

## R E V I E W

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professional field 1.3. *The Pedagogy of Education in ...*

(subject area: *The Methodology of English Language Teaching*)

of the thesis "*Integrating Applied Linguistics approaches and modern competences in the ESP courses for students of Agricultural Science and Arts*"

submitted by **Bardha Gashi** for obtaining the Ph.D. degree

in the professional field 2.1. *Philology* (subject area: *Germanic Languages, English*)

Bardha Gashi's Ph.D. thesis is entitled *Integrating Applied Linguistics approaches and modern competences in the ESP courses for students of Agricultural Science and Arts* and it comprises 191 pages and five appendices amounting to 12 pages (providing an insight into the data collection tools used in the empirical research). The main body of the thesis consists of six chapters presenting the results from the critical survey of the literature on the matter, the discussion of empirical research findings and the author's recommendations for improving the quality of education in the ESP courses at the Faculties of Agribusiness and Arts at her university (which is the main object of her research), as well as a reference list with about 100 entries (incl. relevant documents and reference books, such as dictionaries). The thesis also incorporates 24 tables, 15 graphs (incl. pie-charts) and 8 figures with research data.

The Ph.D. thesis is written in English, but unfortunately Bardha Gashi's language command is not very good and this often impairs the understanding of her own arguments (for instance see the first paragraph on p. 32, but similar problems can be observed on almost every page when Bardha Gashi goes into the specificity of the topic and discusses the nature of ESP teaching in Kosovo and ESP course design at her university). Against that background, the passages which she has lifted verbatim from the sources she used in the writing up of her research – often without formatting them as citations and not providing reference to the source<sup>1</sup> (or the source is acknowledged but it is missing from the bibliography at the end<sup>2</sup>) – really stand out. When Bardha Gashi's Ph.D. thesis was submitted to PlagScan for detection of plagiarism, the analysis yielded a 17.7% overlap with published documents, a relatively high result for any scientific work, requiring a further closer

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<sup>1</sup> See for example pp. 35-37, where the content of 2.2.1. *The concept-oriented approach* and 2.2.2. *The context-oriented approach* is plagiarised from Christopher Gledhill & Natalie Kübler's 2016 article "What can linguistic approaches bring to English for Specific Purposes?", or p. 65, where the last paragraph is copied verbatim from Hussein Ibrahim's 2019 article "The Role of an Ideal ESP Practitioner", available at <[https://www.scirp.org/html/4-1640748\\_91749.htm](https://www.scirp.org/html/4-1640748_91749.htm)>.

<sup>2</sup> See for example pp. 46-47 - **Table 5. Hutchinson and Waters' Framework Vs Munby's Model** (Songhori, 2008: 8), where there's no entry for Songhori in the Bibliography, or p. 62 - **Figure 8. The classification of ESP by experience; Robinson (1991)**, where again there's no reference for Robinson in the Bibliography, and no page quoted.

examination of her text. Human intervention revealed a considerable degree of similarity (even in the rhetorical structure of the text) between Bardha Gashi's dissertation and Nawal Mebitil's Ph.D. thesis entitled *An Exploration of the Main Difficulties, Challenges and Requirements of the ESP Teaching Situation in Algeria: The Case of ESP Teachers at Abou-Bekr Belkaid University, Tlemcen*, which appears in the reference list at the end as an "Unpublished Magister Thesis", but in the body of the text there is no direct reference to it anywhere. Not surprisingly, the authors mentioned in the "borrowed" excerpts are not included in the Bibliography at the end either<sup>3</sup>. These rip-offs from other sources are so blind and undiscriminating that Bardha Gashi talks about herself as "I" on one page (p. 65) and then as "the researcher" on the next (p. 66); or the same content/ argument appears twice within the same section in slightly different version (see p. 62 and p. 64 "*David Carter (1983) too identifies three types of ESP: ... / Carter (1983) mentions three types of ESP Courses ...*" or p. 3 and p. 14 "*What qualifies as ESP and what are the most relevant skills in ESP are crucial to the theory and practice of ESP. However most linguists would agree that it is the third issue<sup>4</sup>, with its focus on the forms of language, which lies at the heart of the linguistic approach to ESP.*"). Often, when Bardha Gashi does try to acknowledge the source, a lack of skills for academic referencing is revealed (e.g. on p. 50 Mary Schleppegell and Brenda Bowman's 1986 publication "Teaching English for Specific Purposes" is attributed to the publisher, which happens to be Peace Corps: "*As defined by the Peace Corps (1986) the learners come ...*", and neither the authors nor the publisher/ Peace Corps appear in the Bibliography), or a lack for formatting the citation in the text (e.g. pp. 66-67 "... *In this regard, Brinton et al (1989): In a content-based approach, activities of the language class are specific to the subject matter being taught, and are geared to stimulate students to think and learn through the use of the target language. ...*" – there are no inverted commas to indicate the range of the quote and the text goes on from page to page).

