



SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF RHETORIC

REVIEW AND OPINION

on the Ph.D. thesis:

**"TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE NON-VERBAL CODE SYSTEMS IN PUBLIC
COMMUNICATION DURING THE GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGE COVID – 19"**

submitted in fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Rhetoric – Non-verbal
communication)

Ph.D. candidate: Kremena Stefanova Dachova

Supervisor: prof. Velichko Rumenev, Dr. Sc.

Reviewer: assoc. prof. Gerasim Petrinski, Ph.D.

Ph.D. candidate

Kremena Dachova has graduated in Philosophy and holds a Master's degree in Organizational Psychology. She has obtained postgraduate qualification in Public Relations and Advertising. She has been enrolled as a regular doctoral student under Order No. RD 20-1232/12.07.2019.

All activities outlined in the approved individual plan of the doctoral student have been executed diligently, and the respective reports have been submitted at regular department meetings of the Department of Rhetoric during the corresponding academic years. The requirements for obtaining 60 credits annually from educational, pedagogical, and scientific activities have been met. She has actively taken advantage of opportunities for training and education abroad, specifically in Spain (three training sessions), Croatia, Cyprus, and Poland.

During her doctoral studies, Dachova has published seven articles in refereed publications in the scientific field of her dissertation, participated in two conferences, and has met the minimum bibliometric requirements as specified in the Higher Attestation Commission Regulations. In addition, it should be noted that she has actively promoted rhetoric and communication theory in various popular and specialized publications and radio and television broadcasts.

The Ph.D. candidate was approved for a public defense of her dissertation within the legally established deadline at a departmental meeting held in June 2023, with the respective deadlines being adhered to in accordance with the legal and sub-legal regulations and the regulations of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. The preliminary discussion of the dissertation work took place at an extended departmental council meeting of the Department of Rhetoric.

During the preliminary discussion, remarks and recommendations were made to the Ph.D. candidate, both methodological and content-related. Subsequently, the jury members unanimously decided to approve the proceeding to public defense. They also approved the following members of the academic jury: /internal/ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yana Sabeva, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gerasim Petrinski, /external/ Prof. Dr. Margarita Pesheva, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stella Angova, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Yordanova.

In this composition, the academic jury was further approved by Order No. RD-38-412, dated July 14, 2023, based on the relevant decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of

Philosophy. At its first meeting, the academic jury elected Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gerasim Petrinski as its chairman and set the date for the public defense as October 27, 2023 (Friday) at 4:00 PM—all procedures in accordance with the law and the regulations of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' was followed.

Ph.D. thesis

The topic of the Ph.D. thesis aligns with its content. It distinguishes itself with its relevance in the context of the significant changes that communicative practices and communication theories underwent during the COVID-19 pandemic (see pages 1-4 and 5-8 of the dissertation). Dachova is justified in discussing the media's 'monothematicism' associated with the pandemic (page 201). Non-verbal communication is a scientific field that has developed significantly over the past half-century, but its dynamics in the conditions of society's forced fragmentation are undoubtedly an essential subject of research with significant practical applicability. The topic chosen by Dachova makes substantial contributions to increasing interest in crisis rhetoric and public relations, which other colleagues in the Department of Rhetoric and other departments in the country actively develop.

The structure of the dissertation is clear, precise, and aligns with the content of the work. The research comprises 350 pages and includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and the contributions of the Ph.D. candidate, cited sources, a bibliography, and seven appendices with photographic material. In terms of arrangement, the text is appropriately distributed concerning the topic. However, it is noteworthy that a substantial portion of the dissertation, around 150 pages, is dedicated to a general overview of the characteristics and specifics of rhetoric as a research field and the features of non-verbal communication. While necessary for the clarity of further exposition, the Ph.D. candidate could have significantly reduced this part of her work, especially given its overall large volume.

The appendices, mainly containing photographic material, effectively complement the text and closely follow its content. In the electronic version of the dissertation, the title page needs to be included, which does not detract from the work in content or argumentation. The table of

contents is included in the abstract but not in the main text. The sources are cited in each chapter, which enhances clarity but is only sometimes accepted practice.

In **the introduction** (pages 1-14), the Ph.D. candidate provides a brief general overview of the previous research on the discussed problem and specifies the terminology ("terminological matrix"). The study's goal, subject and object, chronological period, hypothesis, methodology, approach, and research methods (pages 8-12) are formulated correctly and in accordance with established practices. She aims to analyze the dynamics of non-verbal communication globally and examine the changes in Bulgaria.

The examined sources adequately cover the topic and are distributed into two main groups. The first includes the public statements of several leaders: Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel, Boris Johnson, Rumen Radev, and Boyko Borisov. However, this selection necessarily limits the scope of the research to some extent, as it primarily focuses on the official public discourse.

The research subject, the dynamics of non-verbal behavior during a global health crisis, is sufficiently defined and fully corresponds to the subsequent exposition. The research hypothesis relates to the possibility of defining "Communication during a Crisis" as a specific branch of communication theory, especially non-verbal communication. The formulated goal of the research may lead to the use of the results in similar studies.

