

PEER REVIEW

of a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor'

Author of the dissertation: **Elena Nikolova Runevska**, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Dissertation topic: "ASPECTS OF THE TEACHING OF THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE TO THE BESSARABIAN BULGARIANS FROM THE TERRITORY OF TODAY'S UKRAINE"

Field: **2.1 Philology**

Peer Reviewer: **Bilyana Bozhinova Todorova**, Department of Bulgarian language, Faculty of Philology, South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

I am a member of the scientific jury for the defence of the dissertation thesis for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Elena Nikolova Runevska, full-time PhD student in the scientific specialty "Bulgarian Language - Applied Linguistics", professional field 2.1 Philology, field of higher education 2. Humanities at the Department of Bulgarian as a Foreign Language of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", according to Order No. RD38-373/9.07.2024 of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

1. General description of the submitted materials

The set of materials presented by Elena Nikolova Runevska includes a PhD thesis, a CV, an abstract, a list of printed scientific papers, and a protocol for verification of the originality of the scientific work.

The candidate has declared a total of 14 papers related to the topic of the thesis, seven of them are co-authored and in seven she is the only author. Therefore, she fulfils the requirements of LSDT (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for the Terms and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University.

1. Short biodata

According to the provided materials, Elena Runevska graduated from the Institute of Library Science and later she received a Master's degree in the Bulgarian Philology at the Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski". She has experience working in the media, as a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature at school, as a lecturer at a learning centre, and since 2008 she has been an assistant professor at the Department of Bulgarian as a Foreign Language of the Faculty of Slavonic Philology of Sofia University.

2. Actuality of the PhD thesis

The topic of the dissertation "ASPECTS OF TEACHING BULGARIAN LANGUAGE TO BESSARABIC BULGARIANS FROM THE TERRITORY OF TODAY'S

UKRAINE" is related to the main activity of Elena Runevskla as a lecturer of Bulgarian as a second/foreign language. The choice is more than justified for at least two reasons - on the one hand, it brings together Elena Runevska's long experience in the field of teaching Bulgarian to Bessarabian Bulgarians and, in this sense, has the potential to combine theory with practice; on the other hand, it addresses one of the most interesting problems in Bulgarian studies at the moment - the development of an adequate instrumentarium for teaching Bulgarian as a second and foreign language. The creation of adequate curricula in Bulgarian as a second/ foreign language for different groups of learners depending on their age, place of residence, degree of proficiency in Bulgarian language, and meeting their specific needs, is realized both by the professional community and Bulgarian communities abroad, and recently even by the authorities. Therefore, the choice of a topic related to the university education of students from one of the traditional Bulgarian communities abroad is more than appropriate

3. Description of the thesis

The PhD thesis consists of 232 pages, and its structure is as follows: introduction, three chapters, at the end of which there is a brief summary of the content of the respective chapter, conclusion, contributions, bibliography, description of publications on the topic of the dissertation and appendices.

In the introduction some important clarifications are presented - what are the object and the subject of the research (respectively, the teaching of Bulgarian to Bessarabian Bulgarians and the specifics and approaches in teaching Bulgarian as a second language to Bessarabian Bulgarians); the aim of the research - on the basis of the students' linguistic difficulties in speech and their motivation to identify strategies for their successful overcoming, to propose good practices in teaching, connected to the specifics of the linguistic situation in which the Bessarabian Bulgarians find themselves, to evaluate their effectiveness, as well as the related research tasks, including the identification of the most common difficulties students encounter in their language learning process, the linking of these language difficulties with the specificities of the Russian and Ukrainian languages they are native speakers of, the selection of strategies to overcome them, the development of Bulgarian language lesson designs and corresponding tasks to help in this process. The sixth task is defined as creating and conducting a survey with Bessarabian Bulgarians from the territory of present-day Ukraine in relation to their self-definition and the question of which language is their mother tongue.

It seems to me that the inclusion of the survey at the end of the thesis does not fit well into the overall structure, it is not presented as an organic part of the thesis but is a separate work, an article that has retained its independence. It would have been more appropriate, in my opinion, to place this questionnaire at the beginning of the dissertation, right after the main concepts have been analysed. It could be a starting point to make sense of the comparison between the Russian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian grammatical systems.

The first chapter describes the basic concepts that this study works with, and these are the basic concepts that applied linguistics and the methodology of teaching Bulgarian as a second/foreign language work with. The concepts of "first", "second", "third", "mother tongue" are introduced. The author properly used the terms "first" and "second" language, accepting the understanding of Zh. Koleva-Zlateva on the issue (an opinion which I also share). The other concepts that have found a place in this chapter are also well-chosen and adequately explained. What spoils the impression of a focused presentation of the main theoretical background is the poor graphic layout - the chapter titles are missing, and there is no numbering of subchapters and parts within chapters. There are also a number of omissions, misplaced letters, which are probably the result of lack of sufficient time, but which must be corrected if the thesis is to be published.

