.1. Philology, in the scientific specialty "General and Comparative Linguistics", with candidate prof. dr. Irena Georgieva Vassileva

Documentation and procdure

By order Z-PK-194/28.04.2023 of the Rector of NBU I have been appointed as a member of the jury for the defense of the dissertation of prof. dr. Irena Vassileva, full-time lecturer at NBU. After the procedure of checking the documents and a plagiarism check report, the relevant committee has admitted the candidate to the defense.

I confirm that I have been provided with the documents and materials necessary for the completion of the defence procedure according to the Law on Scientific Degrees and Titles and the New Regulations on the Terms and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at New Bulgarian University. I also confirm that the set of materials submitted by the candidate includes all the documents required for the procedure. The submitted documents confirm the correctness of the scientific metrics data summarized by groups of indicators for the research, teaching and expert activities of prof. dr. Irena Vassileva and demonstrate that she meets in full the minimum national requirements under Article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Law on Scientific Degrees and Titles in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Accompanying texts and documentation

According to the requirements, the candidate has submitted an abstract, but only in Bulgarian. The abstract in Bulgarian includes 33 pages and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation. The author's own formulation of the contributions is correct and corresponds to the dissertation itself.

The applicant has attached a list of 4 monographs and 51 scientific publications, but it is very difficult to know which of them were used for the purposes of previous procedures (habilitation and professorship), so for the purposes of this review I only consider the publications after 2009, i.e. after the acquisition of the position "professor". On this basis the list is reduced to 21 publications, one of which was submitted to the jury in full, namely *An 'academic war' - A case study of confrontation in academia*, published in *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 57 (2022), indexed in Scopus. A paper co-authored with prof. Diana Yankova, Yankova, D., Vassileva, I. (2021) Expressing Lesser Relevance in Academic

Conference Presentations. *English Studies at NBU, 2021* pISSN 2367-5705, Volume 7, Issue 2, pp. 127-146. eISSN 2367-8704. https://doi.org/10.33919/esnbu.21.2.1 is indexed in Web of Science. The remaining 18 publications are indexed in Erih plus. A list of citations is also provided, which far exceeds the minimum national scientific requirements for the defense of a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Science.

The applicant's accompanying texts meet the quantitative and qualitative requirements of Article 2b and Article 1a, para. 1 of the LSDT (ZRASRB).

Characteristics, organization and evaluation of the thesis

Before I provide my assessment of the merits of the dissertation, I should note that the check carried out by the anti-plagiarism system shows unequivocally that the work of prof. dr. Irena Vassileva is original and authorial. The present work has been developed independently and does not repeat the topic and content of the work submitted for her previous scientific degree of Doctor of Philosopy. The dissertation presents an analysis of confrontational academic discourse, using the methodology of classical and contemporary rhetoric, which allows for the analysis of argumentation schemes and rhetorical strategies and their linguistic implementation used by scholars in the humanities.

The object of study, the academic discourse of the humanities, is of utmost importance (both in scholarly and applied terms) for at least the following reasons: 1) the breakneck development of artificial intelligence capabilities and applications based on big language models; 2) the globalization of academia and its stratification into multiple virtual communities with different cultures of communication; 3) the depersonalization of the humanities in terms of publication, funding, and interest; and 4) the multiplication of theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and analytical procedures.

The dissertation is 128 conten pages long, structured in six chapters, with the remaining 17 pages containing an appendix with a list of the corpora used and a list of the literature cited, including 110 titles. In addition, it contains 7 figures and 3 tables.

The immediate object of analysis are reviews of scientific works in the field of linguistics in English and German, which have a pronounced negative character. The specific research focus is on rhetorical strategies and their linguistic realization, as well as the reasons for the choice of particular strategies, their frequency, the differences in the two academic cultures as a reflection of their corresponding traditions, understandings of science, interpersonal relations in the community and a number of other social, economic and historical factors.

