

## STATEMENT

For the dissertation of **Kremena Stefanova Dachova**

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Professional field "Non-verbal communication" 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric), on the topic:

**"Changes in non-verbal codes in public communication in the conditions of the global health challenge – COVID-19"**

By Rositsa Mihaylova Yordanova, PhD - lecturer at VFU "Ch. Hrabar", Varna

**Relevance of the selected topic.** The author of the dissertation presented for discussion **"Changes in non-verbal codes in public communication in the conditions of the global health challenge – COVID-19"** formulates for the first time current unexplored questions on a topic of *global public importance* in the period 2020 – 2022 and their reflection in modern rhetoric. For the first time, *communication patterns* are explored, in particular *non-verbal communication*, the manifestations of the perceptive, expressive and interactive function of communication, of *virtual and visual communication* as opportunities for new communication compensating for personal contacts in conditions of risk. The chosen logical sequence from the general to the particular in the analysis construction contributes to the good coherence of the individual parts in the internal structure. The dissertation work, with a total volume of 350 pages, consists of *an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, main inferences and contributions of the doctoral student, cited sources and used literature, which includes 100 sources in Bulgarian, 3 in Russian, 20 in English and 68 electronic sources. Appendices outside the text are 7.* Each chapter concludes with a summary – a logical transition to the analysis in the next chapter.

In the introduction, the *global public importance* of the topic of COVID-19 and its *health, mental, economic and social consequences* are substantiated. *The aim, object, subject and tasks of the study are oriented towards modern theoretical models, which indisputably enrich the academic field of rhetoric in public communication.* For the first time, research interest focuses on *non-verbal codes in public communication and specific changes in perceptual, expressive and interactive functions in crisis health communication.* The doctoral student's research ambition is *"to establish the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic and the related changes in society (observed in the period of the studied time frame (2020-2022) have influenced the non-verbal behaviour of the person."* (p. 14-15 abstract)

In the first chapter "**Rhetoric and Public Communication**", after a brief historical overview, a transition is made to contemporary research in rhetoric, which includes the theory of argumentation (logical, emotional, through "image") and the new three models of rhetorical classifications: content-situational, functional and formal (see p. 20, dis.). The dissertation focuses on the works of Velichko Rumenev "*Rhetorical Classifications*" and "*Nonverbal Communication in Public Speech and Business Communication*" in the search for classification criteria for situating "health rhetoric" / "rhetoric of the COVID-19 crisis" in modern rhetorical classifications. She adds her own criteria to D. Pavlov and Ya. Totseva's classification of *the types of disputes* and *the types of answers*, I value positively this contribution of the doctoral student. The analysis of *the types of modes of public communication* enriches the possibilities for specifying and specialising speech in the crisis situation of COVID-19. The last fourth part of the first chapter "*Public communication – a tool for formation and manipulation*" is particularly interesting, because it uses references to Aristotle's rhetoric and introduces the central questions of *relative truths, the techniques used to confront morality, apparent enthymemes, the feelings and affects* that can be evoked in the listener, especially "*that inertia of human consciousness which often makes us slaves to unproven opinions, of doubtful truths*".

In the second chapter, "**Non-verbal Codes in Public Communication - A Brief Theoretical Overview and Contemporary Practical Reading**", the doctoral student introduces a richly nuanced terminology into the basis of the interdisciplinary analysis to defend her modern understanding of non-verbal communication in the field of *the functions of non-verbal communication; visual rhetoric; multimodality, the modalities of non-verbal communication; the use of space; physical and cultural modal nonverbal codes, intercultural nonverbal communication, and universal cultural syndromes*. The author's proposed, updated reading of the "**to SURVIVE**" model deserves attention, which, according to the author, "*is not only a necessary condition, but also a mandatory prerequisite for a change in the understanding of effective non-verbal communication in general*" (p. 24, abstract). I rate as successful the finalisation of the second chapter with the processes of *encoding and decoding* the non-verbal message and the possibilities for *the audience to decode the encoded* messages.

The third chapter, "**Types of crises, communication during a crisis**", presents a detailed interdisciplinary analysis with the application of the conceptual apparatus from the disciplinary fields of psychology, social psychology, psycholinguistics, philosophy, media studies, cultural studies, cultural anthropology and political science. After a concise

explanation of *crises* and *their types*, the doctoral student introduces the psychological human dimensions of the crisis-person relationship. I respect the erudition of Kremena Dachova, the thoroughly researched and selected literature from Aristotle to contemporary modern studies in prestigious university centres. I respect her ability to write legibly, discover and deeply analyse the features of altered non-verbal behaviour, human existential dimensions and emotional state. Proof of this statement is the precise development of each part of chapter 3: *crises, emotions, global health crisis and opportunities for manipulation of public opinion*. This part is fulfilled in Kremena Dachova's characteristic authorial style, clear and convincing, with a mastered look at classical and modern theory and research practice, with the discovery of new details that enrich the interpretative analysis.

In chapter 4 "**Non-verbal behaviour in public communication during the period of the emergence and spread of COVID-19**", a research approach and methodology was used, a *"personal analysis of the non-verbal aspect in the behaviour of the researched persons, in general and in particular - during public appearances in the period 2020-2022"* as well as *a comparative analysis of the non-verbal aspects in the public speeches of the representatives of different nationalities* is made. According to the selection criteria, the target group of researched persons includes *Donald Trump and Joe Biden - USA, Boris Johnson - Great Britain, Vladimir Putin - Russia, Angela Merkel - Germany, Rumen Radev and Boyko Borisov - Bulgaria*. Appendices contain prominent portraits of leaders, appropriately selected photographic material that reflects *body language, voice characteristics* (videos), *clothing and appearance, use of space and social distance*.

**The abstract**, with a total of 62 pages, reflects and adequately systematises the structure and content of the dissertation; the author's concepts, summaries, conclusion and inferences; statement of contributions; list of publications related to the topic and bibliography.

**Publications on the subject** – reports and articles, reflect research findings in the field of *leadership; space as modality; the models for effective non-verbal communication during the COVID crisis and cultural anthropology in times of crisis*. They have been delivered/published in authoritative academic forums and journals.

**The contributions** contained in the dissertation are divided into two parts: theoretical and methodical - 7 and of a practical-applied nature - 3. I appreciate that they are an achievement and a personal merit of **Kremena Dachova**.

**I recommend** that the work be published after language editing. I am convinced that the monograph entitled "**Changes in Non-verbal Codes in Public Communication in the Conditions of the Global Health Challenge COVID-19**" will cause research interest in

modern rhetoric, as well as new opportunities to enrich educational programs - bachelor's and master's.

In **conclusion**, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation work on the topic: "**Changes in Non-verbal Codes in Public Communication in the Conditions of the Global Health Challenge COVID-19**", and I strongly recommend the respected scientific jury to vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field "Non-verbal communication" 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric) to **Kremena Stefanova Dachova**, as I will vote "yes".

Varna, October 6, 2023

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Yordanova

