

A SHORT REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezha Todorova Tsoneva-Mathewson

Department of English Philology, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

of the Doctoral dissertation *Adverbs and Functional Syntactic Categories: A Contrastive Study of English and Bulgarian* authored by in Simona Anastasova Mateva under the supervision of Prof.

Prof. Dr. Iliyana Todorova Krapova in:

Higher Education Area 2. Humanities,

Professional Field 2.1. Philology,

Doctoral Program: Germanic Languages (English Language)

1. General introduction of the procedure and the doctoral candidate

By Order No. RD-22-1436, dated July 20, 2026, issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I was appointed a member of the academic committee for the defence of the dissertation titled *Adverbs and Functional Syntactic Categories: A Contrastive Study of English and Bulgarian*, submitted for the award of the degree of *Doctor* in: Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology, Doctoral Program: Germanic Languages (English Language). The author of the dissertation is Simona Anastasova Mateva, a full-time doctoral student at the Department of English Philology, supervised by Prof. Iliyana Todorova Krapova, PhD, from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy.

The hard-copy documentation submitted by Simona Anastasova Mateva complies with Article 36, Paragraph 1 of the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at Plovdiv University and includes the following documents:

- a formal request to the Rector of Plovdiv University to initiate the dissertation defence procedure;
- a CV in the European format;
- minutes from the departmental meeting regarding the report on readiness to initiate the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- the dissertation;
- an abstract of the dissertation;
- a list of academic publications related to the dissertation topic;
- copies of the academic publications;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity regarding the submitted documents.

Simona Mateva was a doctoral student at the Department of English Philology at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv between March 1, 2024 and February 20, 2026. She is an alumna of the same department, having earned both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees there; during that time, she also served as a part-time lecturer in the department.

2. Relevance of the Topic

Adverbs are characterized by typological diversity, a fact that has posed challenges for generations of linguists attempting to categorize them and explain their behavior in a principled way. This situation lends undeniable relevance to the present work. Numerous contemporary linguistic theories—ranging from those of Chomsky and his followers to the works of Langacker, Lakoff, Croft, and other cognitivists—share a common goal: to find a principled approach capable of describing and explaining the behavior of linguistic phenomena. Simona Mateva has adopted the generative approach and, utilizing its toolkit—specifically Cinque's cartographic approach—has produced an impressive comparative study of adverbs in Bulgarian and English. This is the first systematic investigation into the applicability of Cinque's hierarchy to the structure of the Bulgarian sentence, with a specific focus on adverbs. Furthermore, the study proposes refinements to the theory, thereby enhancing its relevance.

3. Familiarity with the Subject Matter

Addressing such a challenge requires a solid theoretical background, which Simona demonstrates excellently in her dissertation. The bibliography comprises 183 titles that trace the evolution of concepts regarding adverbs, as well as the most up-to-date theoretical models in syntax. The study is also impressive with the author's ability to compare two competing approaches explaining adverb behavior, both developed by leading 20th-century scholars - Cinque's cartographic approach and the semantically oriented approach of Jackendoff and Ernst and also to evaluate their explanatory power. The theories are presented with great clarity, demonstrating a genuine understanding of their tenets. It should also be noted that the work mentions ideas of cognitivists such as Talmy, Givón, and Langacker, whose semantic-pragmatic theories differ fundamentally from those of generative syntax. While the typologist Croft is mentioned only in passing, his classification of parts of speech (1991, 2001) merits further consideration.

4. Research Methodology

As previously noted, the dissertation is grounded in the generative framework, more specifically Cinque's cartographic approach according to which the sentence possesses a rich, universal hierarchical structure of functional projections reflecting various grammatical meanings. Within this structure, sentence elements occupy strictly defined positions that determine their syntactic and semantic interpretation. These theoretical premises are supported by data from three established corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the Bulgarian National Corpus (BgNC). It is clearly stated that the study does not use quantitative data that the selected examples are used to test the hypotheses about the structure as well as the intuitions of native speakers.

