



REVIEW¹

from Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov, PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
(*scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution*)

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: " The Policies of Reforms Language ant Their Reflection in the Bulgarian Media: Reconstruction of Sensitive Language Resource on the Basis of Media Practices" ,

presented by Alexander Georgiev, full -time / part-time / independent doctoral student in the Department of Press Journalism and Book Publishing of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Andreana Eftimova, DSc.

I. Presentation of the doctoral (PhD) student on the basis of the submitted documentation

Alexander Georgiev earned BA degree in Book Publishing in 2019 from the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Later he was awarded Master of Art Degree at the program "Media, Communication, and Culture" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and enrolled into Doctoral Program at the Department of Press Journalism and Book Publishing at the the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". He has had experience as editor and proof-reader. Currently Alexander Georgiev works as Assistant Professor at the Institute of Bulgarian Language, Bulgarian Academy of Science.

II. Assessment of the qualities of the text of the dissertation

The Dissertation of Alexander Georgiev has been of good scientific quality. The emphasis is on the media coverage of three social groups (the Roma people, women, and LGBT community) and language changes in their portrayal. As the doctoral candidate points out, he analyzes "the policies of language reforms related to media representation of different communities in society" (p. 6). He argues in his doctoral thesis whether the policies for

¹ Note: The text in italics offers reference points for evaluating the research results. Recommended volume of the review - about 6-7 standard pages



language changes can bring about more tolerant attitudes towards marginal and disliked social groups.

The novelty of the topic is undoubted: language has been a dynamic component of culture, object of constant changes. The new social relations, norms, and values require new language practices. A peculiarity of the Bulgarian situation is that the Bulgarian society has been influenced by the Western culture and thus Bulgarians have been pressed to find linguistic forms to reflect phenomena, which are not authentic for the Bulgarian society. Hence, Bulgaria's communication with Western societies and Bulgaria's institutional inclusion into bodies such as the European Union and NATO have led to strive to find out how linguistically to reflect homosexual or transgender people.

The doctoral thesis has a solid academic foundations: the first three theoretical chapters (out of five chapters in the dissertation) contain competent references to key theories and concepts related to language and media, which later are skillfully used in empirical analysis. Alexander Georgiev sheds light on important scientific ideas, such as the role of language for construction of the reality and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language influences our perceptions of the reality, theory of representation, media impact, language policies, esp. those for coverage of marginal social groups, hate speech, political correctness, moral panic, etc. The doctoral candidate has acknowledged the complex relations between language and society: "The changes of the reality usually have had impact of language, but at the same time the language changes have had influenced our perceptions of the world, of others, of relations in society" (p. 6). Alexander Georgiev has relied on the works of his tutor, Prof. Andreana Eftimova, DSc, that the opposite of hate speech can be regarded the language of political correctness.

Hate speech can have negative impact of society since, as the doctoral candidate writes, "stigmatizes and excludes groups from society" (p. 12) He takes into account a possible contradiction between the avoidance of hate speech and freedom of expression and media (p. 49) Or the possibility language of political correctness to be ridiculed or criticized as a mean of imposing restrictions on free discussion of social problems (p. 53) Still, the author considers that the language of political correctness has advantages and can be construed as "inclusive and culturally sensitive language" (p. 55).

The dissertation has clearly defined object of study, methods and temporal restrictions. The hypothesis is that "despite its slow pace, language of media has adapted to the required language of political correctness" (p. 9).

The amount of empirical data is impressive: more than 37,700 publications at nine media for a 14-year period, from 2011 to 2024. It implies serious efforts for gathering and analyzing such large empirical material, which contributes to the solid grounding of the conclusions of the thesis. The applied methods are content analysis and discourses analysis, which are adequate for the empirical study. They are described in the chapter four, which is devoted to the methodology of the empirical research.

The language presentation of the Roma people in the nine Bulgarian media is on the basis of huge amount of more than 16,000 publications. Alexander Georgiev reflects on the



complicated issue whether this community to be named “Roma” or “Gypsy.” “Roma” has been considered as politically correct since Roma name themselves as such, while “Gypsy” is used by others to refer to them and the term has negative connotations (“to be gyped”, etc). However, the individuals who speak Romani accept to be called “Roma” but those who speak Bulgarian or Turkish as mother tongue rather prefer to be called “Gypsy.” The data gathered by the doctoral candidate have demonstrated that the observed Bulgarian media tend to use politically correct term “Roma” and seldom refer to Roma applying offending labels such as “mangal” or “mangasar” (both are derogatory words for Roma in Bulgarian). This has indicated significant change in media language compared to the situation in the 1990s, when the Roma are portrayed in the media with quite harsh language. The doctoral candidate holds that the observed tendency in the Bulgarian media is that gradually there is almost equal use of “Roma” and “Gypsy.”

Alexander Georgiev has noted an interesting detail in media coverage of Roma: if a Roma commits a crime (or is suspected of committing crime), the media are attracted and cover the case. However, when a Roma is victim of crime, the media do not think this is interesting and does not devote publications to the case. Another interesting assumption, proposed also by other researchers, is that the topics related to Roma, especially about “Gypsy crime,” seem to appear more frequently in the media during election campaigns (pp. 134 and 138).

