

REVIEW

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Tsvetana Dimitrova PhD

(Institute for Bulgarian Language “Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin”, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

PhD candidate: Simona Anastasova Mateva

Title of the PhD Thesis: *Adverbials and Functional Heads: A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and English Clause Structure*

Field of Higher Education: 2. Humanities

Professional Area: 2.1. Philology

Doctoral Programme: Germanic Languages: English Language

Academic Supervisor: Prof. Iliana Todorova Krapova, PhD – Ca’ Foscari University of Venice

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

By Order No. ПД-22-1436 of 20.07.2026 of the Rector of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure for the defence of the PhD thesis titled *Adverbials and Functional Heads: A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and English Clause Structure*, for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional area 2.1. Philology, doctoral programme “Germanic Languages: English Language”. The author of the dissertation is Simona Anastasova Mateva, a full-time doctoral student at the Department of English Philology, with Prof. Iliana Krapova from Ca’ Foscari University of Venice as academic supervisor.

The set of materials submitted by Simona Anastasova Mateva includes: the text of the dissertation (in English), a summary of the dissertation (in English and in Bulgarian), a list of publications within the report on the fulfilment of the national minimum requirements. Declaration on the originality of the dissertation is part of the text. The candidate has four scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation.

2. Brief biographical data

Simona Mateva graduated in English Philology and the master’s program “English Philology – Linguistics and Translation” from the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, where she teaches English syntax.

3. Relevance of the topic, goals and objectives

The dissertation by Simona Anastasova Mateva, titled *Adverbials and Functional Heads: A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and English Clause Structure*, deals with a long-debated issue in generative syntax, namely the distribution of adverbs in the clausal domain. The study adopts the Cartographic Syntax framework (proposed by Luigi Rizzi and Guglielmo Cinque), specifically

the Cartographic Approach of Cinque's, where adverbs are generated in the specifiers of functional projections which are ordered in a fixed (and universal) hierarchy. The choice of English and Bulgarian as the languages of comparison is motivated by their structural differences. English has relatively rigid constituent order and extensively uses auxiliaries, whereas Bulgarian allows for a greater word order variation and employs a rich aspectual system. Thus, the comparison between the two serves as a testing ground on whether cross-linguistic differences in the linear placement of adverbs reflect differences in underlying structure or arise from language-specific properties.

The dissertation is 224 pages long, of which 212 pages constitute the main text, while 12 pages are bibliography comprising 183 titles. It consists of seven chapters, preceded by a list of abbreviations and followed by references and a declaration of originality.

The clausal behaviour of adverbs is a relevant topic which highlights the interplay between different linguistic levels, as the distribution of adverbs is related to syntax, semantics, information structure, aspect, modality, and discourse. The author correctly points out that the traditional part-of-speech classification of adverbs as a heterogeneous word class does not explain their ordering and interaction with other clausal elements. This is true especially considering Bulgarian, which exhibits much greater word order variation. Although the comparison with English allows for an investigation on whether the hierarchy proposed by Cinque can accommodate a language with freer constituent order, here word order differences are not treated as mere evidence for fundamentally different syntactic architectures. The analysis proposed argues that they are a result of language-specific verb movement through the clausal spine.

The dissertation attempts at answering five research questions formulated in Chapter 2, concerning the structural order of adverbs, the empirical status of Cinque's functional projections, the justification of verb movement as a mechanism (rather than base generation or adverb movement), non-canonical adverb placement, and the treatment of adverbial polysemy. The formulation of these research questions provides a coherent framework for the analysis. The work makes a visible progression from the general theoretical question of whether adverbs occupy fixed positions, through the question of how those positions are realised in English and Bulgarian, to the more specific questions concerning movement and interpretation (with a focus on polysemy of two classes of adverbs).

4. Familiarity with the research field

The work is built on a solid theoretical basis. Chapter 2 gives the terminology used and methodological premises, while Chapter 3 traces the adverb analysis from traditional grammatical classifications to generative syntax. The dissertation discusses the distinction between adverbs and adverbials, the status of adjuncts, specifiers and complements, X-bar theory, Universal Grammar, Principles and Parameters, and other major approaches to adverb placement.