The main aim of the study is to analyze the nature of confrontational discourse in academic communication in the field of linguistics based on published reviews in terms of rhetorical argumentation strategies and their linguistic expression. The German- and English-speaking cultures of academic

communication, in particular reviews in the humanities, are chosen as the source of excerpted material for analysis (with content articles and a book as characterized by signs of confrontation are also used as data sources and analyzed in Chapter 5).

On the basis of the overall research aim and in view of the chosen methodological framework, which includes critical discourse analysis, comparative rhetorical analysis and the methodology of contemporary argumentation theory (Walton et al. 2008), which complements classical theory with the so-called "pragmatic theory of rejection", the candidate formulates the following immediate research tasks:

- exploring argumentation schemes through their linguistic expression used by English- and German-speaking scholars in expressing criticism;

- tracking the justification (operationalized as justification or reason) for a critical stance, i.e., whether the criticism is based on objective logic and/or subjective personal evaluation, with this indicator projected as a scale;

- analysing preferred argumentation schemes and topoi;

- analysis of inter-linguistic and intercultural differences and conflict points and misunderstandings that may arise from identified differences;

- exploring explanations for the causes of confrontation in academia;

- exploring the role of intertextuality in confrontational academic exchange; and

- establishing the positive and negative effects of confrontation on the progress of scientific thought.

In view of the above, I can confidently state that the aims and objectives are clearly stated and the material selected for analysis provides a rich opportunity to accomplish the objectives and achieve the aims. I do not agree with prof. Vassileva's statement that "while in the hard sciences, where one deals with measurable data based on replicable experiments, language does not play such a significant role, while in the humanities one relies primarily on linguistic means of persuasion, and therefore the choice of argumentative strategies and the ways of their implementation is of utmost importance." On the one hand, much of psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics, neurolinguistics, sociolinguistics, and experimental linguistics (be it computer models or neural network simulations) use largely quanitative methods and assume replication, on the other hand, there is no science in which language does not play a role (even if we take a purely pragmatic approach in terms of specialized languages without going into the philosophy and epistemology of science). In this line of reasoning, I would like to hear another motivation for limiting the study to the humanities, or a more precise formulation of the terms "humanities" and "linguistics". This weighs even more given the fact that prof. Vassileva is trying to approach the problem form a multifactorial perspective. The following factors at least are included in the extra-textual factors with a direct influence on shaping the confrontation in the discourse under study: "dominant ideologies; common attitudes towards knowledge and understanding of its role in society; differences between the respective educational systems,

e.g. focus on content versus focus on form, written/oral methods of instruction and assessment, etc.; views on the relationship between individual (author) and society (academic community/audience); rhetorical and stylistic traditions; cross-cultural influences and their historical dynamics; intra-cultural social, political and economic developments, etc." (p. 6, abstract). While I fully understand and sympathise with the desire for comprehensiveness and multidisciplinarity, as well as the necessity of such an approach to analyze the phenomenon under study as thoroughly as possible, I am not convinced that the text provides an informed analysis of the mechanisms by which these factors influence confrontation in academic discourse. Given the chosen methodology for analysis - combining corpus and contextual analysis (due to the inadequacy of corpus analysis for qualitative, substantive analysis of argumentative schemata), many of the factors remain outside the direct view of the researcher, such as general attitudes towards knowledge and understanding of its role in society; differences between the respective educational systems, e.g. focus on content versus focus on form, written/oral methods of instruction and assessment, etc.; views on the relationship between individual (author) and society (academic community/audience); intercultural influences and their historical dynamics; intracultural social, political and econocmi development, which require distinct methods of research and analysis, such as content and historical analysis, sociological surveys and others.

