

OPINION

given by **Assoc. Prof. Tsveta Hristova Luizova-Horeva, PhD**
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on the dissertation presented for award of a **PhD** degree
in higher education area **2. Humanities**,
professional field: **2.1. Philology**,
doctoral programme: **Germanic Languages: English**.

Author: Polina Nikolaeva Petkova

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

Dissertation Supervisor: *none*

1. General description of the procedure and the PhD student

Pursuant to Order № RD-21-233 of 06 Feb. 2023 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I have been appointed member of the scientific jury in the procedure for the defence of a dissertation entitled “Hedging in Academic Writing: Explorations into English and Bulgarian Research Articles” towards the award of a PhD degree in higher education area 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, doctoral programme: Germanic Languages: English. The dissertation has been written by Polina Petkova, PhD student on an independent study basis at the Department of English Philology, without a dissertation supervisor.

The set of materials presented by Polina Petkova in electronic form is in accordance with art. 36 (1) of PU’s Regulations on the Academic Staff Development and includes the following documents: an application to PU’s Rector for opening the procedure for the PhD thesis defence, a European format CV, minutes from the meeting of the department’s council where the readiness for the start of the procedure was reported and the dissertation was subjected to a preliminary discussion, the dissertation, a dissertation summary in Bulgarian and English, a list of the author’s scientific publications related to the dissertation topic, copies of these publications and a declaration of originality and authenticity of the documents attached.

P. Petkova graduated from the Bachelor’s programme in English Philology and the Master’s programme in Translation and Business Communications at the Department of English Philology of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. She spent a study period at Loughborough University in Britain under the Erasmus programme. From 2021 to 2022, she specialised at Georgetown University in the USA for the purpose of elaborating her PhD thesis. She worked as an English language teacher and translator for private companies. In her capacity as part-time teacher, and later as full-time assistant professor and lecturer at the Department of English Philology, she has taught sociolinguistics, practical English and optional courses in the area of linguistics at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. She has participated in international projects, scientific conferences and workgroups, and in the organisation of scientific events and graduation ceremonies at the Faculty of Philology.

2. Topicality of the research

The dissertation is focused on a topic that has attracted the interest of linguists working in various theoretical frameworks for several decades, and publications by Bulgarian researchers dedicated to it have become more frequent in recent years. The phenomenon of hedging has often been studied in relation to the features of the scientific article. This approach was also adopted by the doctoral student, who examined the characteristics of the linguistic article.

3. Familiarity with the subject area

The doctoral student based her literature review on 86 sources, including 34 published before 2000 and 5 publications she authored on the subject. She reviewed in chronological order the research devoted to the problem in Western European linguistics and in Bulgarian studies and made an informed statement of her own position on the subject studied.

4. Research methodology

The doctoral student subjected to a comparative (qualitative and quantitative) analysis the manifestations of hedging in a total of 12 scientific articles in the field of linguistics published in 2 American and 2 Bulgarian journals, having normalised the frequency of these manifestations. Half of the articles for each of the two languages were published a decade later than the other half – a period that is too short to yield results for one of the research tasks formulated, namely, to demonstrate a trend in the development of the phenomenon under study. To extract the data, Polina Petkova tested the possibilities of the Hedge-o-matic program and established its inapplicability. This was not a problem in view of the small volume of linguistic material for which manual processing proved quite sufficient. The analysis was based primarily on Hyland's polypragmatic model.

5. Description and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions

The dissertation consists of a text (introduction, five chapters and a conclusion) of 135 pages, four appendices containing the excerpted sources and five tables (pp. 147-158), and references (pp. 159-170). Five more tables and ten figures have also been embedded in the text to illustrate the model used and the results obtained. Some of the citations in the literature review are unnecessarily long (e.g. on pages 33, 34, 35, etc.), and some inaccuracies have been found in the citations (e.g. on page 116: “qtd. in Namsaraev 65” and p. 135: "Kutsarov 29") and in the references (e.g. the non-chronological arrangement of the author's own publications). The doctoral student's reference solely to her own publications in connection with the available comparative studies involving Bulgarian on the problem under consideration (section 7.2) is puzzling: works published over the last few years have been devoted to the characteristics of the scientific article genre in English and in Bulgarian and to the manifestations of the hedging phenomenon. However, her undisputed contribution is the focus on the characteristics of the linguistic article, as well as her view of the applicability of the results of the comparative analysis to foreign language learning and translation, which is obviously the result of the doctoral student's long-term teaching and translation experience. The guidance given by Polina Petkova regarding the coding process would be extremely useful for future research on corpus-based linguistic phenomena.

6. Evaluation of the doctoral student's publications and personal contribution

Polina Petkova has submitted 3 publications related to the subject area of the dissertation and resulting from reports presented at scientific forums in the country. In these publications, the PhD student is a single author.

7. Dissertation summary

The dissertation student presented a dissertation summary in Bulgarian consisting of 64 pages, including 43 pages of text, the appendices to the dissertation work, the literature cited in the summary, a report on the scientific contributions (some of them formulated in English) and a list of publications in the subject area of the dissertation, as well as a summary in English consisting of 32 pages, including 15 pages of text, and all the components listed above. Both versions of the summary correspond to the content of the dissertation.

8. Recommendations on the future use of the dissertation contributions and results

Although the dissertation has been written in very good English, should it be published as a monograph, I would recommend that the PhD student prepare a version in Bulgarian, so that she would make it available to a wider part of the scientific community in Bulgaria.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific and applied science results which represent an original contribution to science and are in conformity with **all requirements** of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDARB), the Regulations on the Implementation of ASDARB and the respective regulations of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

The dissertation proves that its author, Polina Petkova, has extensive theoretical background and professional skills in scientific area "Germanic Languages: English" and demonstrates the qualities and skills needed for independent research work. The research does not contain elements of plagiarism.

In view of the aforesaid, I have no doubt in expressing my **positive evaluation** of the research conducted and presented in the dissertation, dissertation summary, results achieved and contributions that have been the subject hereof, and **I recommend that the honourable members of the scientific jury award a PhD degree** to Polina Nikolaeva Petkova in higher education area 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, doctoral programme: Germanic Languages: English.

10 March 2023

Opinion prepared by:

(Assoc. Prof. Tsveta Luizova-Horeva, PhD)