The focus in the theoretical part is placed on the distinction between the Cartographic Approach (Cinque) and the Scope-based Approach (Ernst). The former associates adverbs with dedicated functional projections, whereas the latter allows for a greater structural flexibility of adjunction and explains the adverb distribution through semantic scope and interpretation. The dissertation devotes a substantial part of Chapter 4 to argue for and against the two approaches, including the problems of adverb ordering, iterability (and polysemy), coordination, deletion, adverb stacking, interpolation, and position-sensitive interpretation.

The literature cited includes works by Chomsky, Cinque, Alexiadou, Ernst, Jackendoff, Haider, Rizzi, Kayne, Pollock and others, as well as relevant works on Bulgarian syntax, aspect, clitics, and comparative approaches (involving Romance languages, but also Fulfulde and Yavapai). There are some missing works though, incl. a previous thesis (by Desislava Vilimovska) building on scope-based/adjunction approach.

There is a certain imbalance between theoretical ground and arguments based on empirical ground. Some sections could be more concise, and some background material can be reduced (mostly the historical one) to bring the theoretical arguments into a sharper focus.

5. Research methodology

The dissertation describes its methods as analytical, comparative, deductive, and explanatory. Examples are excerpted from three corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the Bulgarian National Corpus (BgNC – here, I use the abbreviations as given in the text). Additionally, constructed examples by a native speaker (of Bulgarian) are supplemented also to test hypotheses.

The author makes an important note that the study is not statistically oriented. Corpus data is used primarily to illustrate attested patterns and to provide empirical material for the analysis. The main method involves qualitative interpretation of syntactic structures (some quantitative figures are given but the arguments and conclusions are not based on them).

The qualitative approach is appropriate to the theoretical objectives of the work, but it places some limits on the strength of the empirical claims. Here, the corpus evidence is used for mere attestation and compatibility with the proposed analysis and not as independently establishing the productivity of the orderings. Moreover, the corpus examples are selected by the author, and sources are limited (these are specific corpora which contain specific data – this is diligently noted by the author, though).

In addition, the author also recognises that the two-language comparison cannot by itself establish the universal validity of the Cartographic Approach, which is an appropriate limitation to acknowledge. Examples from works on other languages are given, as referenced in the discussion on the Cartographic Approach.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis

The main analytical chapters of the work are Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6.

Chapter 4 compares the two main approaches used in the generative literature on adverbs to provide the main theoretical justification for the adopted framework. The Scope-based model is recognised as descriptively and semantically flexible, but the author argues that this flexibility comes at the expense of predictive power when systematic ordering asymmetries and cross-linguistic constraints are considered. The Cartographic Approach is argued to be better suited to explaining ordering, adverb co-occurrence, interpolation, and the relation between position and interpretation.

The author does not simply state the validity of Cinque's model (which could be a valid approach for a thesis, though). She critically considers objections to rigid hierarchy and attempts to show how apparent counterexamples can arise from movement, focus, parenthetical interpretation, coordination, or deletion. The resulting argument is that surface variation does not necessarily entail underlying structural variation.

Chapter 5 is the empirical centre of the dissertation. A Higher Adverbial Space (HAS) and a Lower Adverbial Space (LAS) are distinguished, following a proposal by Cinque, to organise the placement of different classes of adverbs in English and Bulgarian. The higher domain hosts projections for speech-act, evaluative, evidential, and epistemic adverbs, while the lower domain contains projections hosting temporal and aspectual adverbs.

The chapter argues that both languages respect the relative ordering of the projections as determined by Cinque. Apparent deviations, especially in Bulgarian, are interpreted as effects of focus, parenthetical status, prosody, and are usually (a result of) movement but are not considered evidence against the hierarchy. The analysis of lower adverbs further addresses anterior, generic/progressive, and completive readings and uses Bulgarian data to investigate the structural interpretation of adverbs such as *вече*.

