



OPINION

from

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for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: "Media and Communication Paradigm of the Turkish Civilizational Discourse (Leadership Communication Strategies)",

presented by Nihal Fehmieva Özergan, free doctoral student in the Department of Communication and Audiovisual Production of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

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The dissertation entitled "Media and Communication Paradigm of the Turkish Civilizational Discourse (Leadership Communication Strategies)" by Nihal Özergan consists of 274 pages. It is structured into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, the main contributions of the dissertation research, a bibliography comprising 186 titles in Bulgarian, Turkish, Russian, and English, digital resources used, as well as four appendices.

The **Introduction** highlights the relevance and significance of the problem addressed in the dissertation, focusing on the development and characteristics of the Turkish civilizational discourse over the last two decades of the 21st century. This is examined through a comparative perspective on leadership strategies during the periods of "Kemalism" and "Neo-Ottomanism," framed within a media and communication paradigm. The research interest is motivated by the lack of in-depth academic studies on the topic, which is identified as critically important "in light of the significant and profound processes of social and cultural transformation leading to an ontological change in Turkish society" (p. 12). However, to avoid the impression of certain statements being declarative and to better distinguish the contribution of this study, the introduction could benefit from a more thorough review of the existing scholarly literature on the subject.

The civilizational discourse, interpreted in the presented study as a "metadiscourse" and a "new linguistic worldview" (pp. 9–10), has recently become an increasingly valuable



analytical tool for social science researchers when examining societal practices and contemporary issues in geopolitics and international relations. The dissertation undertakes an interdisciplinary approach to uncover new linguistic, semantic, and communicative codes of this discourse. It traces its operation within the media and political sphere of modern Turkey, focusing on its use to advance state policies under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party. These policies not only shape domestic public opinion and introduce new perspectives on “civilizational issues” in the cultural and educational sectors but also play a crucial role in foreign policy messaging. The chosen methodology aligns with the stated research goals and objectives, and the analysis is further enriched by exploring, in the context of the topic, concepts such as “conceptual metaphor,” “mental spaces,” and “linguistic personality.”

Each of the main chapters in the dissertation begins with an introduction that reiterates the key paragraphs included in the table of contents. This approach would be justified if it expanded the argumentation supporting the logic of the proposed structure, rather than merely stating that addressing these issues aligns with the research goals and objectives. Given the interdisciplinary approach chosen by the author and the attempt to encompass the topic from all possible perspectives in both diachronic and synchronic dimensions, it is crucial to avoid an impression of eclecticism. To achieve this, the criteria for selecting subtopics, concepts, authors, and viewpoints must be convincingly presented.

The first chapter, “*The Phenomenon of ‘Civilization’ in the Turkish Linguistic, Communication, and Cultural Space*”, is the most extensive section of the dissertation. It introduces the theoretical framework and concepts central to the study. Accordingly, the analysis begins with an examination of the terms “*culture*” and “*civilization*” and their interpretation in contemporary academic literature. However, in terms of the logical flow of the discussion, subsection 1.2.1, dedicated to “*local civilization*” (pp. 38–51), would fit more naturally within the comparative exploration of the evolution of the concepts of “*civilization*” and “*culture*”, where it could present different perspectives more effectively.

The sub-section on “*civilizational discourse*,” central to the dissertation's theme, would benefit from expanded conceptualization, including a more explicit authorial reflection on Stefan Ivanov’s definition of discourse. Additionally, equating “*resentment*” with “*Occidentalism*” (p. 44) lacks sufficient argumentation. Occidentalism is a complex



phenomenon—it is both a European construct and an Arab response to Edward Said’s critique of Western Orientalism. The term originated with Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi, who published *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism* in 1992.

In the subsection discussing the division of civilization into East and West, the analysis would benefit from supporting some of the general statements with more detailed arguments. For instance, the assertion that the division between Western and Eastern civilizations began somewhere toward the end of the Middle Ages (p. 51) or that “*the West primarily embodies European civilization, while the East is a more collective image*” (p. 52) could be further elaborated and substantiated.

From a scholarly perspective, the section addressing the issue of “*Turkic civilization*” is particularly polemical. Here, the author’s thesis stands out, positing the concept of a “*great Islamic civilization*” that incorporates “*local civilizations in Eurasia*” (p. 61). However, the adopted notion of “*great*” and “*small*” civilizations, as well as the claim regarding the existence of a “*Turkic*” (p. 119) or “*Turkic-Muslim civilization*”, rather than a sub-civilization or an ethno-cultural core, requires more robust justification. It is essential to clarify how this thesis aligns with the existing literature on the subject to address academic skepticism effectively. In this context, Nihal Özergan’s work would significantly benefit from including a more comprehensive body of evidence in future publications, particularly on how the theory of Altaic languages integrates with the thesis of a Turkic civilization. Such an approach would provide stronger grounding for the argument and reinforce its relevance within broader civilizational studies.

To trace the transformation and functioning of the concept of civilization within the communicative and cultural space of contemporary Turkey, it is imperative to adopt a diachronic perspective on the conceptual visions developed and imposed over the centuries. In this context, the section dedicated to the views of Islamic, Ottoman, and Turkish thinkers is particularly interesting, especially regarding the shifts in the Ottoman context within the semantic fields of Arabic words for “*civilization*” and “*culture*.” However, when conducting such comparative philological analyses, it is essential not only to rely on Ottoman-Turkish dictionaries but also to consider the ways in which etymology and meanings are derived in Arabic lexicons. This approach would ensure the highest degree of scholarly rigor and provide a more comprehensive foundation for the proposed arguments. By incorporating these broader



linguistic and semantic insights, the study would better substantiate its thesis and enhance the depth of its analysis.

