



REVIEW

**By Associate Professor Yana Krasimirova Sabeva, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”**

**Member of a scientific jury, appointed by order № ПД-38-412 of 14.7.2023 of the Rector of SU
"St. Kliment Ohridski"**

Subject: dissertation for award of an educational and scientific degree Doctor in professional field
2.3 Philosophy/Rhetoric (Non-verbal Communication in Rhetoric)

PhD Candidate: Kremena Stefanova Dachova, full-time PhD student, Department “Rhetoric”,
Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Dissertation topic: Changes in non-verbal codes in public communication in the context of the
global health challenge - COVID – 19

Supervisor: Professor Velichko Rumenchev, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

1. General overview of the procedure

Dissertation "Changes in non-verbal codes in public communication in the context of the global health challenge - COVID - 19" has passed a successful internal discussion. The doctoral student completed the program with the right to public defense.

For participation in the procedure, Kremena Dachova provided a list with the following articles:

- Modern projections of leadership – web based proceedings from International Scientific Conference Leadership and Human Resources Development, 29-30.11.2019, pp. 149-158;
- The hidden dimension in the 21st century: space as a modality in non-verbal communication" - Rhetoric and Communications magazine, 07/1/2021;
- Information society and knowledge society. The three paths to knowledge in the 21st century - web based proceedings from the 19th national scientific conference with international participation Knowledge Society and Humanism of the 21st Century, 1.11.2021.;
- From SOLER, through SURETY to SURVIVE - models of effective non-verbal communication during a Global Health Crisis - magazine Contacts - to be published;



- Globalization and public participation in conditions of global health crisis COVID-19, magazine Sociological problems, 2023;
- From SOLER, through SURETY to SURVIVE - models of effective IHC during a Global Health Crisis", magazine Philosophical Alternatives, 2023;
- Dimensions of culture. Contemporary cultural anthropology during the global health crisis COVID -19, Journal of Culture, 2023.

2. Resume on candidate's work, based on documents provided

2.1 Education

Kremena Dachova has a degree in Philosophy from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (1997). She has a postgraduate qualification in PR and advertising at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (1996-1997). She also holds Master's degree in organizational psychology from the same university (2014-2016). Kremena Dachova is a Doctoral student at the Department of Rhetoric in the period 2019 - 2022. In the period 2018 - 2022 she participated in a number of international trainings in Cyprus, Poland, Croatia and Spain.

2.2 Professional Experience

In the CV provided Kremena Dachova indicated professional experience in the field of advertising, marketing and public relations (1997-2014). In the period 2014-2021, she was a consultant and trainer on topics related with company culture, organizational training, leadership skills, negotiations, etc.

3. Characteristics of the dissertation work

The dissertation has a volume of 350 pages. The text is divided into an introduction, four chapters, a resume and scientific contributions. Cited sources and references are added at the end of each chapter. The literature used includes 100 sources in Bulgarian, three in Russian and 20 in English. There are 68 electronic sources. The dissertation contains eight tables, 23 diagrams and eight photographs. There are seven appendices to the main text. The total number of citations is 632.

Attached to the dissertation is the 64-page abstract, which faithfully and comprehensively reflects the content of the dissertation and its contributions.



1.1 Topic of the dissertation

As expected, topics related to various consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic enjoy high public interest and provoke an active public debate. The effects of the pandemic are yet to be assessed and various recovery programs and preventive strategies will be built based on the results obtained. This process of analysis and development of various programs, analyses, recommendations, etc. is actively observed in communications and in especially in crisis communications. In connection with this the study of a specific part of human communication – non-verbal communication and its transformations provoked by the pandemic is extremely relevant. What's more, this type of analysis has good potential to be applied in practice.

Traditionally, the topic of non-verbal communication tempts many specialists, scientists and practitioners to take a stance, make recommendations, etc. However, there are still niches where there is a need for research with scientific and applied value. Development of meaningful, scientific analysis which could be used for practical recommendations is much needed.

