



NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

EVALUATION

OF THE APPLICATION OF PROF. IRENA GEORGIEVA VASILEVA, PhD,
for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF ARTS
in the Professional Field 2.1. Philology

TOPIC: "Confrontation in Academic Communication"

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appointed member of the academic jury by order of the Rector of New Bulgarian University N
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1. Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms.

Prof. Irena Vassileva's research sets as its main **goal** „to elucidate the argumentation strategies employed by linguists in voicing criticism, to look for some explanations for confrontation in academic discourse and to evaluate the positive and/or negative effects it has on international academic communication" (p. 9). The significance of the research problem lies in the contrastive analysis of the confrontation in academic book reviews in English and German which has never been done so far and the conclusions about the culture-specific peculiarities of the two discourse communities. In applied terms, as underlined by the author, "The results of the study could further be used to sensitize scholars' awareness of the functions and consequences of confrontation, as well as for the creation of teaching materials for scholars" (p. 13).

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

The study defines some narrower aims/practical tasks (p. 11) of which the most valuable and well-supported is the analysis of “the preference for certain argumentation schemes and topoi” in book reviews.

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

The theoretical basis for choosing the research methodology is justified on pp. 14-17. As a result, the methodology employed in the study is a combination of two contrastive discourse analysis methods, i.e. contrastive rhetoric and argumentation theory. The grounds for employing these two methods are explained in details in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Thus, the chosen methodology contributes to the reliability and representativeness of the research and is a solid basis for conducting the analysis and drawing some conclusions. The research proves skills in conducting critical literature review and expert selection of research corpus.

The research corpus comprises 10 academic book reviews with a negative character in English and German – 10 for each language, as well as 12 review articles and book reviews including replies to reviews in English that are closely related to one another and represent two mutually exclusive, in the authors’ opinion, schools of linguistics.

The **dissertation content** is of 146 pages, which include: the theoretical part; the bibliography of 12 pages and 110 references; and Appendix with the source texts for the book reviews. The content of the thesis is structured in six chapters and gradually the author fulfils the objectives of the research – from presenting the background of the research problem (Chapter 3), through the summary of the types of topoi used as instruments of argumentation and their frequency in academic book reviews (Chapter 4), culminating in the case study of the 'academic war' with the exemplification of the various types of argumentation schemes in the research corpus (Chapter 5).

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

The topic of confrontation in academic communication is approached critically and despite relying on other linguists' theoretical arguments, Dr Vassileva is not afraid to reach her own conclusions based on the contrastive discourse analysis of the classification of topoi which is done systematically and meticulously supported with examples from the book reviews. The selection of the book reviews has been done not with an application of search/statistical software, but manually, which deserves mentioning since it requires tedious selection of negative/critical reviews which are much less common in both English and German linguistics.

Another contribution is the introduction of the term 'academic war' which is done with the purpose of examining the characteristic features of the conflict academic exchanges on the example of reviews exchanges between the pro- and anti-Critical Discourse Analysis linguistic schools. Analysing the critical argumentation schemes, the author proves that the main differences between the two opposing schools are of theoretical character and that the most frequently used topoi in the corpus is the topos from the person, accounting for 57% of the topoi. The comprehensive summary of the characteristic features of the 'academic war' (pp. 121-124) which is the result of the analysis of numerous examples ranks high in the theoretic contributions of the research. Some of the conclusions are: the language is highly personalized; switching between pronouns is done with the purpose of engaging the readers in a dialogue; authors involved in the 'academic war' are, or regard themselves, as 'authorities' and therefore do not resort to other specialists; refutations dominate overwhelmingly in the argumentation schemes; metaphors and irony are employed.

Although the analysis of the confrontation is based on Aristotelian theory of argumentation with its modern clarifications by e.g. McElholm and Eggs' classification of argumentation into three types, Vassileva's contribution is in specifying the most typical topoi in both English and German negative book reviews and supporting them with examples. Contrastive statistical review of the topoi is followed by author's explanations and summarizing which add insights into the nature of academic confrontations between linguists in particular. For instance, one of the research observations is the frequent use of 'personal attacks' in English which contradicts older (from 1985) statement that the English-speaking academic discourse community is more tolerant than the German-speaking one.

One of the practical contributions is the examination of the functions and structure of the genre of the book review and guidelines for reviewers which can be applied for academic purposes (e.g. for students majoring in applied linguistics at university level).

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

The research on the topic of confrontation in academic communication has been considered for publishing by Palgrave Macmillan. The list of publications includes one book, two articles, and six papers from conferences. All publications have received reviews upon publication. The Scopus database reports one article in refereed professional journal, 1 citing of an article from the list of publications and 280 citings altogether.

6. Comments, recommendations and suggestions


The candidate demonstrates mastery in applying research methods for analyzing linguistic phenomena which have not been paid enough attention and in reaching conclusions supported by evidence. Skills are demonstrated in comparing and contrasting, conducting a case study, and corpus selection and analysis. This study can be used as a model for similar contrastive analysis of academic confrontation in other languages.

Yet, as Vassileva admits, the identification and categorisation of the argumentation schemes, which determine the research analysis, are of highly inferential character and we cannot but agree with her suggestion to resolve the problem in similar future studies by using multiple judges in order to ensure inter-coder reliability.

As a recommendation I would suggest relying on academic dictionaries or authoritative linguists when providing definitions, e.g. *critical* (p. 22), *critique* (p. 23), *confrontation* (p. 25) instead of referring to Wikipedia.

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

Taking into account the fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Arts, as well as the high quality of the research presented by the candidate, I recommend that the Scientific Jury assess the dissertation on the topic of "Confrontation in Academic Communication" positively and award the candidate, Irena Vasileva PhD, the degree „Doctor of Arts" in the Professional Field 2.1. Philology.

Signature:.....

/Assoc. Prof. Valentina Georgieva, PhD/

19.07.2023

Sofia