An important part of Chapter 5 concerns verb movement where verbs move around adverbs which are placed in the specifiers of functional projections ordered in a fixed hierarchy (thus, the resulting placement of adverbs is in fact a result of verb movement). English finite lexical verbs are relatively restricted, whereas Bulgarian ones may raise through the lower adverbial space. Auxiliary verbs and active and passive participles are also compared. To capture the resulting movement possibilities, the dissertation introduces additional structural projections, labelled YP_{low}, YP_{middle}, and YP_{high} following the YP label as introduced by Ledgeway and Lombardi to mark a projection that works as a placeholder delimiting lower vs. higher adverb zones.

The proposal attempts to preserve Cinque's fixed adverb hierarchy while providing a more explicit representation of the positions occupied by verbs and auxiliaries. The analysis of Bulgarian passive constructions is particularly relevant because it brings together verb morphology, auxiliary placement, cliticization, and adverb order. An interesting observation here, which will need further attention, is that the Bulgarian passive participles demonstrate a wider distributional freedom than the active participles (passives in Bulgarian are often analysed as syntactic constructions; see also examples such as *сградите са подходящо проектирани* (*те са

подходящо проектирали сградите), where the adverb scopes over the participle only and is placed between the present-tense auxiliary/copula and the passive participle).

Chapter 6 addresses the syntax-semantics interface through analysis of polysemous adverbs. The central proposal is that lexical ambiguity can often be modelled structurally: different readings of the same form (of an adverb) may correspond to different merging sites in the functional hierarchy.

The discussion of *already/вече* is used to investigate anterior and terminative interpretations, while the analysis of *still* and its Bulgarian counterparts (още/все още, все пак) distinguishes aspectual, marginality, and adversative/concessive interpretations. The latter is associated with a focused position outside Cinque's hierarchy, whereas aspectual and marginality readings are related to the continuative aspectual domain.

Thus, Chapter 6 tests the theoretical framework against data that might otherwise appear to challenge a one-to-one correspondence between lexical item and syntactic position, but it also identifies cases that require further refinement, particularly marginal and scalar interpretations.

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

Theoretical: One of the main strengths of the work is its clearly stated theoretical focus which aims at not merely describing adverb placement in the two languages but seeks to explain them within the chosen framework. The author consistently relates surface word order to hierarchical positions that are derived through verb movement and argued for with respect to morphology and interpretation. The work also introduces YPlow, YPmiddle, and YPhigh as additional functional projections to be used for modeling the adverbs ordering as a result of verb (and auxiliary) movement. These are intended to refine the cartographic representation without replacing the underlying hierarchy of functional projections.

Comparative: The comparative perspective is among the main contributions. The dissertation applies Cinque's adverb hierarchy to Bulgarian clause structure in comparison with English backing the hypotheses of the universality of the hierarchy with evidence from three corpora. It also examines adverbial classes and interpretive patterns that have not been central in other treatments. Bulgarian's freer word order, aspectual morphology, and clitic system (esp. the possible clitic status of present-tense auxiliaries) are used as evidence for testing the proposed architecture.

The proposed treatment of polysemous adverbs is also a plus. The analyses of *already/вече* and *still* and its Bulgarian counterparts are used to argue that differences in interpretation can be systematically related to structural positions. This strengthens the dissertation's general claim that syntax and interpretation are closely connected within the functional architecture of the clause. The attempt to connect distinct phenomena such as adverb ordering, verb movement, auxiliary placement, participial movement, aspect, focus, and polysemy, is also commendable as it allows the author to evaluate the proposed hierarchy across several diagnostic domains.

In conclusion, the work builds upon both theoretical and empirical arguments. The proposals are backed up by a substantial bibliography showing the author's familiarity with the major theoretical debates on the topic. It also draws upon corpus evidence, native-speaker judgements, syntactic diagnostics, and structural representations. The comparison therefore has theoretical consequences for the analysis rather than serving only a descriptive purpose.

8. Assessment of publications

The text has been approbated in four publications in academic conference proceedings.

9. Personal contribution of the PhD student

All publications of the doctoral candidate are single authored. I haven't observed traces of plagiarism in the work.