The introduction of dissertation is dedicated to presentation of the main parameters of the study. At the beginning, the text presents the need of development of scientific research in the direction of controlling the consequences of COVID-19. A resume of different scientific researches of non-verbal communication conducted in Bulgaria and on a global scale is also included (pp. 1-5). The introduction describes so-called by the author "theoretical matrix of the study" which explains the main terms that are used (p.8). Also in the introduction, aim, subject, object, tasks and hypothesis are distinguished. The autor points that "research analyzes the multimodalities of contemporary public rhetoric with the aim of establishing the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic and related changes in society (observed in the period of the studied time frame (2020 - 2022)) have influenced the non-verbal human behavior" (pp. 8-9). The main tasks of the dissertation are also indicated here. In view of their importance, it should be outlined the tasks related to the study of changes in non-verbal behavior during a global health crisis of Bulgarian and international public figures, including "to summarize the non-verbal signs of reactive behavior in conditions of COVID-19" (p. 9) and to "update the existing scientific, theoretical, communication models" (p. 9).

As the object of the research, the doctoral student points out "non-verbal behavior as part of communication between people in risk communication - a consequence of dealing with COVID - 19 - the global health challenge" (p.9).



The "non-verbal manifestations of three of the four main functions of communication: perceptive, expressive and interactive" are pointed to be the subject of the study (p. 10).

The temporal scope of the study is from March 2020 to the end of 2022.

Web-based sources with free access were used for analysis (p.10). The objects of the study, public figures, are divided into two subgroups. The division is made on a territorial basis: Bulgarian and international.

The first subgroup includes Donald Trump, former President of the United States, Joe Biden, current President of the United States, Vladimir Putin - President and former Prime Minister of Russia, Angela Merkel, Federal Chancellor of Germany until 2021 and Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of Great Britain.

The second subgroup includes two public figures from Bulgarian politics - Rumen Radev - President of the Republic of Bulgaria and Boyko Borisov - Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria until 2021.

The main hypothesis (p.10) states that "in conditions of: an existential crisis on a global level, creating prerequisites for a number of changes in social life; with greatly reduced real communication, occurring, however, in a time of high technical achievements, providing unlimited opportunities for virtual communication in real time, independent of distances (between people, cities, countries, time and continents) - communication (in general) has its distinctive features that allow us to classify it as a specific Crisis Communication".

The first chapter (pp. 14-53) contains a historical overview of rhetoric, rhetorical classifications and rhetorical canons. The topic is placed in the context of public communication. Special attention is paid to dialogic communication formats. Debates and disputes are also emphasized.

Expanding the classification of "the types of disputes from classification of D. Pavlov and Y. Totseva", the doctoral student adds the so-called "health" aspect (p. 35). Undoubtedly, for the needs of the study, such an aspect is necessary. In view of their sustainability and the changes that occur in various spheres of political and social life, upgrading the existing classifications, with academic precision, is important in view of their relevance.

To prof. Velichko Rumenchev's classification of types and types of rhetoric according to their topic (political, judicial, academic and theological), the author adds two more thematic categories: "speech on medical issues" and "globally significant speeches" (p.39). In view of the purpose and specific tasks of the study, this update is also adequate.



The third part of this chapter is devoted to rhetoric in the context of public communication. It begins with an extensive overview of rhetorical canons, including their application during the COVID-19 pandemic (pp. 40-44). The text is followed by an exposition dedicated to "public communication" and its essence, modern manifestations and applications (pp. 44-53), incl. its useage for the purpose of manipulation of public opinion. Here it should be noted the desire of the doctoral student to cover comprehensively and present all aspects of the researched topic, as well as her attempts to upgrade the existing knowledge with her own scientific contributions.

The second chapter (pp. 57-143) is entitled "Non-verbal codes in public communication - a short theoretical overview and contemporary practical reading". It contains an extensive theoretical overview, developed from the perspective of the application of non-verbal communication in practice. The works of Charles Darwin, Edward Hall, Julius Fast, Allan Pease and others are briefly presented. (pp. 57-61). Basic functions of non-verbal communication are described (p. 61-66). In the same chapter, the author highlights the topic of visual rhetoric (p. 67). She dwells on the concept of "multimodality" (p. 67-69), then extensively describes the different modalities of non-verbal communication (p. 70-118).

