

OPINION

Prof. Stiliana Belcheva, MD, PhD

Regarding: The thesis of PhD student Emanuela Hrabar Shtika, titled: "Influence of phonological processing on spoken and written language in aphasia" presented for the award of educational and scientific degree PhD in a professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program "Logopedics" at the Department "Logopedics", Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts, Department "Logopedics", SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Scientific supervisors: Assoc. prof. Katerina Shtereva, PhD

By order № PK 38-56/29.01.2024 of the Rector of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", I was elected a member of the Scientific Jury, and by decision of the meeting of the Scientific Jury (protocol №1/08.02.2024) I was elected to prepare an Opinion for the defense of PhD student Emanuela Hrabar Shtika, s of PhD thesis in the professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy, in the scientific specialty "Logopedics".

This opinion has been prepared in accordance to the Law of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Academic Staff Development Law and the Regulations for the Conditions and the Procedure for Acquisition of Academic Degrees and Academic Position Occupation in SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

I have not found a lapse in the open defense procedure and the documentation submitted by Emanuela Hrabar Shtika.

I declare that I have no co-publications with the PhD student.

Brief biographical data

PhD student Emanuela Hrabar Shtika was born on 08.10.1994 in the city of Sofia. In 2013, Emanuela Shtika graduated from secondary school at PGICHE "St. Methodius". In 2017, she received a bachelor's degree in "Logopedics", and in 2019, a master's degree in "Developmental Communication Disorders", Faculty of Elementary and Preschool Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

General characteristics of the dissertation work

The structure of the PhD work submitted for defense is in accordance with the actual standards for the preparation of such a work. The latter covers 231 pages: Introduction (7 pages), Literature Review (72 pages), Aim and Objectives (2 pages), Research Stages (1 page), Hypotheses (1 page), Object, subject and contingent of the research (2 pages), Procedure of conducting the scientific research (21 pages), Results and Discussion (55 pages), Summary and Conclusions (3 pages), Recommendations (2 pages), Limitations (1 p.), Conclusion (1 p.), Contributions (1 p.), Future Research Directions (1 p.), Bibliography (12 p.), followed by – Appendices (43 p.).

The dissertation is properly constructed, well and eruditely written - illustrated with 16 tables, 28 graphs and 78 appendices. 116 authors are cited in the bibliography, of which 26 are in Cyrillic and 90 are in Latin.

Actuality and significance of the dissertation topic

In recent years problems with communicative disorders affecting the language ability of a person after brain damage have been focused on diagnosis, treatment and the creation of individual complex programs to remove the lasting consequences of aphasias (motor, sensory, etc.).

The cause of aphasias is always brain damage. Most often, they are caused by a stroke, but they can be caused by brain trauma, tumor, epilepsy, various local, focal lesions, inflammation in the hemisphere dominant in terms of speech.

Despite the similarity in the symptoms after a stroke (aphasia, dysarthria, apraxia, etc.), speech disorders are very individual in each patient. The progression and outcome of a stroke varies from case to case. Compiling the logopedics diagnosis is a multi-stage evaluation process that includes observation of the speech, language and cognitive abilities of the patient after a stroke or other type of brain pathology, which allows the speech therapists to assess his deficits. Phonological processing is a key element in language difficulties in aphasia. Impairment of this process leads to characteristic difficulties in recognizing, distinguishing, processing and manipulating phonemes and phonological structures in spoken and written language. All this speaks of the need to include diagnostics of phonological processing in the logopedics process when evaluating patients with aphasia. This approach would contribute to the creation of individual therapeutic strategies and is a prerequisite for key information on appropriate methods to support language processes in individuals with aphasia.

A strategic goal and actual task of the study is to create a tool to determine the state of phonological processing in persons with aphasia and to prove its influence on oral and written language in these Bulgarian-speaking patients, with the aim of achieving better results on the field of therapy and restoration of language function in this communicative disorder.

Shtika 's PhD thesis is dedicated to this problem.