In the research methods, Dachova sets a rather ambitious task, combining various approaches in different parts of her research, such as "analysis and synthesis," "rhetorical argumentative analysis," "pragmatics-dialectical analysis of argumentative discourse," "multimodal," and "discursive analysis." A drawback of this formulation is the lack of sufficiently specific definitions for these approaches. Dachova clarifies them throughout the dissertation, but should have been better presented in the introduction. Additionally, in my opinion, there is a tautology observed in the title of this part of the introduction (page 11), as the terms "methodology," "approach," and "methods" are not differentiated for the purposes of the research and, in their usual usage, significantly overlap. I acknowledge the innovative character of the study outlined on pages 11-12 and the conclusions proposed on page 12.

The first chapter (pages 14-57) is dedicated to rhetoric as a subject of research and studies on public communication in general. Its size is adequate. It is divided into three main parts. The first of them focuses on rhetoric, its historical development, classifications, and branches (called 'rhetorical canons') (pages 14-44). The second part, significantly shorter, is dedicated to public communication, its essence, historical development, modes, and manipulative aspects (pages 44-52). The "brief" historical overview is indeed brief (pages 14-19), as it should be, given the topic of the work. By the way, I must express my reluctance regarding the inclusion of a general historical overview of rhetoric in dissertations on modern topics. Parallels with the historical development of rhetoric and oratory are acceptable and necessary, but such a comprehensive subchapter is somewhat redundant. In this case, Dachova has mixed classifications of style with general rhetorical classifications (page 17) (distinguishing between the two was a problem for authors even in antiquity); Plato's Academy was not the first established higher educational institution in Europe: that honor probably goes to Isocrates' rhetorical school. I am afraid I have to disagree with the claim that "dialogue prevailed over monologue during the Middle Ages" (page 30) – if my own brief lecture course on the history of Old Bulgarian eloquence leaves such an impression, I pledge to make every effort to correct it before any potential publication.

Considering the thesis's topic, it is strange to me that there is no information about the development of studies on non-verbal communication in antiquity, such as, for example, in the anonymous *Rhetoric to Herennius* (circa 87 BC) and in Quintilian (circa 91 AD). The same remarks apply to the brief historical overview of the development of the five phases in creating a rhetorical work, which coincides with the five branches of rhetoric (page 40). Aristotle did not define this classification, and Cicero is not the author of *Rhetoric to Herennius*. The terms "хереза" ("heuresis"?) and "непyp" ("peroration"?) are obviously misspelled (page 41).

Although the Ph.D. candidate briefly introduces other classifications, the rhetorical genres and types are presented exclusively according to Velichko Rumenchev's classification, enriched in places with additional theoretical models (for example, the classical model of communication developed by Shannon and Weaver, page 24 onwards) and general theories (for example, those of D. Pavlov and Y. Totseva, page 35). Of course, it is entirely justified that the Ph.D. candidate focuses on the relatively dominant form of indirect communication in our time, namely virtual communication.

In the context of rhetorical classification based on the number of active subjects, Dachova suggests adding "health dispute" to the typological criteria of Pavlov and Totseva (page 35), as well as introducing new criteria: "awareness and professional expertise" and "agnosticism of information" (page 37). The second captures an essential characteristic of crisis rhetoric surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, although I do not entirely agree with the term "agnosticism"'s appropriateness.

She also proposes distinguishing specific subtypes of rhetoric based on the purpose of the discourse and the topic of the discourse (page 39). The presentation of the discourse surrounding the health pandemic through the prism of the five parts of rhetoric (page 43 sq.) is coherent. At the end of the chapter, various modes of public speech (modes of necessity, desirability, obligation) are presented, which effectively complement the overall theoretical framework of the study, addressing the question of "how" the discourse on COVID-19 is conducted.

Chapter Two (pages 57-152) is also extensive. It provides a general theoretical overview of nonverbal communication and its practical applications, classification markers, functions, code systems, and components. It is highly commendable that the Ph.D. candidate has not limited herself to standard research in this well-established field but has presented numerous works, clearly and analytically distinguishing between scholarly and popular texts (pages 57-61). I emphasize this because this scientific field has enjoyed great popularity recently, and it is essential for the researcher to be able to make such a distinction. The functions of nonverbal communication are presented excellently, with appropriate attention given to the argumentative function crucial for rhetoric (pages 63-66). A special place is dedicated to "multimodal nonverbal communication" with its intercultural aspects and models for effective application (pages 67-69), although my opinion of E. Hemming's theories, as presented by Dachova, is somewhat reserved. The individual modalities (channels) through which nonverbal communication occurs are examined in great detail, and the Ph.D. candidate has made efforts to draw information not only from fundamental and well-known studies in Bulgaria but also from original research. However, I recommend she not accept Mehrabian's experiment on the percentage proportions of verbal and nonverbal communication so indiscriminately. Even though she has presented the nature of this research and the limitations of its results very accurately, she has still included the famous 55% intonation, 38% gesture, and 7% content even in the headings of the subsections. The models of effective

communication presented by the Ph.D. candidate towards the end of this part of the research are extremely useful. Dachova has also applied her model related to the changed communication requirements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (pages 132-139), including the obligation to protect the health of other communication participants and get vaccinated. The Ph.D. candidate has titled this model in English, and I recommend that she change the word "audithory" (sic!) to "audience" since the former is an adjective meaning "related to hearing or the sense of hearing," not "audience."