In order to avoid certain inaccuracies in future publications on the topic, I would like to point out facts such as the one where it is not entirely correct or scientifically grounded to define al-Farabi (d. 950), the founder of Arab philosophy (*falsafa*), as a “great son of the Turkic peoples” (p. 72). Little is known about the ethnic origin of this great scholar from the classical period of the Arab-Muslim Caliphate. One hypothesis is that he came to Baghdad from Central Asia, but many other researchers argue for his Persian origin.

Regarding Ibn Khaldun’s (d. 1406) views on history and civilization, the used literature can be supplemented with the in-depth introductory study by Yordan Peev on the Bulgarian edition of *Muqaddimah* (“Introduction”) and other articles by the same author, as well as studies by other Bulgarian Arabists and historians of Islam, published in Bulgarian and English. It is also necessary to handle classifications such as “the Islamic Peripatetics al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Khaldun” (p. 77) with more caution—not only because the phrase “Islamic Peripatetics” is largely an oxymoron, but also because figures like Ibn Khaldun are extremely complex. He was a rationalist in historiography, referred to as the “father of sociology,” but he was also a respected and adjudicating judge (*qadi*) in the Maliki school of Islamic law (*shari’a*) within the society in which he lived.

On p. 79, the dissertation defines “Turkish cultural space as a borderland multilingual zone between Turkic, Seljuk, Ottoman, Arab-Islamic, and Western European civilizations,” and introduces the concept of “Seljuk civilization.” In such cases, a more detailed argumentation is necessary as to why a dynastic rule is perceived and defined as a civilization. The comparative analysis between the uses of the words for civilization in the Turkish context, “medeniyet” and “uygarlık,” as synonyms—one with a historical connection to Arabic, carrying religious connotations, and the other entering usage with Atatürk’s secular reforms (p. 86)—is of particular interest.

The second chapter, *Turkish Civilizational Discourse: Genesis, Characteristics, Features*, and **the third chapter**, *Empirical Study of Turkish Civilizational Discourse*, present significant observations on the topic of the dissertation, expanding upon and building on the existing academic research in this field. They not only analyze the subject but also conduct an empirical study of the concepts in Turkish pro-government and opposition media, as well as in



the speeches of Turkish President Erdoğan. A notable contribution is the focus on the use of phrases that have become conceptual metaphors in Turkish civilizational discourse, enriching the discussion with evidence that outlines leadership communication skills in the context of media and communication paradigms.

Notes and Recommendations

It would be appropriate for the list of abbreviations (p. 268) appearing at the end of the dissertation to be placed at the beginning of the table of contents. While the desire of the dissertation author to present some of the key theoretical concepts visually in tables and figures for greater clarity is understandable, I believe this is unnecessary in this case, as it risks oversimplifying the more complex classifications and definitions. For the purposes of the analysis and its completeness, a review of the scientific literature would be more appropriate, noting the specific features of theoretical approaches, rather than presenting authors and their studies of imagology, for example, in tabular form (p. 134).

Many paragraphs in the dissertation end with references, and for achieving coherence and smooth transitions to the next idea, it would be beneficial to highlight the author's stance and evaluation of the foreign theories, viewpoints, and ideas presented in the text. Furthermore, there is a noticeable absence of citations for referenced authors and their works (p. 25, 30, 32, 34, 54, 63, 68), and often page numbers are missing in direct quotations from sources used in the argumentation (p. 27, 28, 33, 37, 39, 44, 49, 56, 65, 75, 100). Sometimes, names of scholars who propose their own conceptualizations are listed without citing their works (p. 29, 122, 134).

In the linguistic analysis, the term “lexeme” is sometimes used (e.g., p. 31) as a synonym for “term,” “concept,” or simply “word.” However, as a specialized linguistic term, “lexeme” encompasses all forms of a word and its variants. In connection with the recurring phrase in President Erdoğan’s civilizational discourse “We are all on the same ship” and the reference to its borrowing from the words of Prophet Muhammad, it is mentioned that this is a hadith transmitted by “the hadith scholar Sahih Bukhari” (p. 191). In reality, “*Sahih*” (from Arabic “authentic”) is not the name of Imam al-Bukhari (d. 870), but the title of one of the six canonical collections of hadith, which is also the most widely recognized by Muslims.

Another recommendation for the doctoral candidate’s future work is to pay attention to the correct citation of titles of important scientific works that have already been published in Bulgarian translation.



The contribution summary provided in the abstract (pp. 38–40) accurately reflects the content of the dissertation. The requirements for such a text have been met, as it includes the most significant elements of the dissertation and summarizes the original aspects and contributions.

Nihal Özergan has submitted three published articles on the dissertation topic and one article under review for the defense process. All of these are listed and included both at the end of the dissertation (p. 267) and in the abstract (p. 41). During her doctoral studies, she also participated in several scientific conferences and seminars with presentations related to the dissertation topic.

Conclusion

The presented dissertation meets the primary academic requirements for preparing a doctoral thesis. Despite the remarks and recommendations provided, my overall evaluation is positive. Therefore, I recommend that the academic jury award Nihal Fehmieva Özergan the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” (PhD) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – International Communication).

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Galina Evstatieva

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