

REVIEW

On a dissertation on a topic:

"ORAL LANGUAGE DISORDERS AS A MAJOR PREDICTOR OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL DYSLEXIA"

For acquisition of ONS "Doctor"

In a professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Speech Therapy)

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The review was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application and the Rules for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The review of the materials is according to the order of the rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the appointment of a scientific jury No. RD 38-62/31.01.2023.

Teodora Yaramova has submitted all the necessary documents required for the dissertation defense procedure.

1. Brief presentation of the doctoral student

Teodora Yaramova completed her bachelor's education in 2004 at VTU "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", specialty "Social Activities". In 2014, he obtained an OKS master's degree at "Paisiy Hilendarski" PU with professional qualification - speech therapist, teacher of language and speech disorders. Since 2019, he has been a full-time doctoral student at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski", doctoral program "Speech Therapy", professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Speechology). In the period 2013-2016, he worked as a junior teacher of children with language and speech disorders in the Resource Center for supporting the integrated education and upbringing of children and students with special educational needs, the city of Smolyan. From 2016 to the present moment, he worked consecutively as - a teacher of children with language and speech disorders at the Regional Center for Support of the Inclusive Education Process, Smolyan; speech therapist at "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" and OU "Ivan Vazov", Smolyan.

Since 2019, he has been a holder of the Third professional-qualification degree, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", DIUU. In the period 2005-2023, he participated in a total of 44 qualification

courses, trainings, conferences and seminars in the field of speech therapy, inclusive education and special pedagogy. Facts that unconditionally demonstrate the desire of doctoral student Teodora Yaramova for professional development, improvement and additional qualification. Without retelling the content of the dissertation, I will make some highlights that I think are important.

2. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms

The subject of the presented doctoral dissertation is the assessment of atypical language behavior in oral speech as a marker for subsequent difficulties both in mastering the writing process and in the development of school skills in general. The author defines these difficulties as developmental dyslexia. The object of research are children aged 6;0 to 7;0 years who, after an assessment of language functioning, form an experimental group demonstrating the presence of language deficits. The study aimed to examine whether identified atypical language behavior interacts with academic difficulties at school age. In this sense, the studied problem has a serious practical application. As a rule, children with specific language disorders grow up as children with difficulties in mastering the written form of speech and in developing academic skills. Undoubtedly, reading and writing are processes based on language competence and the possibilities of correct language expression in oral speech. Clinical interventions in the early years should maximize the opportunity to strengthen oral language as the foundation of literacy – not only readiness to read and write, but also those targeting semantics, vocabulary and the generation of one's own language utterances.

On the other hand, one of the main diagnostic markers for developmental dyslexia is the so-called discrepancy between levels of spoken and written language (Lyon GR, 2003; Catts, Adlof, Hogan, & Weismer, 2005; Berninger V., 2006; Connelly V., 2006). At the level of oral speech, children with dyslexia generate normative language utterances with respect to the formal structure of the language. They are also characterized by high levels of functioning in the remaining areas of the language system – semantics and pragmatics. Children with dyslexia and those with developmental language disorders share a common deficit only in the development of metaphonological language skills (Bishop D., Snowling M., 2004). Moreover, in dyslexia these features generate difficulties with grapheme-phoneme decoding in reading, while in developmental language disorders they reflect on reading comprehension (Snowling M., 2017). Differences that determine a differentiated approach to diagnosis and speech therapy intervention.

Therefore, I believe that the more serious contribution of the research topic lies in the search for specific relationships between individual components of language development and difficulties in academic achievement, which was carried out by the doctoral student and is largely presented.

3. Purpose, tasks and hypotheses of the study

In connection with the formulated research questions for the assessment of language functioning in oral speech and interpretation of established deficits as a predictor of difficulties in mastering written speech, I believe that doctoral candidate Yaramova specified relevant

research hypotheses, methods and procedures. The goal and tasks are set clearly and concretely. Research questions are meaningful and fit the purpose.

4. Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and correspondence of the used literature

Given the set topic and the author's search for interaction between the development of oral and written speech, the theoretical framework presents different approaches to the interpretation of language and its functioning - medical (neuropsychological) and behavioral (linguistic). Different concepts for understanding developmental language disorders and developmental dyslexia are also discussed in the same text section. Atypical language behavior has been identified as a major predictor of the onset of dyslexia.

The presented models of acquired disorders of the language, on the one hand, and acquired disorders of the reading and writing processes, on the other, I consider redundant in the theoretical formulation of the considered problem, as they do not correspond to the topic of the dissertation work.

At the same time, there is a lack of a clear theoretical model for defining the condition of developmental dyslexia. The modern approach to the interpretation of the violation, as a phenomenon of a different type of processing of verbal information, has not been derived. The same applies to the main diagnostic criteria that define it:

- Inconsistency between the potential capabilities of the individual and achievements in written speech;
- Discrepancy between the ability to decode when reading and understanding what is read;
- Inconsistency between the levels of language expression in oral and written speech;
- Achievement discrepancy.