I also find a contradiction in the following: prof. Vassileva claims that confrontation is not a widely studied phenomenon and that in most cases it is considered insignificant by most researchers of academic discourse, but at the same time she recognizes the phenomenon as inherent to academic discourse "by certain standard requirements of modern scientific communication" (p. 6, dissertation). As key points for analysis, the author very rightly directs herself to "the role of evaluation in academic communication, the relationship among criticism, critique, negative evaluation and confrontation in academic communication, as well as the importance of culture, disciplinary culture, and community of practice"(p. 10, dissertation). Despite the clear statement of the nature and complexity of the issues explored, somehow at a gallop, without depth of reflection, the broad themes remain merely hinted at but not developed in depth. The thesis reads like an informative introductory or summarizing booklet, but not as a thorough scholarly work. For example, it is a little frivolous to cite extracts from wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticalthinking) (p. 22 of the thesis) as definitions of key concepts when there are authoritative and widely accepted works on the issues surrounding these concepts, for example Fisher, Alec (2011) *Critical Thinking. An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press or Moon, Jeniffer (2008) *Critical Thinking. An Exploration of Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

The notions of critique, critical thinking and critique are mentioned in passing but are key to the idea of confrontation in academic discourse (section 3.2, thesis, pp. 21-25). Chapters two and three of the dissertation constitute a catalogue rather than a coherently constructed text in which the author's position stands out. The relationship between evaluation, argument scheme, confrontation and rhetorical style

remains unclear to me. I would like the author to articulate this relationship clearly and to state her own hypothesis about the manifestations, or at least the parameters of manifestation (discursive, argumentative, rhetorical and linguistic) of this relationship.

The data analyzed have been personally compiled by the author and are a rich source for analysis, fully consistent with the objectives and research questions formulated. The choice of two methodological approaches (corpus and contextual) is very resourceful and suggests a strong motivation for comprehensiveness of analysis.

The chapter's exposition of Bourdieu's (1999) sociological approach and Tannen's (2002) agonistic approach to the construction of academic-scientific discourse suggests parameters of research on the discourse of opposition that, however, remain understated and underdeveloped in the rest of the text. The claim is that we will see analysed both the processes and the products, both the individual as social agent and society as the dynamic network surfing of the construction of a plurality of types of cultures that are intertwined in a complex way in Giddens' (1979) structuration model, which again remains simply mentioned without specifying what the author derives from it. The complexity of the issues is deepened by including the dimension of interdisciplinarity, which breaks the unity of discursive community, academic culture, culture of engagement in a discursive community and a community of practice. What is lacking is the articulation of a clear authorial stance on the theoretical model applied in the research, which is surprising given the clearly delineated chosen methodology (as well as the motivation for this choice) and research methodology, which are fully consistent with the stated aim and objectives of the thesis. In the contrastive part of the study, the classical theory of argumentation is used as the theoretical model, enriched with the pragma-dialectical model of argumentation. Types of topoi that serve as methodological tools of analysis, argumentation schemes and preconditions (or specific reasons) for crtique are selected for immediate analysis.

In the immensity of the issues explored, the author manages to delineate her research focus by concentrating on the exploration of a specific academic genre - peer reviewing and the discursive conduct of 'academic warfare'. Peer reviewing is seen as a genre with a very high degree of intertextuality and addressability, which contributes significantly to establishing the identity of the discipline as a whole and the status of individual members within the relevant discursive community. In this academic genre, the personalization of scholarly thought reaches its highest degree.

In Chapter 4, the results presented in the form of graphs show that in both English and German, criticism is based primarily on content-related premises, while formal indicators are apparently not considered particularly significant. Among the significant results of the contrastive study is the identification of the topoi for the expression of criticism with the highest frequency in the reviews: topos of person; topos of example; topos of means and ends; topos of authority; topos of cause-effect; topos of