The second part of this chapter has a strong focus on the possible implementation of theory in practice. Here the author offers her own model for effective study and evaluation of non-verbal communication, called "to SURVIVE", which is based on the models of Egan and Stickley (p.124-139). The main reason is, as the author explains "an extension of Egan's model, further developed by Stickley is not only a necessary condition, but also a mandatory prerequisite for a change in the understanding of effective non-verbal communication" (p.139). Its purpose is to focus on survival, which we can agree is one of the tasks of communication, incl. of non-verbal communication not only in crisis conditions. The upgrade of the existing communication models in practice is one of the contribution points in the dissertation, which provides a basis for future research and applications in practice.

The third chapter (p. 152 – 235) is dedicated to crises, their types and specifics. It begins with explanation of the concept and different types of crises according to the territorial and temporal scope (p. 152-154). The next part of this chapter is devoted to management of existential crises, which is approached through the prism of basic human emotions (pp. 154-170).

The third part of this chapter is entitled "Global Health Crisis. The usage of crisis circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic" (p.181-186). Here the author concludes that "in the



period of the global health crisis 2020-2022, the man of the 21st century experienced his cathartic moment in terms of who he is, does he know himself and to what extent and how he wants to present himself to the world " (p.186), with which I agree.

In this chapter, the author examines the dual nature of the manifestations of the COVID-19 pandemic – as a dividing line and as a unifier.

In the third chapter, some specifics of communication during a crisis are presented (p. 199 - 207). At the end of this chapter, the author summarizes the main effects of crises on human behavior and on communication (p. 230 - 235).

As a general comment, it can be said here that the topic of crisis communications is presented according to the aims and objectives of the study.

The fourth chapter (p.242 – 310) deals with the non-verbal codes in the public speech of seven public political figures. These are Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin and Boris Johnson. Bulgarian political leaders Rumen Radev and Boyko Borisov are also included. For the purposes of the analysis, the author used publicly available web-based sources. She organizes her analysis around three main functions of communication: cognitive, emotional, and interactional. The author first makes a personal analysis of the non-verbal codes in the communication of each of the studied persons, then makes a comparative analysis of the two groups - Bulgarian and international. The main conclusion states that, “the global health crisis caused by COVID-19 has led to significant changes in the non-verbal behavior of people”, which already have and will continue to have consequences. “In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, they appear to be consequences, but compared to the horizon of the future - they are and will be the cause of subsequent global and irreversible changes in society” (p.309).

The conclusion of the dissertation (pp. 315-345) again presents the main points of the research, including object, subject and methodology. Here the author again emphasizes the idea that COVID-19 pandemic has provoked significant changes in communication, incl. in non-verbal communication.

The author's decision is to place in the conclusion a long text about public communication and the reflection of cultural specifics on it.

4. Scientific contributions



The author has listed a series of scientific contributions to her work. In view of their importance, I would like to underline the following:

4.1 The dissertation is a comprehensive study of crisis and post-crisis communication in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its content and structure demonstrate good knowledge of the topic, analytical and critical thinking.

4.2 An innovative model for assessing the effectiveness of non-verbal communication was presented, developed on already existing ones, which could have a wide application in practice.

4.3 Both the topic of the research, which is extremely promising, and its results provide an opportunity for future developments with the potential for significant scientific and applied value.

4.4 The analysis of the connections between specific crisis situations and changes in non-verbal behavior is extremely valuable and has a potential to be applied in practice.

5. Critical notes and recommendations

The scientific output of the doctoral student is good and covers various aspects of communication, with a focus on non-verbal communication. I would encourage her to continue her work in this direction, as this field provides an opportunity to conduct various studies of high scientific and applied value.

6. Question for the PhD student

How do you see the future of classic communication campaigns, including of crisis management campaigns, in the conditions of the entry of artificial intelligence?

7. Conclusion

The dissertation "Changes in non-verbal codes in public communication in the context of the global health challenge COVID-19" for award of the educational and scientific degree Doctor in professional direction 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric - Non-verbal communication in rhetoric) of Kremena Stefanova Dachova is distinguished by high scientific value and opportunities to be applied in practice.

It represents original research that fills niches in science and in practice. It also has original scientific contributions with potential for future application.



In connection with the above I strongly recommend to the respected members of the scientific jury to give positive assessment to Kremena Dachova and to award her with educational and scientific degree Doctor. I also give my positive assessment.

Sofia

Associate professor Yana Sabeva, PhD

Oct 5th 2023