

REVIEW

by Yana Valentinova Chankova, PhD

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on a dissertation

submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in: Higher Education Field 2. Humanities,

Professional Field 2.1. Philology,

Doctoral Programme Germanic Languages: English Language

Author: *Simona Anastasova Mateva*

Title: Adverbials and Functional Heads: A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and English Clause Structure

Academic Supervisor: Prof. Iliyana Todorova Krapova, PhD - Ca' Foscari University of Venice

1. Description of the Submitted Materials

By Decree RD-22-1436/ 20.07.2026 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I have been appointed as a member of the Academic Board responsible for conducting the procedure for the defence of the dissertation entitled *Adverbials and Functional Heads: A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and English Clause Structure*, submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Field 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology, Doctoral Programme *Germanic Languages: English Language*. Author of the dissertation is Simona Anastasova Mateva, full-time doctoral student at the Department of English Philology, supervised by Prof. Iliyana Todorova Krapova, PhD affiliated with Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

The set of printed materials submitted by PhD candidate Simona Mateva complies with Art. 36(1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv and includes the following:

- an application to the Rector of Plovdiv University requesting the initiation of the dissertation defence procedure;
- a Curriculum Vitae in Europass format;
- the Minutes from the English Department meeting when the preliminary discussion of the dissertation was held;
- PhD dissertation;
- PhD dissertation abstract (in English and Bulgarian);
- a list of scholarly publications on the dissertation topic;
- copies of the mentioned publications;
- a declaration confirming the originality and authenticity of the submitted materials.

2. A Brief Biographical Note

Here, I will briefly outline the professional qualifications and teaching experience of PhD candidate Simona Mateva. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Linguistics and Business Administration (English and Spanish) (Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, 2020) and a Master's degree in English Philology – Linguistics and Translation (Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, 2022). Her professional development began in 2017, when she started working as a teacher of English and Spanish and as a sworn translator at Tanya's Language School, where she acquired professional competences and refined her teaching and translation skills.

From 2020 to the present, she has worked as a part-time assistant professor at the Department of English Philology at the Faculty of Letters at Plovdiv University, conducting seminars in Modern English Syntax and Practical English (translation from Bulgarian into English). In 2023, Simona Mateva was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in Germanic Languages: English Language (Generative Syntax) at the Department of English Philology at Plovdiv University. Her academic interests lie in the areas of Generative Syntax, Theoretical Linguistics, syntactic analysis, comparative analysis of English and Bulgarian, adverbial structure, and word order.

3. Relevance of the Subject-Matter and the Research Objectives

The publication of Guglielmo Cinque's seminal work *Adverbs and Functional Heads: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective* (Cinque 1999), which reshaped contemporary syntactic theory by demonstrating that both adverb classes and the functional heads associated with clause structure follow a rigid, cross-linguistically stable order, with apparent variation explained by syntactic movement rather than true structural differences, has sparked increased interest in the study of adverb

classes, their hierarchy, functional projections, and clause architecture. Issues concerning the universality of the mentioned hierarchy, the status of functional projections, semantic granularity, syntactic movement, and interface interactions (factors such as prosody, information structure, etc.) continue to provoke discussions in syntactic research at present.

Against this background, a topic focused on the comparative analysis of Adverbials and Functional Heads in English and Bulgarian can be deemed suitable for doctoral research, relevant, and of scholarly interest. The main goal of the dissertation is stated by doctoral candidate Mateva on p. 4: "...to formulate grammatical principles capable of predicting the constraints on verb movement with respect to adverbs, and, in doing so, to develop a theory that is both maximally restrictive and broadly applicable" (the additional objectives are discussed in detail on pp. 10-14.) To achieve this goal, Simona Mateva puts forward 5 research questions (pp. 14-16), aligned with the main conceptual assumptions of the theoretical framework she has chosen (pp. 76-106).

These research questions define the necessary algorithm for accomplishing the stated goals and have been successfully addressed to a great extent.

4. Awareness of the Issue at Hand

The dissertation presents a well-defined problematic area and sustains a clear argumentative thread from the introductory to the concluding chapter, it integrates theoretical-descriptive and explanatory-empirical approaches in the analysis of corpus material, thus achieving its main goal, i.e. to contribute to the development of a unified and predictive theory of adverb placement by refining the specifier-head relations, formulated by Cinque (1999).