Chapter 3 (pp. 152-242) is dedicated to different types of crises, the role of emotions, and the general aspects of crisis communication. Like the previous part, it is extensive, which is reasonable given the complexity of the concept and the research topic. This part of the study is coherent and well-structured. Crises are typologized primarily in terms of their duration and geographical spread. The following section of the chapter focuses on the psychological and communicative aspects of emotions crucial for the COVID-19 period: grief, disgust, anger, and fear, with various nuances presented (pp. 156, 159, 161, 167). Dachova draws attention to the essential role of emotional intelligence in coping with the negative consequences of the global pandemic and in communication under such crisis conditions (especially pp. 175-181). The reference to the emotional aspects of the health crisis is directly related to the communicative-discursive transformations it imposes on rhetoric.

I recommend that the Ph.D. candidate avoids excessive reference to etymologies, especially incomplete ones. On page 200, she derives the word "communication" from the Latin "communico," correctly noting that its root is "mun." However, she does not acquaint the reader with the original meaning of the Indo-European root *moj-n-, which initially meant "change, exchange." The Bulgarian verb "с-мен-ям" (to change) has the same origin, with the usual transformation of the ancient diphthong "oj" into a "ят" vowel in Old Bulgarian. In Latin, "munus" means "duty." However, I fail to see how this information is helpful for the specific research topic. The candidate effectively focuses on presenting the general argumentative aspects of non-verbal communication (NVC) in crisis conditions to Aristotle's *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*, highlighting the relatively increased importance of *ethos*. However, the presentation of these fundamental persuasive methods is sometimes inaccurate (pp. 203-208). The media analysis, the presentation of the means of media manipulation (especially in the context of the global pandemic), and the

correct reference to Noam Chomsky's methodological devices and his theory of distracting strategies are highly effective and of high quality (pp. 209-218, especially p. 210). The same can be said for the overview of manipulative strategies through which the media influences modern societies.

Chapter 4 (pp. 245-315) is dedicated to the specific features of non-verbal behavior observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It forms the core of the research, with the primary contribution focused within it (without implying that the other chapters are not innovative). In the beginning, Dachova provides a comprehensive and precise presentation of the target group and selection criteria and her adopted methodology for its analysis (pp. 242-247). The Ph.D. candidate emphasizes officially recognized politicians worldwide and in Bulgaria, excluding the so-called "netocracy" (a global "caste" of people who control information on the Internet) from her target group due to its multinational nature. She employs a "multimodal approach" when examining specific communicative acts while considering the situational use of non-verbal communication channels. This part of her dissertation is very well-structured. The analysis of the material used (part of which is illustrated in the appendices to the individual sections) is comprehensive and correctly executed.

The conclusion (pp. 316-348) constitutes a separate chapter within the research. It is comprehensive and effectively complements and summarizes the content.

Bibliography and citations

The citations and bibliography meet the requirements for an academic text. As mentioned above, the Ph.D. candidate has adopted the somewhat atypical practice of presenting the studies she has referred to at the end of each chapter. Of course, I do not believe that this particular feature diminishes the quality of her work.

Language, style, and terminology

Dachova adheres to the principles of academic language and style, although sporadic errors (for example, "в предвид," p. 114) and incomplete sentences (for example, "ВЪВ ВСТЪПИТЕЛНАТА

си студия към...", p. 199) are observed. Her style occasionally exhibits unexpected expressiveness, which is not typical of academic texts. As long as such a feature does not harm her research, I congratulate her as a philologist.

Summary of the thesis

The abstract presents all thematic parts of the dissertation clearly and accurately. It is informative enough and meets the regulatory requirements.

Publications

During her Ph.D. program, Dachova has published seven articles in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings. These studies align with the research topic, which is the product of the dissertation proposed for public defense. Through them, the Ph.D. candidate has fulfilled and significantly exceeded the minimum regulatory requirements for publishing activities stipulated by the laws and the regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski."

Contributions

In the conclusion (pages 348-350), the main contributions of the dissertation are formulated. They are divided into theoretical-methodological (seven contributions) and relevant for practical use (three contributions). Although I accept them (with the remarks noted above), the theoretical-methodological contributions, for the most part, actually represent more like conclusions. I recommend reformulating them if she decides to publish her research.

Conclusion

The dissertation proposed for public defense meets the formal procedural requirements for this type of research. Its content stands out with its originality and has high scientific value. From a stylistic and structural standpoint, the research is well-organized and coherent in content and language. Based on the above and despite the minor shortcomings that do not significantly impact

the quality of the dissertation, I unreservedly that the esteemed jury award Kremena Dachova the academic degree of Doctor in the scientific field 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric).

Sofia,

September 27, 2023

/assoc. prof. Gerasim Petrinski, Ph.D./