Knowledge of the problem

In the review E. Shtika presents data in a clear and concise form, both in a historical aspect, as well as the most essential data from the literature, presenting the modern classifications, types, symptoms and predictors of the aphasia. The types of alexia and agraphia are discussed in separate chapters; the specifics of the Bulgarian phonological system in aphasia. Special attention is also paid to theoretical approaches and models related to oral, written language and phonological processing, as well as to the diagnosis of phonology in aphasia.

In the literature review E. Shtika has summarized the current state of the problem in a very good way. A very good impression is made by the summary of the literature data at the end of the literature review with the indicated more important conclusions and unresolved questions. The literary review is a good achievement of the author and deserves a positive evaluation.

It should be pointed out that the material included in the overview is presented in good Bulgarian which is also characteristic of the author's subsequent presentation.

Research methodology

In this chapter, the aims, hypotheses and tasks of the research are very well and consistently presented; the stages, object, subject and participants of the research; the process of selection and preparation of the experimental instrumentation; data collection procedures, diagnostic and statistical methods.

Aim and tasks of the dissertation

The aim of the dissertation work is to create a tool to determine the state of phonological processing in persons with aphasia and to prove its influence on oral and written language in these patients speakers of the Bulgarian language.

To fulfill these goals, E. Shtika has set herself 9 specific tasks, which are clearly formulated and provide the opportunity for very well-directed studies.

It makes a good impression that in connection with the set aim Stika has formed two main working hypotheses.

The object of the study are adult patients with motor or sensory-motor aphasia.

The subjects of the study were 30 patients with motor or sensory-motor aphasia between the ages of 23 and 86, with a male to female ratio of 2:1.

Note: The experimental group included persons with both motor and sensory-motor aphasia. I believe that the work would win if the subjects in the experimental group were divided into two subgroups - with only motor and only with sensory-motor aphasia and the youngest patient (23 years old) was not included in the group.

Results

The studies were conducted in a logical sequence. The results of the research conducted are very well documented.

The data obtained using adequate approaches are convincing.

The results from the separate ones studies are very well and clearly presented in 16 tables, 28 graphs and 78 appendices.

This creates visibility of scientific facts from one's own research. To analyze her own results, Shtika used appropriate statistical methods, which creates a basis for discussing the data obtained and the conclusions drawn from it.

As systematically as the research is conducted, so systematically are and the discussions that follow each of the chapters of results. E. Shtika skillfully and thoroughly uses her literary knowledge to competently and critically discuss her own results and prove her hypotheses. A very good impression is made at the end of the dissertation work by the proposed recommendations, limitations, the conclusion as well as the future directions for scientific research.

As a result of the work done and the proper discussion of the results, 7 conclusions have been formulated. I accept the conclusions.

Contributions of a theoretical, methodological, empirical, practical-applied, methodological and social character have been made in the dissertation work, which would be of interest to practice.

I accept those presented by Shtika scientific contributions as are presented. They really reflect what has been achieved.

Based on the above, I evaluate the dissertation work of E. Shtika as her personal work, fully meeting the requirements and recommended scientometric criteria for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD".

Abstract of dissertation

The abstract of dissertation in a volume of 54 pages is compiled in accordance with the requirements of the regulations and reproduces the dissertation work appropriately and to a sufficient extent.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my assessment of the dissertation work presented by Emanuela Hrabar Shtika on the topic: "Influence of phonological processing on spoken and written language in aphasia" is positive, and with this opinion I express my conviction that the work fully meets the accepted requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its

Application, as well as the specific Criteria for occupying academic positions and acquiring scientific degrees in "SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Based on the above, I will vote "**YES**" and recommend the respected members of the Scientific Jury to vote positively and award **Emanuela Hrabar Shtika** the educational and scientific degree **PhD** in a professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program "Logopedics" at the Department "Logopedics", Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

12, April, 2024
Sofia

Member of the Scientific Jury: 
/prof. Stiliana Belcheva, MD, PhD/