10. Abstract

The abstract, in Bulgarian and English, reflects the main objectives, theoretical framework, analytical results, and contributions of the dissertation.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

There are several critical remarks that were already given in some or other form above.

First, there is a certain disbalance between theoretical breadth and arguments based on empirical evidence. The dissertation makes a strong case for the Cartographic Approach, but some of the conclusions are formulated more broadly (and more generally) than the evidential basis may permit. The study of two languages, even when supported by three corpora, cannot by itself establish the universal status of the hierarchy. However, the author acknowledges this limitation, and it would nevertheless be useful to maintain the distinction consistently between evidence supporting the applicability of the hierarchy to English and Bulgarian and evidence establishing its cross-linguistic universality.

Second, the empirical methodology could be described more transparently. Since corpus data are selected manually and used qualitatively, the reader would benefit from more explicit information concerning the number of examples, selection criteria, distribution across the corpora, and the treatment of counterexamples. There are other corpora with data from different registers which can be consulted – for example, the CLASSLA.web corpus contains data from different web sources that is closer to the vernacular.

Third, the proposed YP projections are theoretically important but would benefit from a more explicit discussion. The dissertation introduces YPlow, YPmiddle, and YPhigh as schematic functional projections associated with verb movement. Since they are an extension of the existing cartographic architecture, it would be useful to state more explicitly what independent diagnostics distinguish them, what predictions they make beyond the cases analysed, and how they compare with alternative analyses of verb movement.

Fourth, some of the analysis of polysemy reveals the limits of a strict one-form/one-position correspondence. The treatment of marginality and scalar interpretations is insightful precisely because these cases do not fit the simplest version of the hierarchy. A somewhat more explicit discussion of the criteria used to distinguish homonymy, polysemy, and context-dependent interpretation would make the argument in Chapter 6 even stronger.

The dissertation could benefit from some reduction of repetitions. Some theoretical points, especially the contrast between free adjunction and fixed functional positions, and the role of verb movement, are restated in successive chapters and summaries. Although the immediate theoretical foundation of the work is explicit (Cartographic Syntax and strict X-bar), there are occasional slip-ins of terms from other branches without previous reference or explanations such as phase and phase edge.

12. Personal impressions

I have no personal impressions of the doctoral candidate.

13. Recommendations for the future use of the dissertation's contributions and results

The work shows a clear understanding of the state-of-the-art in contemporary generative and comparative syntax, it is theoretically and argumentatively coherent and offers specific analyses that extend the discussion of adverb placement and behaviour in Bulgarian and English. The study provides a basis for further research into the interaction between functional structure, word order, verb movement, and interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Simona Mateva's dissertation is a substantial theoretical and comparative study of adverb syntax in English and Bulgarian. Its main theoretical commitment is to the Cartographic Approach and to the hypothesis that adverbs are associated with a structured order of functional projections. The empirical analysis argues that the apparent flexibility of adverb placement can largely be explained through the interaction of this fixed hierarchy and language specific movement of verbs, auxiliaries, and participles.

The dissertation's strengths are its theoretical breadth, its comparative focus on Bulgarian and English, the employment of verb movement, and its attempt to relate syntactic position to the interpretation of polysemous adverbs. The introduction of the YP projections and the analyses of two classes of adverbs provide concrete points at which the dissertation seeks to extend or refine existing cartographic analyses.

The dissertation contains scientific and applied scientific results that constitute an original contribution to the field and meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for the Application of the ADASRB, and the relevant regulations of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate, Simona Anastasova Mateva, possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty of Philology, while also displaying the qualities and abilities necessary to conduct independent scientific research.

In view of the foregoing, I confidently provide a positive assessment of the research – as presented in the dissertation, the abstract, and the achieved results and contributions – and I recommend that the esteemed scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” (PhD) to Simona Anastasova Mateva in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, and doctoral program “Germanic Languages: English Language”.

24 September 2026

Reviewer: _____

(Assoc. Prof. Tsvetana Dimitrova, PhD)