

EVALUATION

of the application of Blagovesta Petkova Troeva-Chalakovska for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in

By Associate Professor Elena Borisova Tarasheva, PhD in Mathematical Linguistics, New Bulgarian University, habilitated in the field 2.1. Philology: Media Discourse, appointed member of the academic jury by order of the Rector of New Bulgarian University № 3-RK-208/13.05.2024

1. **Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms.**

This presented thesis explores the problems of adult English language learners with dyslexia in reading and writing. Given the fact that dyslexia is a disruption rather than a barrier to the development of language skills, the research is important and necessary for the practice of language teaching. The thesis offers important insights into at least three areas:

Firstly, the psycholinguistic mechanisms of reading and writing as processes are elucidated through literature review and the specifics of the processes for dyslexic individuals are highlighted. The features of dyslexia at the biological and neuropsychological levels are traced, as well as its development at different ages and manifestations in learning English as a foreign language. Thirdly, the choice of a toolkit to investigate the difficulties of people with dyslexia is motivated by a review of existing work on the subject. These phases demonstrate a desire to raise language teaching to a level of high scholarly awareness by introducing research advances in associated areas outside the domain of foreign language learning and teaching. The doctoral student has ventured into the complex field of psychology and described ten models of language processing in the brain, thus enriching the field of methodology with necessary and essential interdisciplinary knowledge.

Data collection is not easy given the hard task of finding informants who admit to being dyslexic and are also English language learners. Nevertheless, data were collected and conscientiously and competently processed, on the basis of which a synthesis of reading and writing difficulties was formulated. The practical step has also been taken to develop guidelines that facilitate teaching people with dyslexia. With these steps, we see teaching at its best - an informed, motivated and reflective activity.

2. **Justification of the aims and objectives of the dissertation.**

The aim is formulated in terms of the specific teaching of English to dyslexic people. Written and oral tests are used to identify the problems. In devising the tests, exceptional knowledge is demonstrated of both the structure of the two languages in comparative terms and of typographical features that facilitate reading for dyslexic people - such as type and size of fonts, etc. Semi-structured interviews are also conducted with participants to further clarify reading and writing difficulties. The self-reflective

model is preferred, although it is more difficult to analyse as it provides more material to clarify people's difficulties. Procedures for analysing the data are created. The knowledge of mathematical models for statistical data processing, especially the use of median, is positively impressive. This broadens the candidate's scope to more beyond pedagogical and linguistic knowledge and allows for independence in her work as an educator.

The formulation of eleven goals may be seen as too ambitious and it is also a distraction for the attention of the researcher. Additionally, there are seventeen hypotheses, ten of which relate to the first research goal. The seeding of numerous objectives indicates a highly elaborate approach to the research design, but also too many pointers to follow at the implementation stage. Certainly, there is no way that all research is straight-forward and easy to follow. It is likely that the difficulties in forming a study group lead to a desire to accomplish as many goals as possible with the informants painstakingly found. The fact is that the researcher has dealt with a complex situation, where most of the complication was self-imposed. But in the end, the set goals are mirrored in the conclusions: what was formulated as objectives and hypotheses is finally reported in the conclusions, thus the research is successfully implemented and leads to the desired results.

3. Conformity between the chosen methodology and research methodology and the set aim and objectives of the dissertation.

From my area of expertise, I would note some disagreement on the term "error analysis". The authors of Error Analysis Theory, Pit Corder and Larry Selinker, created a model for teaching language that negates the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis whereby theoretical comparisons of which language units are different in two language systems and therefore more difficult for learners. The Error Analysis model is a type of linguistic analysis of the structures that learners get wrong; it involves data collection, classification according to an established taxonomy, and analysis and identification of the language fields which learners mistake. It is not an analysis of the mistakes in a test. The mistakes in a test are not the systematic errors in the sense that Selinker and Corder discuss, and certainly not identifiable in a single experiment. Rather, error analysis is a philosophical framework, including designing and conducting a study – very similar to Troeva's, without the final stages of identifying the errors and using Corder's taxonomy. Troeva's thesis presented here chooses Bioecological Systems Theory as its philosophical framework, instead.

4. Theoretical and applied contributions of the dissertation (description and evaluation), including the presence of original contributions to science.

The presented work is a continuation of the candidate's Master's Thesis, which also presents the topic of language learning for people with dyslexia. The research interest in doing more than just teaching but also selecting and researching the material and methodology reveals an enduring interest in the creative approach to teaching. It achieves an informed and reflective attitude, supported by knowledge of a wide range of related disciplines. This creates a new image of the teacher as a person with a wealth of knowledge, research experience and motivated to use scholarship for the sake of an effective and respectful education for learners.

5. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they have been published.

The candidate has submitted seven publications on the topic: two in the yearbooks of the NBU Department of Languages and Cultures, two in the ESNBU journal, one in the refereed journal *Pedagogy* and one each in the publications of the Shumen and Varna universities. The enduring focus on the topic of Learning foreign languages by people with dyslexia is remarkable, as well as the coverage of various aspects of the problem, and the practical orientation of the research reported by the publications.

Also presented are 14 articles quoting Troeva's publications from Turkey, Spain, Russia, Nigeria and India. Given that the publications were made in NBU journals, the geographical scope is impressive.

The PhD student's articles have also been cited in eight dissertations from Lithuania, South Africa, UK, Congo, Australia, Dubai and Croatia. The candidate has obviously established herself as a respected and valued scholar in the field of specialised pedagogy.

6. Opinions, recommendations, and comments.

The broad competency and research skills demonstrated emphasise once again the need to raise the authority and recognize the scholarly value of the work of language instructors. Obviously, the citations come from scholars abroad and not from Bulgaria. It is time for Troeva-Chalakovska to lay the foundations of her own school of thought in language pedagogy for special groups of learners, a circle of academic followers whose research will give impetus to the teaching of foreign languages not only in the world but also in this country.

7. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of the dissertation.

The candidate clearly fulfils and at points even exceeds the requirements for the award of the academic and research qualification Doctor of Philosophy. The documents presented here manifest a preparedness for scholarly work, knowledge of the subject matter, and exceptional discipline and motivation, therefore I recommend that she is given the degree of PhD.

Date: June 7th 2024

Signed
Elena Tarasheva