comparison; topos of classification and topos of definition. Findings from the analysis show that in German reviews one third of the topoi consists of personality topoi, which together with authority topoi account for 44% of all cases; whereas in English the percentage is lower (22% + 4.5%), leading the author to conclude that, unlike in other academic genres where argumentation is mostly based on topoi based on common premises of everyday logic within the genre "academic book review" topoi with conventional conclusions represent a relatively high percentage of argumentation, making the review a highly personalized academic genre. After the presentation of a detailed analysis of the use of different topoi under different premises in book reviews in both languages, it is logically concluded that out of the three types of argumentation (epistemic, deontic and ethical), epistemic argumentation dominates book reviews, which is related to the aesthetics and epistemology of academic discourse as a whole. The data from the analysis suggest that deontic argumentation is relatively more common due to the evaluative nature of the reviews. The same is true for ethical argumentation, which involves categorising a statement on a scale of 'good-bad'. Equally common is the use of "personal attacks" in English, realized in "insulting, contemptuous, and sarcastic tones" (Tannen 2002, p. 1664, p. 77, dissertation), which is interpreted as a relatively new phenomenon, most likely related to the function of English as the global lingua franca of scientific research. From a contrastive point of view, it is also important to note the difference in the discourse of review in the two languages in the ratio between topoi based on logical general premises and those based on conventional inferences: in German 1:1 and in English 2:1 in favour of logical topoi. German authors lean much more heavily on authority than English-speaking authors, which is related to the centuries-old German tradition of respect and deference to expertise in a given field, which is also related to the empirical findings regarding the relationship between authority and negative review: most negative reviews are written by scholars possessing greater authority than the authors being reviewed.

In the next chapter, chapter five, the confrontation in academic discourse focuses on the scholarly debate and disputes between different schools in the field of critical discourse analysis. The methodology of this part of the study is based on contemporary argumentation theory (Walton et al. 2008, p. 81, dissertation), which complements classical theory with the so-called "pragmatic theory of rejection". As key elements of the study the researcher operationalises the distinction between "attack, opposition, refutation and rejection" (Walton et al. p. 220, p. 81, dissertation) within the adopted understanding of argumentation "as the linking of propositions into a sequence of reasoning used for some purpose in a dialogue context" (p. dissertation). The empirical material analysed covers publications between 1992 and 2010, where reviews, responses to reviews and review articles are examined in detail, with reference also made to two books that played a significant role in the development of the discussion. The corpus of "academic warfare" contains only a fraction of the prerequisites for criticism, oriented exclusively toward theory, terminology, and analysis, with prerequisites regarding form being extremely rare. In almost half

of the cases (47%), the critical argumentation schemes address controversial theoretical issues. Problematic definitions and use of terminology account for 20% of cases. Critical argumentation schemes related to problematic analyses (24%) deal mainly with proving the opponent(s)' analyses wrong and, in some cases, proposing "correct" interpretations of the same data or (less frequently) theory. The most frequently used topos appears to be the topos of personality (57% of all toposes), and the leading pronoun is the first person singular "I". The topos of contrast is the second most frequent at 21% and naturally reflects the confrontational nature of the discussion. The topos of example (10%) is used either to cite examples from publications of or less frequently to introduce counterexamples. The authority topos (8%) is relatively rare in the corpus, with the cause-and-effect topos (8%) being the least common, used mainly to refute false premises. Refutations (which encompasses false premises - 17%, questioning the premises and/or conclusion - 17%, conclusion does not follow the premises - 22%, probation - 8% and personal attack - 11%) account for 75% of the argumentation schemes used in the corpus. As more general conclusions from the analysis, the research establishes that the German-speaking community seems to be more tolerant, more unified, and the individual authors show less idiosyncratic traits. The English-speaking community, on the other hand, shows a much higher degree of idiosyncrasy, a lower degree of unity, and a strong tendency to use "personal attacks".

The last, sixth chapter, contains a summary of the conclusions based on the analysis of the empirical material, which sheds new light on the applied problems of emancipating a specific academic genre - the negative review, as well as the theoretical generalizations justified by the statistical analysis of the corpus data of reviews and the content analysis of the thematically unified corpus of the academic war, where the high degree of intertextuality allows for the tracing of complex argumentation patterns. The brevity of this chapter again suggests a sense of flying off overview rather than profound reflection and synthesis of the findings. The sense of the schematic and parochial nature of the exposition does not leave the reader in this chapter, either.