As a consequence of this, a serious theoretical case arises: Dyslexia refers to children with Developmental Language Disorders (DLD) who have reached school age or is a separate nosology manifested as a specific difficulty in mastering literacy, manifested by different manifestations and implying different speech therapy methods for impact?

Also, the presented form of dyslexia as "a more general syndrome with a previously known etiology - sensory, visual, intellectual, motor, kinetic, autistic disorder" (p. 44) refers to a wide range of child development disorders that are exclusionary criteria for dyslexia.

5. Correctness in citing a representative number of authors

A significant number of scientific sources are cited - 276 titles (27 in Cyrillic, 246 in Latin and 3 internet sites), which cover a wide range of publications, the oldest being from 1973. To a large extent, the citation is correct and covers significant authors in the fields, related to the topic of the dissertation. An inaccuracy was detected in the citation of Internet addresses, which I assume is a technical error. It is a post on Facebook (Retrieved on 28.06.2019 from <https://www.facebook.com/dyslexia.kids/posts/2077721382263637>), which of course could not have the status of a scientific publication.

6. Availability of a justified and developed theoretical model of the study

An original toolkit, constructed in two separate methodologies, was developed for a longitudinal study of the interaction between language disorders in preschool age and the establishment of writing difficulties, academic achievement and gender differences in elementary school age, in the same subjects. Assessment of language functioning includes tasks for phonological, meta-phonological, morpho-syntactic and semantic language skills. Verbal-auditory dictation was used to assess written speech. The data on the academic functioning of the school-aged subjects were collected through a pedagogical questionnaire specially developed for the purposes of the study. It makes a good impression that the author's assessment methodology is constructed in the traditions of Bulgarian speech therapy theory and practice.

7. Correspondence of the chosen methodology and research methodology with the set goal and tasks of the dissertation work

The presented evaluation methodology is consistent with the set goals and objectives of the study. Of the 100 children examined with the language functioning battery, 19 cases of children with atypical language development were found. The same (except one) were followed in the academic environment of the primary school. I believe that this is one of the main contributions of the study conducted. Due to their extreme labor intensity, longitudinal studies are rare in Bulgarian research practice. In this sense, the presented results are valuable and can be informative. The conclusions drawn from the first and second stages of the research give the doctoral student reason to assume that the raised hypotheses are confirmed. The obtained results unconditionally confirm the interaction between oral speech and the development of writing skills, in particular the skills of verbal-auditory dictation.

8. Availability of own contribution in the collection and analysis of the empirical data

All research and other applied methods were developed and carried out personally by the PhD student, under the guidance of her supervisor. I believe that the study done is a good basis for future research to be extended to assess other aspects of the ability to encode written text, as well as those related to the development of reading skills.

9. Contributions

I would like to draw particular attention to one significant applied contribution of the dissertation work. In the field of communication disorders, it is accepted to believe that for language to function properly, it should not differ in form, content and use from expectations of age and sociocultural environment. Linguistic behavior is seen as the manifestation of an individual's linguistic competence for the form, content and use of his native language, through speech. In other words, linguistic expression is the actual use of language in the processes of communication, encoding and decoding of messages in different types of utterances. Expresses the ability to apply implicit and scholarly knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and language usage in any given communication in such a way as to achieve success in its completion.

Modalities of this linguistic expression are spoken and written speech. Speech - oral or written, contains identical language units and rules for combining them. The results obtained from the study prove that the peculiarities in the mastery and use of linguistic signs in oral speech cause similar manifestations in the development of literacy (reading and writing skills). This is of extreme importance for clinical practice and the specificity of therapeutic approaches. It is necessary that speech therapy interventions when working with children with developmental language disorders include not only the development of phonological, morpho-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic language skills for expression in oral speech, but also be supported by non-conventional literacy by a specialist (in upper preschool age), in order to prevent academic difficulties. In cases where an untreated condition of atypical language acquisition is identified, elementary teachers should be informed that these are students at risk of academic difficulties and need specialized speech therapy support.

10. Publications related to the dissertation work

Results of the dissertation work have been published in seven editions - one in the magazine "Special Pedagogy and Logopedia", ed. FNOI, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" and in six collections of reports from scientific forums of FNIO, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

11. Abstract

The presented abstract correctly reflects the main aspects of the research and the contributions of the developed work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the notes and recommendations made to the presented work, I believe that the work of Teodora Penkova Yaramova submitted to me for review contains essential results, conclusions and recommendations that would have serious practical application when working with children with learning difficulties, especially those with established atypical language development.

In connection with this, I believe that Teodora Penkova Yaramova can be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Speechology).

21/04/ 2023

Reviewer:


Assoc. prof. Ekaterina Todorova, PhD