In her work, PhD candidate Mateva discusses important theoretical sources, which are not merely listed and referenced but are instead incorporated into the observations, analyses, and discussions. Their interpretation is tailored to the stated research problem and the central argument, and demonstrates clearly articulated critical engagement with existing studies in the field. Citations and references are purposeful and correctly integrated into the main text.

5. Research Methodology

In her dissertation, doctoral candidate Mateva adopts an analytical and comparative approach with the aim of explaining how adverbs are hierarchically positioned and structurally behave in English and Bulgarian. The analytical tool applied is largely rooted in generative grammar, specifically, the study employs the cartographic (functional) model developed by Cinque (1999), according to which adverbs occupy fixed specifier positions of functional projections. The research is comparative and tests whether this model can predict adverb distribution in English and Bulgarian, the

latter two having been chosen due to their typological differences that make them suitable for evaluating the universality of Cinque's hierarchy of adverbs.

The study is grounded in theoretical hypotheses and assumptions whose explanatory adequacy is tested against real language data. In particular, corpus data from the BNC, COCA, and BgNC are used, supplemented by native speakers' judgements and specially constructed examples, when applicable. It is explicitly stated that corpus examples serve as evidence pro/con structural hypotheses, rather than for calculating statistical dependencies.

The conceptual framework is aptly chosen and demonstrates a high degree of explanatory adequacy. The applied methodology contributes to the achievement of the research objectives and is executed with discipline and clear awareness of methodological limitations. The central argument is articulated early and developed consistently.

6. Description and Evaluation of the Dissertation

The dissertation submitted by PhD candidate Mateva investigates the syntax of adverbs in Bulgarian and English through the lens of generative grammar, challenging the traditional approach that treats adverbs as peripheral, optional modifiers, and supports the claim that adverbs can be considered crucial diagnostics for determining clause structure. Specifically, this work adopts the cartographic (functional) approach proposed by Cinque (1999), which assumes that adverbs occupy fixed specifier positions of functional projections. The dissertation tests the universality and explanatory power of Cinque's syntactic hierarchy by comparing two typologically distinct languages and presents arguments and empirical evidence instantiating the cartographic approach as a tool capable of providing a unified explanation for the ordering, interpretation, and verb-adverb interactions.

The structure of this doctoral dissertation is traditional and meets the requirements for the genre, specifically, it comprises Introduction, 5 Content Chapters, Conclusion, and Bibliography within a volume of 224 pages. The Bibliography includes a total of 183 publications by English, German, Spanish, Italian, Bulgarian, etc. authors.

The Introductory Chapter presents the author's motivation for carrying out such type of research, places the research topic within the context of contemporary syntactic theory, provides arguments for conducting a comparative analysis of English and Bulgarian, and outlines the structure of the dissertation, however, it does not provide information regarding the research objectives, questions, hypotheses, corpus, scope, or methodology. While the chapter convincingly argues for the relevance and significance of the chosen topic, it is not fully optimal as an introduction.

Chapter 2 demonstrates the author's theoretical competence through clearly defined and well-grounded research objectives, questions, methods, and theoretical assumptions, as well as an informed discussion and critical analysis of classical and contemporary approaches to the study of adverbs. A positive aspect is the way Cinque's cartographic model (1999) is integrated into the context of restrictiveness, Universal Grammar, and hierarchical structure. At times, however, the narrative is overloaded with theoretical detail and explanations of well-known facts, e.g. "S → NP VP" (p. 11) (obsolete by now), as well as explanations concerning certain older modules or versions of the generative line of enquiry, e.g., X-bar theory and the Government and Binding framework, etc. (pp. 11-14).

Chapter 3 positions the dissertation within traditional scholarly conversation and demonstrates the author's thorough awareness of the development of linguistic theory from the Antiquity to the cartographic approach, via traditional grammar, functional approaches, linguistic typology, generative grammar, etc., and along these lines, it can be very useful for the uninformed reader. However, such historical and theoretical density leads to departures from the central research problem and a dilution of focus. Among the strengths of this chapter are the critical review of relevant literature, the veracious evaluation of existing syntactic approaches, and the well-argued-for motivation for choosing cartography as analytical tool.

