

REVIEW

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on the academic output submitted
in fulfillment of the requirements for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the doctoral
program "General and Comparative Linguistics", Professional Field 2.1. Philology, Field of Higher
Education 2. Humanities
Candidate: Prof. Dr. Irena Georgieva Vassileva

Order of the Rector of the New Bulgarian University, Prof. Plamen Doynov, Phil. Habil., N 3-RK-194
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This review follows the text structure and content requirements recommended by the New Bulgarian University.

1. Significance of the study in relation to its scientific and applied characteristics.

The thesis *Confrontation in Academic Communication* is of 144 pages: 6 chapters on 128 pages with 7 graphs and 3 tables integrated in the text, followed by an appendix with a list of the corpus material and bibliography including 110 sources used and cited in the thesis. The significance of the work is indisputable: a critical and analytical presentation of the topic of confrontation in academic communication based on the idea that the authors of scientific works have a different academic culture, firstly, and secondly, when the authors with such a culture write in a foreign language and must comply with the relevant foreign academic culture; misunderstanding is inevitable, there are deviations from the norm and the expectations, feeling of exoticism or lack of competence. The thesis is contrastive in its essence: negative reviews of scientific works in English and German are compared. The subject of the study is the rhetorical strategies in the two languages and their linguistic implementation, the choice of strategies, their frequency, revealing the differences of the two academic cultures, which, in fact, result from traditions, interpersonal relations, perceptions of science and other significant factors.

2. Rationale of the aims and tasks of the Thesis.

As undoubtedly an experienced scholar, Irena Vassileva is able to perceive a scientific problem and confidently and accurately formulate her goals in a study. The purpose of her work is "to investigate in detail the confrontation in academic communication in the field of linguistics based on publications from two leading cultures in modern science - the English-speaking and the German-speaking, from the point of view of the rhetorical strategies of argumentation (p. 11)" (Summary, p. 4). In addition, the thesis



reviews and analyzes the exchange of critical publications between two well-established schools of English linguistics, where deviations from generally accepted academia standards are observed, affecting the interpersonal relations of scholars.

In order to achieve her goal, the author clearly set the tasks that she had to complete (p. 11), which, of course, she diligently did.

3. Evidence that the thesis was developed independently and does not copy the topic and a significant part of the content of the work presented for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy”.

A document certifying the lack of plagiarism has not been presented by the author (such a requirement has been introduced in some Bulgarian universities.), but this in no way violates the rules for the defense of the thesis.

The present work does not in any way correspond to the topic *Conjunctions in English and Bulgarian scientific texts*, presented and defended by Vassileva when she was awarded the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy” in 1993.

4. Adequate balance between the detailed outline of the subject matter and relevance to the cited academic publications.

The choice of the topic of this paper implies not only broad and indepth knowledge of the discussed problem, but “involvement” in it. The author not only thoroughly presents the problem in two different academic cultures, but also skillfully compares the texts from the two languages, finding similarities and significant differences. All this is based on the theoretical overview she makes and her practical experience as a scientist publishing her scientific works in both languages (English and German).

5. Correct citation of a representative corpus of academic works.

I find this aspect of the assessment irrelevant to the discussion of a thesis aimed at the scientific degree “Doctor of Science”. If a work is not firmly based on correct citation and adequate use of a representative number of works by prominent scientists in the field, then it would not be a scientific work. Vassileva is among the leading scholars who fight for academic ethics and integrity, so the work under consideration is an example of correct citation and use of high quality academic sources.

6. Theoretical model of study and its implementation.

As the author herself notes on page 13 of the thesis, her research is of a contrastive nature, accordingly, her choice to use the tools of contrastive rhetoric is fundamental. The research method is the discourse analysis at the supra-sentential level. The author shares her attempt to implement the corpus-based method in her research in the fifth and sixth chapters, but this attempt failed due to the specifics of the research. Hence, she relies on the context-based method of research and analysis.

7. Correspondence between the research methodology and the goal and tasks of the thesis.

In order to implement the contrastive analysis, the author chooses classical rhetoric, and the chapter devoted to the so-called “academic war”, also includes the approaches of the modern theory of argumentation which complements the classical theory with the so-called “pragmatic theory of refutation”. With these approaches an analysis far beyond the sentence and even the paragraph level can



be done, relying on the extraction from the text of segments representing complex argumentative structures.