Before commenting on the contributions of the paper, I find some significant gaps in the literature used, in addition to those listed above, which I find key to forming a hypothesis about the nature of rhetorical and argumentative strategies of confrontation in discourse linguistics, such as Englebretson, Robert (ed.) (2007) *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins and Jaffe, Alexandra (ed.) (2009) *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*. Oxfrod: Oxford University Press. Given that one of the contributions is to combine pragma-dialectical argumentation theory with classical rhetoric, I definitely miss significant titles in the former field: Toulmin, Stephen (2003) *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. van Eemeren, Frans (2018) *Argumentation Theory: A Pragma-Dialectical Perspective*. Dordrecht: Springer.

van Eemeren, Frans (2009) (ed.) *Examining Argumentation in Context.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

van Eemeren, Frans, Bart Garssen, Erik Krabbe, Francisca Snoeck Henkemans, Bart Verheij and Jean Wagemans (2014) *Handbook of Argumentation Theory*. Dordrecht: Springer.

van Eemeren, Frans and Bart Garssen (2012) *Topical Themes in Argumentation Theory. Twenty Exploratory Studies [Argumentation Library vol. 22].* Dordrecht.

van Eemeren, Frans (2010) *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse. Extending the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

van Eemeren, Frans and Rob Grootendorst (2010) *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation*

The pragma-dialectical approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van Eemeren, Frans, Peter Houtlosser and Francisca Snoeck Henkemans (2007) *Argumentative Indicators in Discourse*. Dordrecht: Springer.

It is precisely these shortcomings and the overview-catalogue nature of much of the exposition of theoretical propositions, definitions and operationalizations of basic concepts, the description of the methodology and the superficial discussion of the multilayered factors that have a direct impact on the observed phenomena that significantly diminish the contributions of the dissertation.

The contributions of the thesis can be summarized as follows:

1. Formulating an interesting research question of exceptional importance and comprehensiveness;

2. Distinguishing the frequency and types of discourses of opposition and confrontation as appearing in salient genres of academic discourse in a contrastive perspective (German and English);

3. A selection and collection of empirical data with a clear focus and rich potential, one corpus being longitudinal and thematically unified, the other containing reviews of scholarly publications that are overtly critical and dismissive;

4. To the established socio-pragmatic approaches (with a focus on speech acts and strategies of the teacher) a methodology is added for the analysis of confrontational discourse, combining the conceptual and analytical apparatus of classical and contemporary rhetoric, analyzing not only topoi but also argumentation schemes, which by assumption reflect the cognitive structures that lead to the choice of certain linguistic devices.

5. The study refutes some traditional conceptions of academic communication in the humanities, such as: the evolutionary development of science, building on previous achievements and developing them without denying them; the unitary character of the scientific community in a discipline and the existence of consensus; the constructive character of criticism based solely on logical arguments.

6. The existence of a discipline-specific academic discourse community is called into question due to the ever-expanding interdisciplinary nature of research and the movement of scholars between different research groups and academic cultures.

The abstract correctly and accurately reflects the thesis. The contributions identified by prof. Vassileva in their entirety reflect the real contributions of her research.

Conclusion

In spite of the remarks, I cannot but note the high degree of knowledge of the state of the problem internationally and awareness of the main lines of research development in this field. The literature used corresponds to the issues at hand (despite the apparent lack of key developments in the field of argumentation and position-taking) and the work of Prof. Vassileva fits organically into the debates of the professional community. In-text citations are correct, although they follow a different logic (in footnotes or within the text). The bibliographical references at the end of the text correspond to the authors cited in the text.

The overall publishing and research activity of prof. Vassileva reveals a far more panoramic and convincing picture of a serious scholar, with significant contributions to the development of argumentation theory, the analysis of academic discourse in the field of the humanities, and linguistics in particular, contrastive and cross-cultural analysis of rhetoric and authorial positioning in academic discourse, etc. (see monographs from 2000, 2002 and 2006). The most indisputable evidence of the nuanced contributions of prof. Vassileva is the citation rate of her publications, which in their number and variety of citers, the prestige of the publications that cite her works, which unambiguously demonstrate the wide international resonance of her research.

On the basis of the overall set of publications of prof. dr. Vassileva, I recommend to the respectable scientific jury to award the candidate the degree of Doctor of Science in the field of higher education "Humanities", in the professional sphere 2.1. Philology, in the scientific specialty "General and Comparative Linguistics".

Date...........   Sign: ....

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