Linguistic presentation of gender identities is a complicated problem, analytically discussed by Alexander Georgiev. He writes that “...the use of feminine linguistic forms as strategy for increasing visibility of women in society” (p. 125). However, his data show that there was decrease of the use of these feminine linguistic forms to cover women in professions such as journalism and politics. The general problem is that the Bulgarian society has preferred, in general, adherence to traditional values in relation between males and females. Hence, the prevailing attitudes are that some occupations are perceived as suitable for males only and it is questioned whether females could practice them. Despite modernization influences, these strong traditional values have led to certain sexism, which should not be exaggerated but it also should not be neglected.

The contribution of the author is his reflections on how non-binary persons (those who identify neither as males nor as females) should be covered by the media. This is an issue for which the Bulgarian society does not conduct authentic debate since it is mostly provoked by the discussions in Western societies. For instance, there are only 138 media publications related to non-binary persons out of 37,700 publications in the analyzed data base. Most of these 138 texts are about persons from Western societies, who identify themselves with non-binary gender identity. Thus, a discourse that originates in the West has been transferred to the non-Western Bulgarian society and this creates difficulties to be presented linguistically. Alexander Georgiev proposes the idea of the non-binary language, suitable for tolerant presentation of non-binary persons. He competently identifies linguistic obstacles for covering non-binary persons in Bulgarian. The practice of using plural “they” or “ze” instead of “he” and “she” to refer to non-binary individuals is illogical in Bulgarian.

The dissertation provides also analysis the media coverage of the LGBT community on the basis of more than 7,100 texts. A complicated issue is the idea of gender and the



alteration of its meaning in Bulgaria. The concept of gender does not have proper translation in Bulgarian, in contrast to English, which discriminates between “sex” and “gender.” The discussions in Bulgarian society since 2018 about the Istanbul convention shifted attitudes of many Bulgarians to interpret “gender” wrongly as the “acceptance of the third gender” and the introduction of term “gender ideology” with negative connotations. “Gender” in Bulgaria has started to be used as offending label for homosexuals and other people with “non-traditional sexual orientation.” Alexander Georgiev writes about the media portrayal in Bulgaria of the LGBT persons that “Words and expressions suggested by the principle of political correctness have gradually appeared in the media, although this process is very slow” (pp.200-201)

The summary of the dissertation is clear, logically structured and adequately presents the main ideas of the thesis.

III. Contributions to the dissertation research

One of the scientific contributions of the dissertation has been analysis of how to refer to non-binary persons in Bulgarian language in order to present them neutrally and tolerantly and avoid negative and derogatory connotations. Alexander Georgiev has proposed valuable ideas to what extent practices in Western languages to cover non-binary people in the media can be applied in Bulgarian language.

The large empirical data based on more than 37,700 publications in media outlets in Bulgaria has shed light on how some communities (including groups considers as specific or/and marginal) have been portrayed. The dissertation also discusses the difficulties of finding inclusive language to cover groups, which could encounter negative attitudes.

IV. Notes and recommendations

The dissertation has been of good quality. According to my opinion there is no need the text to be edited in order to be improved.

The following suggestions are non-mandatory and they could be taken into account in case the doctoral candidate wants to develop and elaborate some of his ideas. There are cases, in which politically correct terms are imposed on communities, who, in general, do not accept them. For instance, travelers in the United Kingdom, Ireland, or France to be called “Roma.” Some of travelers ethnically are not Roma but because they have nomadic way of life, moving from one place to another, they are called “Gypsies.”

The group of Sinti in Germany usually objects to be called Roma, although their origin is from India and their language is similar to Romani dialects. Some international organizations in their documents use the term “Roma and Sinti” to take into account the preference of Sinti not to be named “Roma.”

The other complicated case in the Egyptian minority in Albania and Northern Macedonia. These are Roma, who still accept the old and already scientifically rejected theory



that the Roma are of Egyptian origin. Romani language is of Indian origin and genetic studies indicate that the Roma in Europe have specific genes that can be found only among populations in India. Thus, according to scientific evidence the Roma are not of Egyptian origin. However, the principle of respecting the self-identity has been regarded as leading and consistent with political correctness and these people are considered as Egyptians.

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Alexander Georgiev has authored five academic publications, related to the topic of his doctoral dissertation, compared to the required minimum of three publications. He also published two additional academic papers. He has cleared the minimal requirements for earning a doctoral degree.

VI. Conclusion

The dissertation of Alexander Georgiev has all qualities to be accepted for successful defense and earning doctoral degree. The thesis is analytical, with good style and language, clear and logical expression of ideas. The theoretical chapters have demonstrated the competencies of the author related to media and language. The empirical research is methodologically sound and solid, based on huge body of media publications (37,700) for long period of 14 years. The results are significant and are empirically grounded.

I will support the proposition the doctoral dissertation to be accepted and Alexander Georgiev to receive doctoral degree for his thesis.

Reviewer: Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov, PhD

Date: March 3, 2025