

REVIEW

By Prof. Irena Georgieva Vassileva, PhD, New Bulgarian University

of the dissertation for the acquirement of the educational and scientific degree "PhD"

in: Area of Higher Education: 2. Humanities, Professional Field: 2.1. Philology, PhD programme:
„Germanic Languages: English Language”

Author: Polina Petkova

Topic: Hedging in Academic Writing: Explorations into English and Bulgarian Research Articles

Supervisor: *none*

1. General description of the submitted materials

By order No. **ПД-21-233/ 06.02.2023** of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to participate in a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on „**Hedging in Academic Writing: Explorations into English and Bulgarian Research Articles**“ for the acquirement of the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in: Area of Higher Education: 2. Humanities, Professional Field: 2.1. Philology, PhD programme: „Germanic Languages: English Language”. The author of the dissertation is Polina Petkova - independent doctoral student at the Department of "English Philology" with supervisor - none.

The set of materials presented by Polina Petkova electronically is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU and includes the following documents:

- an application form to the Rector of the PU to start the procedure for the defense of a dissertation thesis;
- curriculum vitae in European format;
- minutes from the department meeting related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation thesis;
- dissertation thesis;
- an extended abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the submitted documents;

The doctoral student has submitted 3 articles.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Polina Petkova graduated in "English Philology" - bachelor's degree in 2011 and a master's degree in "Translation and Business Communications" in 2012 at PU. From 2019 to 2022, she was a doctoral student at the Department of English Philology at PU, and from 2021 to 2022 she was a Fulbright Scholar at Georgetown University, Washington, USA. During this stay in the USA, she worked on her dissertation. She teaches various disciplines in the department and has participated in national and international projects.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

The topic of the dissertation is relevant both in scientific and applied terms. As the author rightly points out in the Introduction, while the phenomenon of hedging in the scientific text has been studied in great detail and from various theoretical perspectives in relation to the English language, as well as in other languages, almost no attention has been paid to it for the Bulgarian language. The same applies to the structure of the scientific article. At the same time, these are problems that are becoming more and more important now, when Bulgarian scholars are trying to become "transparent" in the international scientific space, publishing in English as well.

4. Knowledge of the problem

The candidate demonstrates a very good knowledge of the literature on the problem and offers an extremely detailed overview in Chapter 2. Polina Petkova's ability to critically follow the chronological development of the studies, their interrelationship, advantages and disadvantages, becomes evident here - a quality that is absolutely necessary for a scholar. The latter especially refers to the critical analysis of the possibilities of using the "Hedge-o-matic" methodology, which the author has tested and rejected as unsuitable for the purposes of an in-depth study.

5. Methodology of the study

The selected methodology stems from the set goals and objectives of the dissertation thesis, namely: to investigate the means of expressing hedging in the English and Bulgarian languages and to compare them both by type and by distribution within the individual parts of the scientific article. The author chooses to employ the methodology proposed by Hyland (1998) as the most suitable for the analysis. I regard this choice as a very good one, especially considering the fact that this methodology has been used in a number of other studies of other languages, making the results of the present study comparable to similar ones.

6. Characteristic features and evaluation of the thesis

The introductory chapter of the dissertation successfully introduces the topic and justifies both the doctoral student's personal interest in the problem and the need for such research. It is emphasized that, despite numerous developments on the topic of *hedging*, there is still no consensus on the definition of the concept and its scope. This chapter briefly outlines the content of the dissertation as a whole, which helps the reader to navigate the text.

Chapter two is devoted to the literature review which, as I mentioned above, is very detailed and at the same time critical. Part **2.2.** dwells on the development of the concept of hedging, paying attention to practically all theoretical approaches to its research from the 1970s until now. Part **2.3.** examines the genre of the scientific article with a focus on John Swales' foundation-laying theory, as well as the relatively few publications on the issue about the Bulgarian language. In part **2.4.** the theory underlying the Hedge-o-matic project is presented, and its applicability to contrastive analyses is critically analyzed.

In **Chapter three**, the methodology of the study is presented, where in part **3.2.** the sources of data (articles in English and Bulgarian) are described with justification for their choice. The preliminary procedures for preparing and processing the corpus are also described. In part **3.6.** the author includes her own pilot study based on the "Hedge-o-matic" approach. This is followed by an introduction to the aforementioned methodology developed by Hyland and the rationale for its selection for the purpose of the investigation.