Chapter 4 deals with 2 major theoretical analytical models, i.e. the cartographic approach and the scope-based approach, and convincingly argues pro the strengths, advantages, descriptive and explanatory adequacy, as well as the choice of the former as analytical tool, based on real empirical support. Cinque's (1999) syntactic hierarchy of adverbs is discussed in relation to its explanatory power, predictability, universality, and applicability to Bulgarian and English data. What cannot be found here is a critical analysis of the cartographic model, including its limitations and areas for further development.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical part of the dissertation, demonstrating expert application of the cartographic model, excellent work with corpora (the BNC, COCA, BgNC), systematic use of diagnostic tests, proficient differentiation between high and low positions and the corresponding adverb classes, and clear description of the parallels between English and Bulgarian. Most importantly, this chapter provides sustained evidence supporting the claim that the cartographic analytical tool is applicable to the study of clause structure in both languages, with predictable variation explained by syntactic verb movement and/or information-structural factors. This chapter represents the core of the dissertation and can be described as a strongly-argued-for support pro the cartographic approach based on empirical material from typologically distinct languages.

Chapter 6 demonstrates clear awareness of the relationship between polysemy and syntactic position, masterly application of the cartographic model to real data from English and Bulgarian, fine-grained analysis of crucial functional projections, and well-defined arguments con the traditional view on polysemy as a purely lexical phenomenon, in short, this chapter, as well as the previous one, demonstrates original contributions.

The Concluding Chapter synthesizes the empirical and theoretical results of the dissertation, providing a well-articulated explanation of how the cartographic approach accounts for the syntax of adverbs in English and Bulgarian. Its strengths include a straightforward empirical summary, an effective analysis of polysemy, as well as contributions aiming to refine the analysis of existing functional projections.

7. Contributions and Significance of the Dissertation

The scholarly and applied contributions of the doctoral dissertation are primarily directed toward: validating new aspects of existing syntactic theories and hypotheses by means of innovative tools; obtaining and discussing confirmatory evidence. Along the above lines, I accept and confirm contributions 1, 2, 4, and 6 (p. 32 of the English Abstract) as valid and authentic, i.e. this is an original scholarly study that tests the applicability of Cinque’s functional hierarchy of adverbs to Bulgarian, as well as the first systematic comparative analysis of English and Bulgarian conducted within the mentioned model. Furthermore, several less thoroughly researched classes of adverbs in English and Bulgarian are discussed, focusing on their distribution within the functional hierarchy. I do not confirm contribution 3 (p. 32), the use of corpora is obligatory in this type of research and does not constitute an innovation.

The most substantial contribution of the present study is the candidate’s proposed differentiation of the YP-space, introducing additional structural projections — YP_{low}, YP_{middle}, and YP_{high}, which are integrated into Cinque’s syntactic adverb hierarchy (contribution 5, p. 32).

8. Evaluation of the Publications on the Subject of the Dissertation

Four single-authored publications in English related to the dissertation research have been submitted by Simona Mateva. These publications consist of papers and conference proceedings and meet the national minimum requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree Doctor of Philosophy in terms of number and content, exceeding the required minimum by 10 points. To be quite precise, 2 of the publications appear in the *Research Papers of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv - Languages and Literature* (20 points), 1 in the *Annual of the Department for Language Teaching and Continuing Qualification at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”* (10 points), and one in *Doctoral Debuts 2024: Proceedings of an Academic Conference* (10 points).

The submitted evidence shows that doctoral candidate Mateva has met the minimum national requirements for acquiring the degree Doctor of Philosophy according to the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

9. Original Contribution of the Doctoral Candidate

The dissertation and the 4 publications submitted by Simona Mateva for taking part in the current procedure represent original scholarly research. No plagiarism has been detected to date, and the stated contributions and obtained results are personal achievement of the doctoral candidate.