I find the use of contrastive analysis and error analysis as a basis for the study a very good choice, so citing authors such as A. Danchev, R. Shopov and others who have popularized them in Bulgarian environment is quite adequate. However, there are many sources in English which may be cited in this part. Furthermore, it seems to me that authors such as Ellis and Barkhuizen and Selinker should be cited directly rather than through other authors. Nevertheless, I think this chapter is well constructed, presents the main problems of teaching a language as a second language in a focused way, and describes some important features used by native speakers of another first language.

Another essential part of the first chapter is the description of the emigration waves before the Liberation, which led to the formation of the community of Bessarabian Bulgarians on the territory of today's Ukraine, as well as the presentation of the current state of the process of cultural and linguistic integration of Bessarabian Bulgarians. The opportunities offered by the Bulgarian state to the Bessarabian Bulgarians are presented, one of which is the so-called Decree No. 103, on the basis of which the Bessarabian Bulgarians can study at Bulgarian universities. At the end of the chapter, the specifics of the Bulgarian language of the Bulgarians in present-day Ukraine are presented in a summarized form, in which there is

both a positive transfer from Russian and Ukrainian in terms of some linguistic features and a negative transfer in terms of other linguistic features.

The second chapter deals with the specific analysis of linguistic errors in the teaching of Bulgarian as a second language and is a continuation of the theoretical basis presented in the first part of the first chapter. Some of the premises adopted by the author are presented again, this time addressing the specific most common systematic errors in students' language excerpted from written work, which are presented in Appendix 1. The collected material is very interesting and could be used in the future to investigate more detailed features of the mixed language of students of Bessarabian Bulgarians. In this part of the work the errors are described without presenting the reasons for their occurrence, and this is specified by the PhD student on page 42. I have one note here - on p. 42 the form "трима сина" is given as an example of replacing the plural form with the numeral form. However, this form is literary and it may be appropriate not to mention it. On pp. 44-45, I have some objections to the formulations *Детерминация на името: индивидуални, количествени или видово-родови признаци* and *Липса на детерминация на името: индивидуални, количествени или видово-родови признаци* because they are not informative enough. The additional examples on page 46 contain both redundant use of a definite name and the omission of a member where necessary. It seems to me that it would be better if these examples were classified.

On p. 79, "singular" is omitted in the sentence "Past tense verb forms have gender, plural verb forms do not".

The comparison between the temporal system of Bulgarian, Russian and Ukrainian is interesting and it seems to me that it would be deepened in the future research of Elena Rumevska by including more sources in order to bring out the specifics of each system in more detail. The tense system, along with definiteness, are particularly difficult for Slavic-speaking students to master, as numerous studies have pointed out, and word order and collocations are a challenge for anyone learning a second language. I therefore welcome the task-based semantic-pragmatic approach adopted by the PhD candidate in her work and presented to us.

A very interesting sub-chapter is the one that presents the linguistic sense and is related to the reception of phraseological units with a male and female component. It seems to me, however, that this part should have been more clearly connected in the overall conception of the work, because it does not now stand as an organic part of the thesis.

One of the most important and contributory parts of the thesis is the description of the strategies for overcoming language difficulties. Here I have a slight objection to the phrasing 'in the last decade' (p. 93), followed by early 21st century references.

The third chapter begins with a description of the design of Bulgarian language classes for independent and fluent learners. For me, this is the most interesting chapter in the study and a major contribution to the methodology of teaching Bulgarian as a second/foreign language. It is a so-called case study, which the candidate applied in her work, but which she has repeatedly approbated during the years she has been teaching students. It seems to me that it is useful to indicate here to what extent such an organisation is also possible in a wider context and whether Runevska thinks it is suitable specifically for her target group.

The candidate presents a typology of the tasks that she has prepared and implemented, as well as the curricula for first- and second-year students of Bessarabian Bulgarians, related to the recommendations of the Council on Lifelong Learning. The monitoring of results is also presented. It seems to me that a statistical summary of the results and/or a questionnaire to present the students' feedback on each of the elements included in the training would be useful to be added.

The following sub-chapters present individual studies that support the claim that training should be practical, and related to the needs of the students. An overall summary is lacking. Contributions are correctly presented, followed by the bibliography and appendices.

The abstract, despite its small length, correctly and accurately presents the content of the work.

In conclusion, despite the above-mentioned remarks, it is obvious that the thesis presented to our attention is written by a person with a good linguistic culture, a lot of practical knowledge on a very important topic for applied Bulgarian studies - teaching Bulgarian as a second/foreign language. The dissertation is contributory and presents valuable observations and guidelines for teaching Bulgarian language to Bessarabian students. Outside of the thesis, my overall impression of Elena Runevska is positive; I know her as a thorough scholar with diverse interests and extensive teaching experience. Therefore, I strongly believe that the esteemed jury should award Elena Runevska the educational and scientific degree of "DOCTOR".