Chapters four and five move on to the actual analysis of the research data. The two chapters are structured in parallel / identically, with the focus in the fourth chapter on the English articles, and in the fifth - on the Bulgarian ones. The quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the use of hedging are examined, starting from their general frequency, moving to their individual manifestations at the linguistic level (passive / active verbs, personal pronouns, adverbs and adjectives, modal verbs, phrasal units, quotations), after which the focus is placed on the pragmatic function and distribution in the individual parts of the scientific article. Without dwelling on the results in more detail, I will note here that the analysis was carried out in a clear logical sequence, with exceptional meticulousness and precision.

Chapter six briefly summarizes the results of the analysis for the two languages and makes a detailed comparison of the use of hedging, again following the scheme of the previous chapters. Explanations of the observed phenomena and their causes are offered, which are sought in the accepted standards for writing a scientific text in the respective communities, on the one hand, and in the individual preferences (idiosyncrasy) of the authors, on the other.

7. Contributions and significance of the study for science and practice

The contributions of the dissertation are outlined by the author in Chapter Seven where, as a theoretical contribution, the author emphasizes that contrastive studies of this nature contribute to clarifying the concept of hedging. Attention is rightly drawn to the fact that this term has not yet found a suitable equivalent in the Bulgarian language. From a methodological point of view, the stages of selection and application of the relevant methodology are mentioned. The indisputable necessity of teaching the ways, means and functions of hedging for both the Bulgarian and English languages is noted. This is also one of the perspectives for implementing the results of the study in practice. Other suggestions for theoretical research are proposed in point 7.6., which are definitely promising.

In fact, this is the first comprehensive study of the phenomenon of hedging in English and Bulgarian, and despite the limited volume of corpus, it provides a good starting position for further development of the problem, especially for the Bulgarian language. The extremely detailed critical overview of the publications on the subject is very useful in this sense, which is also evident from the very appropriately selected bibliography.

8. Evaluation of the publications based on the dissertation.

The publications are parts of the dissertation that have been promoted at national scientific events and published in proceedings.

9. Personal contribution of the doctoral student

The study has been carried out entirely by the doctoral student.

10. Extended abstract

The extended abstract is submitted in English and Bulgarian and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation, as well as meeting the requirements of the relevant regulations.

11. Critical notes and suggestions

The claim on page 12 that contrastive research on hedging is dominated by the comparison of English with German is not entirely accurate at present – Google Scholar gives virtually equal numbers of publications for English and German, and English and Chinese. In addition, there is a growing number of publications relating to languages such as Turkish and Arabic. As for the theoretical models used in all these studies, they are based on the theoretical models about the English language.

In Chapter 4, where the English corpus is analysed, the impersonal sentences introduced by "There is / are" and the so-called empty subject "It" should also have been included, since they are also very frequently used devices for depersonalizing academic discourse.

It is not very clear what exactly is meant by the expression of hedging by reference – the very fact of referencing, the use of the so-called reporting verbs, or something else. The choice of verbs to introduce a quotation is a large topic in itself, as it also indicates the writer's attitude towards the quoted or its author and is used as an *argumentum ad verecundiam* (argument from authority) which may be relevant or irrelevant and misleading.

In connection with the analysis of the Bulgarian corpus, the absence of reflexive constructions, which are a strong means of depersonalization, is striking. This can lead to distortions when comparing with English, where, for example, there are more modal constructions, which are perhaps compensated by reflexives in the Bulgarian language. I cannot agree, either, with the suggestion that in Bulgaria it matters which institution a given scholar comes from, since the so-called discursive community is too small for differences to emerge.

Moreover, the conclusion claims that the phenomenon of hedging is neglected in pedagogical practice. Especially in the UK, it is strongly emphasized in all Academic English courses, with relevant materials provided.

Some of the above remarks could be taken into account before a possible publication of the dissertation, and others could be the subject of separate studies.

12. Personal impression

I have no personal impressions of the candidate.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific and applied results which represent an original contribution to scholarship and meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the relevant Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral student Polina Petkova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Germanic languages: English language" by demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research. No plagiarism has been detected.

In view of the above, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, the dissertation thesis, extended abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I therefore propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "PhD" to Polina Petkova in: Area of Higher Education: 2. Humanities, Professional Field: 2.1. Philology, PhD programme: „Germanic Languages: English Language”.

10.02.2023

Reviewer:

(signature)

Prof. Irena Vassileva, PhD