

## REVIEW

By Prof. Dr. Diana Yankova, New Bulgarian University, scientific field 2.1. Philology, for the degree of Doctor of Science, doctoral programme "General and Comparative Linguistics", NBU, professional field - 2.1. Philology, member of the academic panel by order of the Rector of New Bulgarian University № 3-RK-194/28.04.2023

of the dissertation by Prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva on '**Confrontation in Academic Communication**'

### **Significance of the research topic in scientific and applied terms**

The research question is significant since the topic under consideration has not been developed in a comparative aspect (English - German) and is hardly covered globally, where existing publications are mainly focused on the English language. For the first time, the methodology of Aristotelian rhetoric, complemented by that of contemporary rhetoric, is used to investigate the argumentative strategies used by authors of reviews of scientific publications with a strong negative nature. At the same time, in the last decade there has been a growing interest among linguists around the world in the ways and means of expressing academic criticism and its impact on the development of science, the academic community, and relationships within it.

The aims and objectives are clearly and precisely formulated in terms of the content and scope of the analysis, its results and their application.

### **Knowledge of the state of the problem and relevance of the literature used**

Vassileva is clearly well acquainted with the academic literature on the topic, as she relied on a sufficiently large number of authors in the process of analysis as well as in the theoretical review. The approach in dealing with the sources is critical and demonstrates the author's ability to extract what is relevant from the available publications in accordance with the specific objectives of the research. Citations and references in the text are correct. The number of sources according to the reference list is sufficiently large and the publications are relevant to the topic, aim and objectives of the study.

### **Presence of a substantiated and developed theoretical model of the study**

The study presents a broad theoretical base, critically examining the latest developments in contrastive rhetoric, the relevance of the concept of "academic discursive community", the role of intertextuality in academic communication, intercultural differences and the problems they

lead to in international communication. In addition, as directly related to the topic, the publications and different perspectives on the place of the evaluative element in academic communication and its linguistic realization are reviewed and the notions of "critique" are clarified. The meanings and scope of notions of culture, culture of academic discipline and 'community of practice' (a group of scholars from different disciplines working on a particular task) are also discussed.

The genre of "scholarly book review," its formal and functional characteristics, and its historical development are examined in detail. Special attention is paid to the role of the author of the review - their motives for writing, ethical aspects, academic status and a number of other factors.

### **Correspondence between the chosen research methodology and the set aims and objectives of the dissertation**

The choice of Aristotelian and modern rhetoric as the methodological basis of the study is completely innovative and provides a comprehensive scope of parameters that influence the identification of argumentative strategies used by negative review authors. Furthermore, this approach allows for the analysis of whole passages of texts linked into argumentative structures, going far beyond the sentence and even the paragraph. In this regard, this methodology is compared with corpus-based approaches, concluding that, at least at this stage of the development of corpus-based methods, they are not precise and detailed enough for the purposes of such an analysis. In short, both the chosen methodology and the research methods meet the objectives of the study.

### **Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation (description and evaluation), including the presence of an original contribution to science**

The material that serves as the basis for the analysis in the study consists of publications in English and German (book reviews and responses to them) that are generally available and have been published in leading journals in the respective languages. In addition, the results are presented in an easily understandable manner through a number of clearly structured graphs and tables, which facilitates understanding for readers.

This dissertation is unique insofar as no systematic research has been conducted on the nature of confrontation in academic communication against the backdrop of the increasing importance of competition and power struggles characteristic of our current globalized societies. The issues the author raises are important because controversy, depending on the circumstances, can accelerate or, conversely, impede scholarly progress. If we know more about the argumentative strategies employed in the 'academic wars', then we can conduct the development of scientific knowledge more effectively. The results of this research therefore have a social significance.

The thesis, although small in length, leads to important findings and contributions. First of all, it points out the main difference between the English-speaking and the German-speaking academic community where, due to cultural, social and historical factors, in the former case academic controversies seem to be much more intolerant and acute and also show personal attacks. Second, the two main chapters, 5 and 6, apply two methodologies, both of which are

important because of their differences. Especially the application of argument analysis in Chapter 6, based on Walton's approach to argumentation schemes, is new and innovative in the context of the work. Third, the dissertation paves the way for future research in several respects. Furthermore, the author's results can be used in teaching, as well as in training scholars to reflect on the nature of confrontational discourse more consciously than they have done so far.

Last but not least, the study is of a highly interdisciplinary nature. It is related to pragmatics, argumentation theory, discourse analysis, rhetoric and sociolinguistics. Since it is written in readable language, in addition to researchers in these fields, its readership can also include undergraduate and graduate students.

Although she draws on previous publications on the issue, Irena Vassileva uses them skillfully and critically to support new analyses and conclusions. Going into even the smallest details of the data shows that the author has made a great effort and worked independently.

The abstract clearly and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation and its contributions.

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

Three publications are listed that directly address particular aspects of the dissertation. Two of these are articles in refereed and indexed, leading journals in the field, and the third is a book published in Germany. All publications are in English. This demonstrates the interest in the topic developed by Vassileva in recent years. In addition, she has participated in six international conferences with papers on the topic of her dissertation. In a note at the end of the abstract, she states that, "The limited number of publications directly resulting from the dissertation is due to the copyright requirements of Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, with whom the thesis has been contracted to be published as a monograph." Overall, there are many articles in the full list of publications that are indirectly related to the dissertation topic and demonstrate the development of Vassileva's interests in intercultural academic communication.

#### **Citations by other authors, reviews in the academic press, etc.**

The applicant has indicated a sample of citations from SCOPUS, where the reference shows that there are more than 280 citations, all of them by foreign authors. According to Google Scholar, there are 1120 citations. These data show that Irena Vassileva is one of the most cited Bulgarian linguists abroad.

#### **Personal qualities of the author**

I have known Irena Vassileva since 1997, when we started working at the same institution. Her academic career, albeit somewhat untypical for Bulgarian standards, is characterized by a diversity of countries and universities where she has taught (besides Bulgaria, also in Germany and the UK). She has received numerous research grants from various foundations, and here I will mention only the leading Humboldt Foundation, where, in addition to being an individual fellow, she has also been the leading scholar of two international research projects. She worked as a researcher at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and was awarded the second

doctoral degree "Dr.p-Phil. habil." in German-speaking countries after a dissertation defense procedure at the University of Leipzig.

Last but not least, Prof. Vassileva's research led to the development of a project that won a competition for funding by the National Research Fund at the end of 2022, of which she is the leading researcher.

### **Recommendations and comments**

One problem that the dissertation could have addressed is that a currently fashionable topic in such "academic wars" is "pseudoscience" or "fake news": participants can accuse each other of putting forward "unscientific" views. How would the author distinguish between "bad science", "pseudoscience" and "science" in terms of the arguments she has analysed? Clarifying this question would link the development to a modern topic discussed in the media, and thus contribute to the wider public use of this thesis. This remark can also be considered as a recommendation for future research within the general topic.

### **Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of the dissertation**

My overall assessment of the dissertation, the abstract and the publications by Prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva is positive. She has proved to be an established scholar and well known abroad in her field. The dissertation contains both theoretical and applied contributions. The structure and content of the submitted dissertation and abstract fully comply with the requirements of the relevant legislation and its implementing regulations at NBU. This gives me grounds to propose that the degree of Doctor of Science be awarded to Prof. Dr. Irena Vassileva in professional field 2.1. Philology.

Date: 19.06.2023 г.

Signed:

Prof. Diana Yankova, PhD