8. Author's contribution in the empirical data collection and analysis.

Irena Vassileva modestly lists 8 contributions of her work in the thesis summary. Briefly, they are:

1. For the first time, a comprehensive comparative analysis of the confrontation in linguistics in English and German has been done.
2. This is the first analysis of confrontation in a longitudinal aspect.
3. For the first time, reviews of scientific publications are used as the corpus of the analysis, which are of an overtly critical and rejecting nature.
4. The present work approaches the analysis of confrontational discourse, based on the methodology of classical and modern rhetoric, which results in the derivation of the rhetorical strategies and their linguistic implementation used by scholars in the humanities.
5. Both methodologies show that incorporating an analysis of argumentation schemes allows for much more interesting observations above the level of the Aristotelian topos, looking at larger organizational structures that are assumed to reflect cognitive structures as well. From a theoretical point of view, the approach of argumentative schemes has proven particularly useful for longitudinal research involving the study of publications related to each other intertextually, while other approaches, as mentioned above, remain at the level of the single argumentative element and its rhetorical and linguistic analysis. However, a critical problem with this approach proved to be the highly inferential nature of the identification and categorization of argumentation schemes and, therefore, the operationalization of the model. The problem can be solved by using more parsers to ensure coding reliability. Either way, refining and/or using a different solution could be a fruitful topic for future research.
6. The results of the research overturn some traditional notions about academic communication in the humanities, such as: the aspiration of science to develop evolutionarily, stepping on previous achievements and developing them further without rejecting them; the unified nature of the scientific community in a given discipline and the presence of consensus; the constructive nature of criticism based solely on logical arguments.
7. The dissertation thesis expresses hesitation regarding the so-called academic discourse community united around a subject due to the ever-expanding interdisciplinary nature of scientific research on the one hand and the movement of scholars between different working groups and academic cultures on the other.
8. The study proves that the analysis of confrontation in science and especially of its causes cannot remain within the framework of linguistics and rhetoric. These reasons lie in the ever-increasing competition in the conditions of globalization, in the resulting struggle for prestige and ultimately related well-being and exercise of power (Taken from the author's summary, pp. 30 - 31).

I firmly believe that, at the very least, it should be emphasized that this comparative analysis of the confrontation in academic communication in English and German, i.e., in these two different academic cultures, was made by a representative of a third academic culture, the Bulgarian one, which differs from those presented in the work. This fact further enhances the contributions of the work itself and of the author's influence in the academic community of humanities.

Contributions:

1. Brief description of the characteristic features and assessment of the plausibility of the study on which the contributions of the thesis are based.

In thoroughly practical terms, the plausibility of the presented material and its contributions can be found in the fourth and fifth chapters, in which the author examines and analyzes reviews in English



and German (Chapter 4) and reviews in English (Chapter 5), described in the *Appendix*, (pages 129 - 132). After their comparative analysis, the author has logically arrived at a number of conclusions, presented in Chapter 6 (pp. 125 - 128), which are the basis of the scientific contributions of her work.

2. Description and classification of the author's contributions.

Irena Vassileva's contributions to the humanities in general and the field of academic discourse in English and German are of a general (Contribution 3; 6; 7; 8) and particular character (Contribution 1; 2; 3; 4; 5), in a theoretical plan (Contribution 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8) and practical plan (Contribution 2; 4; 5; 8) (Summary, pp. 30 - 31).

- a) The thesis must reveal that the candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge of the relevant field and the ability for independent research.

The theoretical basis, the research corpus, the implemented research methodology, the comparison of corpora from two languages, the investigation and contrastive analysis, the conclusions drawn and the summarized contributions of the thesis prove that the author possesses the qualities listed in 2 a.

- b) The thesis must contain theory-based conclusions and solutions to academic or applied scientific problems which are original contribution to science.

The contributions in 2, 2a listed above, the theoretical basis of the work, the choice of the researched problem, the results and the conclusions confirm the authenticity and originality of the contributions of this work in linguistics.

3. Assessment of the of the author's degree of personal involvement in the contributions.

The dissertation thesis is completely authentic, with the author's typical approach and execution of a certain research problem.