The chosen methodology allows obtaining an adequate answer to the specific goals, namely (a) to propose grammatical principles that predict the rules regulating the movement of verbs in relation to adverbs, and (b) to make the theory of the relations between specifiers and heads in adverbs as restrictive as possible and at the same time as general as possible.

5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and contributions

The thesis begins with a very useful list of abbreviations and a definition of key terms, making the text more accessible to linguists who are not specialists in generative syntax. The chapters then follow a meaningful and clear sequence – presentation of the problem and theoretical framework (Chapter 2) – historical overview of ideas about adverbs (Chapter 3) – competing theories (Chapter 4) – empirical tests (Chapter 5) – polysemy of the adverb pair *already/already*, *still/yet* (Chapter 6) – conclusions (Chapter 7). Each chapter ends with a summary that aids in reading this text filled with technical terms

One of the strengths of the present study is the clearly formulated legitimate research question within generative syntax: Can the distribution of adverbs be explained by hierarchical syntactic structure, and can the apparent variety be explained by verb rather than adverb movement? The analyses proposed in the dissertation present convincing evidence for a positive answer to these questions. A comparative analysis of the behavior of adverbs in English and Bulgarian proves that both languages obey to the same deep hierarchy, differing in how verbs move within this hierarchy. Moreover, Simona Mateva offers a fine-tuning of specifier-head position with the introduction of additional projections YP_{low}, YP_{middle} and YP_{high} related to verb movement. This proposal offers a solution when the positions of full verbs, auxiliary verbs, participles, and adverbs cannot be

adequately explained by the standard hierarchical structure. But the question remains whether these projections really exist independently and are sufficiently distinct from each other, or whether they are convenient descriptive terms introduced for specific movement patterns.

The analysis of the polysemy of the adverbs *already* and *still* is particularly interesting. According to the author, their ambiguity is not a lexical phenomenon, but the different interpretations are dependent on the syntactic position of the adverb in the functional structure. Different interpretations are thus seen as the result of different structural configurations. This is an important contribution to the more general question of the interaction between syntax and semantics, and shows the potential of the cartographic approach to explain not only the linear distribution of adverbs, but also differences in their interpretation.

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

Simona Mateva has published 4 articles related to her dissertation work, which meets the minimum national requirements for awarding a doctoral degree. They reflect the main merits of the work related to the clear theoretical orientation, the well-motivated comparative approach, the use of a substantial empirical base, the detailed analysis of verb movement and the proposed finer structuring of the functional domain through YP_{low}, YP_{middle} and YP_{high}. The analysis of the polysemy of adverbs as a structurally conditioned phenomenon is also a significant contribution.

7. Abstract

The content and quality of the abstract is at the level of the entire dissertation - a clear and accurate presentation of the main research questions and their answers in each chapter of the work. It is made according to the requirements of the Regulations and reflects the main results achieved in the dissertation.

8. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

The author herself notes that the study needs more detailed explanations of the mechanisms underlying the movement of the verb, and this open question could be the goal of further research. Moreover, although the theoretical part includes results from applying Cinque's approach to other languages such as Italian, French, German, etc., the conclusions made in this dissertation could be tested in other languages as well, which will be a step forward towards the argumentation of the

principle of universality. The present study did not use quantitative data, but it would be interesting to have the examples used statistically verified.

Conclusion

Simona Mateva's dissertation contains research results that represent an original contribution to linguistics and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the Regulations for the Application of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the corresponding regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the academic field of Philology (Germanic languages - English language), while also showing the aptitude and ability to conduct independent research.

Based on the foregoing, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation titled *Adverbials and Functional Heads: A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and English Clause Structure* and support the awarding of a Doctoral Degree to Simona Anastasova Mateva.

September 24, 2026

Assoc. Prof. Snezha Tsoneva-Mathewson, PhD

(academic position, academic rank, first name, surname)

(signature)