This lack of academic skills for critical review of the literature on the topic and technical oversight on part of the Ph.D. student leave their imprint on the whole of the dissertation and strengthen the impression of patchiness/ incoherence (there is a big amount of irrelevant information – e.g. whole sections with many instances of unacknowledged borrowings like 1.1.1. The acronyms in ESP, 2.4. ESP EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT; or discussion of "the related sub-fields of Applied Linguistics to foreign language teaching and learning" /p.34/ and the description of the CEFR and explanation of the six levels of language proficiency /pp.100-102/, the detailed discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of various research tools, e.g. interviews, the Likert scales, etc. in 3.6.

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<sup>3</sup> e.g. Richards and Schmidt, 2010; Richards, 2012; Richards, 2001; Richards and Rodgers, 1996; Jijajing, 2007; Tudor, 2005; English, 1998; Peraldi, 2012; Resche, 2013, Robinson 1991; Spolsky, 1998 and many others.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of this rip-off (on p.14) it is not clear which the "the third issue" is.

INSTRUMENTATION, etc.), incompleteness (e.g. there is no section in Bardha Gashi's thesis focusing on elucidating the meaning of "*modern competences in ESP*" – a term which appears in the title of her dissertation) and uncritical approach to the theoretical tenets discussed (her argumentation is often a string of quotations left without any critical comment on her part).

Such academic lapse and technical oversight on part of the Ph.D. student and her supervisor leave a bad taste in our mouth and spoil the good impression of the otherwise well-structured and independently conducted scientific study of a truly topical and locally significant applied linguistics problem – the ESP teaching in Kosovo and in particular the quality of ESP courses at the departments of Agribusiness, Music and Film Directing at "Haxhi Zeka" University. Her empirical study, based on careful examination of the syllabi and the actual content of the ESP courses, as well as a comprehensive needs analysis of all the stakeholders in the educational process, and aiming at helping "*teachers to function more adequately in their target situation, i.e., ESP, to respond positively to the demands of the study programs, and to meet students' needs and increase course attendance and learning outcomes*" (p.25), is among the most significant contributions of her Ph.D. thesis. The methodological framework is neatly designed and the methods and procedures of data collection (incl. instrument triangulation for increasing the validity of the findings) are appropriate for addressing the research problem and reveal interesting traits in the empirical data (it could only be argued that the comparison between the results of the students on the EGP placement test at the start and their performance on the ESP achievement test at the end is inapt, but it should be admitted that the conclusions drawn by Bardha Gashi are logical and they do not overgeneralise the pattern which is even intuitively felt by her, namely that students with higher level of language proficiency at the start progress better during the ESP course). Research findings are systematically discussed in the defined context and the inferences are pertinent and clearly drawn from the results of the data analysis: they point out to the various limitations in the ESP course content and the deficiencies in its delivery, as well as confirm the need for the introduction of preliminary language courses for students with insufficient knowledge of English to help them perform better on the ESP courses and function smoothly in the foreign tongue in their professional contexts. The recommendations which Bardha Gashi offers at the end of her thesis (pp. 144-146) for improving the quality of teaching and learning on the ESP courses at the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Agribusiness at "Haxhi Zeka" University are practice-oriented and could directly benefit the teachers and programme designers in the field.

Finally, it should be noted that the abstract reflects the main content of the Ph.D. thesis (justifiably focusing on the empirical study), and Bardha Gashi's publications on the topic of her research meet the Ph.D. degree conferring requirements.

In conclusion, on the basis of everything stated above, I recommend that the Ph.D. thesis be returned to Bardha Gashi for revision and for undertaking corrective action to eliminate the identified problems (e.g. remove irrelevant passages, extend the literature survey to include at least a working definition of "*modern competences in ESP*", acknowledge all used sources appropriately, etc.), as well as allow her to have her dissertation proofread by a native speaker in order to improve its academic style. In accordance with article 15 (2) under the NBU Directive for Academic Staff Development, the Ph.D. student can be given a period of up to a year for corrective action and then be granted the chance to defend her revised thesis again.

24 June 2020

Signature:



/доц. д-р Св. Димитрова-Гюзелева/