4. Assessment of the compliance of the summary with the main concepts and contributions of the thesis.

The summary fully corresponds and adequately presents the content of the work, as well as its contributions to science.

Thesis impact.

1. Evaluation of the publications connected to the dissertation thesis: number, publication houses, indexed journals.

In the list of publications presented by Irena Vassileva, consists of 10 reviews, 3 monographs, 46 articles in journals and collections of papers, editor of one academic book: all of them in the period from 1993 to 2022. The predominant part of her publications, as well as her three monographs are devoted to academic discourse, academic communication, various perspectives and problems in academic writing, communication, etc. A large part of the articles have been published in prestigious refereed academic publications (The list presented by Vassileva).

With regard to the content and topics of her publication production, a tendency of narrowing the focus and interest in academic discourse, academic communication and text is observed, but expanding the range of problems in these fields which are considered from different perspectives. Undoubtedly, this is her contribution to linguistics, contrastive studies in Bulgaria and



internationally, focusing on the problem of ethics in producing scientific texts, copyright, plagiarism and anti-plagiarism. Also, the thesis has been accepted for publication at Springer - Palgrave Macmillan and is about to be released.

2. Citation and impact.

The information from the author's profile in Scopus as of April 2023 proves Vassileva's contribution and reveals her impact on an international scale. Her works have been cited 280 times; according to Google scholar from 1995 until now her works have been cited 1117 times; also, for the humanities h-index 4 is an excellent achievement. After the publication of this thesis devoted to confrontation in academic communication, and probably more publications on the topic will be published, the above data will be firmly on the rise.

Author's personal qualities.

In this part of the review, I risk violating the already precisely described and professionally discussed style of the academic text, in particular - the review, because, speaking about the personal qualities of Irena Vassileva, I must say that I have known her since the years when she was my lecturer in English Lexicology at the South-West University. What is more, she was my MA thesis reviewer when I graduated in Applied Linguistics. One cannot avoid subjectivity and emotionality when talking about memories from 25 years ago.

Prof. Vassileva's CV gives the necessary information about the range and scale of her scientific and teaching activities, of which 15 years she worked in the Department of Foreign Languages at SWU 'Neofit Rilski'. My comment on the personal qualities of the author of the dissertation is from this perspective.

Precise in her speech, balanced in the presentation of the teaching material (I still keep the notebook on lexicology), critical and strict in her evaluation of students' term papers and diploma theses, objective in the assessment, generous to the students - this is how all her students would describe her.

Regarding her teamwork and her work with the administration, Prof. Vassileva is ethical, friendly, discreet. She has proven not only with her scientific works, but also in practice that her academic mission is professional and academic ethics.

Her contribution to English studies at the South-West University is indisputable, she was one of the leading specialists teaching in the *English Philology* and *Applied Linguistics* majors during the indicated years (1996 - 2011).

Critical remarks and recommendations.

More and more academic works are on the topic of academic style, academic writing in English (and in all other languages), there is a large selection of textbooks and teaching materials on academic writing in English that teach, recommend, show how to write academic texts. The current dissertation thesis adds other perspectives and touches upon this problem, it summarizes observations on already published texts, draws new conclusions and suggests recommendations that noticeably contradict some of the prescribed rules and norms in some of the works and textbooks used by students and teachers.

I would recommend that the author consider publishing a textbook or instructional materials on academic writing in English for undergraduates and PhD students: 1) on academic writing in English for all (if possible) scientific fields and 2) for purely philological academic texts. If such a textbook is made in a comparative plan with the Bulgarian language (and why not with the German language) and is available in the university bookstores, the contribution of the scientific works under consideration will be even more noticeable and with an even greater application in the Bulgarian universities and colleges.



Conclusion.

Considering all the above, I confidently propose and vote that Irena Georgieva Vasileva be awarded the scientific degree “Doctor of Science” in the doctoral program “General and Comparative Linguistics”, Professional Field 2.1. Philology, field of higher education 2. Humanities and I suggest that the members of the scientific pannel vote in favour of Irena Vassileva.

23 June 2023

Signed:

/Assoc. Prof. Dafina Kostadinova, PhD/