10. Dissertation Abstract

The Abstract (in English and Bulgarian) complies with the requirements for a thorough and authentic description of the content, the objectives, the main theoretical assumptions, the methods used, the findings and the results of the analyses, which are contained in the dissertation.

11. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

The following remarks and recommendations aim to draw the candidate's attention to certain aspects of importance to her future scholarly pursuits and do not diminish the significance of the proposed dissertation:

1. The postulation of the projections YP_{low} , YP_{middle} , and YP_{high} contributes to a more fine-grained representation of clause structure within the cartographic approach, however, a more sustained argumentation supporting the empirical justification of the introduced structural labels, their semantic correlation, and their predictive power will give added value to the research. Of special interest can be a study investigating the predictive power of the proposed YP-projections across a wider variety of languages.

2. The discussion of verb movement triggers is insufficient, given its crucial role and the articulated claim that verbs move around adverbs rather than the other way around. It is not clear what instigates verb movement. Here are several proposals: cf. the Generative Minimalist framework by N. Chomsky (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2004), where verb movement is triggered by formal features, in particular, uninterpretable, strong, or edge-related features on functional heads (v , T , C), which must be checked-off or eliminated before Spell-Out. The following may serve as triggers for verb movement:

- uninterpretable features on functional heads (v , T , C may carry uninterpretable ϕ -features, tense features, or clause-typing features; if the verb cannot check them in situ, movement is triggered (respectively V-to-T movement, T-to-C movement);

- strong features (PF-visible) which must be checked-off before Spell-Out, and thus instigating overt movement, e.g., a strong Tense feature, a strong +Q feature, etc. (V-to-T movement, T-to-C movement);

- morphological requirements (affix support), when a functional head requires a phonological host, e.g., Tense/Agreement affixes need a verb to attach to;

- EPP-type head features, e.g., C may require a head in its position (T-to-C movement), T may require a verbal head (V-to-T movement);

- Phase-edge features on v or C, as heads may acquire Edge features that force movement of heads or phrases;

- interface conditions (PF/LF) - there are also triggers that are not purely syntactic but arise from interface pressures: prosodic requirements, linearization constraints, visibility conditions.

3. The verb movements mentioned above correlate with the formation of clause structure in different sentence types, such as negative and interrogative sentences, wherein the triggers for verb movement once again play a key role. In this vein, it will be interesting to delve into the interaction between the triggering mechanism/s of verb movement and the distribution of adverbs in negative and interrogative sentences.

12. Personal Impression

I have known Simona Mateva since the day I took over the lectures in Modern English Syntax at Plovdiv University and she was introduced to me as my assistant. I have excellent impression of her work as an assistant professor with expert knowledge in the field of syntactic theory and contrastive linguistics, and as a reliable colleague who can always be counted on when issues need to be attended to. She has proved herself as a promising young specialist in her teaching practice, popular and highly valued by her students, she participates in the organization of numerous academic events and scholarly forums and is of great help to all colleagues from the English Department.

13. Bibliography cited:

Chomsky 1995 —

Chomsky, Noam. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

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Chomsky, Noam. “Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework.” In *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*, edited by Roger Martin, David Michaels, and Juan Uriagereka, 89–155. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

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Chomsky, Noam. “Derivation by Phase.” In *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, edited by Michael Kenstowicz, 1–52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Chomsky 2004 —

Chomsky, Noam. “Beyond Explanatory Adequacy.” In *Structures and Beyond: The Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, Volume 3, edited by Adriana Belletti, 104–131. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Cinque 1999 —

Cinque, Guglielmo. *Adverbs and Functional Heads: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

CONCLUSION

The PhD dissertation comprises scholarly and applied results that constitute an original contribution to scholarly research and meet all the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADASRB and the corresponding Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The dissertation testifies to the fact that doctoral candidate Simona Mateva possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty Germanic Languages: English Language, as well as competencies and skills for carrying out independent scholarly research.

In view of the above, I give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented in the dissertation, the abstract, the achieved results and the contributions reviewed above, and recommend to the esteemed members of the Academic Board to award Simona Anastasova Mateva the educational and scientific degree Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Field 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology, Doctoral Programme Germanic Languages: English Language.

11 September 2026

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Yana Chankova, PhD