

REVIEW

of A MULTI-PROCESS COGNITIVE MODEL FOR INVESTIGATING TEXT AND DISCOURSE (МНОГОПРОЦЕСЕН КОГНИТИВЕН МОДЕЛ ЗА ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА ТЕКСТ И ДИСКУРС),

submitted for acquisition of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences

in 2.1. Philology, PhD program: Germanic languages (English-language Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis)

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Stefana Petrova Dimitrova

The candidate's documentation I have been appointed to review is full and meets all the requirements of the Law on Scientific Degrees and Titles as well as those of the New Regulations on the Terms and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“.

The dissertation submitted for discussion is a serious, profound and engaging piece of linguistic study. In order to prove this statement of mine, I here pose myself several questions, which I will try and address, and I will base my answers on the author's theoretical statements, observations and findings as evident in the texts included for my evaluation.

I believe I need to start by declaring I find the dissertation to possess both theoretical and applied strengths, and to do so on an equal footing. Since the analysis of the theoretical strengths is related to a rather complex matter, I will start by dwelling on them in more detail.

1. Relevance of the topic. Eminent linguists have been dealing with questions about the construction of text and the functional characteristics of discourse for several decades now. The topic chosen by Nelly Tincheva is given a new reading in the dissertation thanks to her clarifying the existing overlap among four clearly defined spheres of text and discourse analysis, namely: practical analysis of texts and discourses, theoretical understandings of the

implementation of the above-mentioned practical analysis, critical review of the theoretical studies on the cognitive construction of texts and discourses as well as on their correlation with the field of concepts related to text and discourse. Such dissection of the research object could be viewed as its in-depth problematization and as its transformation into a cluster of linguistic plots, which leads to purity of analysis and creates comfortable conditions for avoiding tautological descriptions and findings.

2. Presence of a theoretical dominant in the study. Beyond all doubt, such a dominant does exist and it is connected with the choice of the fourth sphere, to which the main focus of the work is directed. It is in its development that the author's creative potential unfolds to the fullest.

3. Choice of a foundational cognitive approach in the investigation. The cognitive approach chosen is fully adequate with regard to the research questions posed. The principles of the approach are originally described by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, but have been later supplemented, expanded or narrowed by a significant number of other authors, of whom I personally am most partial to Robert Langacker. Despite the interpretations and sometimes even the distortions of this approach witnessed in the last two decades, I would say that it is in coherence with the longer-term experiments on the original pragmatic theory conducted by Charles Morris that the author here talks of a peculiar insufficiency evident in cognitive research (including neurobiological cognitive experimental cycles and their reading). Moreover, the author emphatically and not without reason asserts that language studies constitute an indispensable source of new theories and paradigms.

4. Clarification of the scope of the basic concepts. In this regard, clearly, we need to be concerned above all with the concepts of *text* and *discourse*. As is known, *text* and *discourse* are often used not only in everyday communication as synonyms, but also by a number of linguists who at best present them as different aspects of the same concept. In some schools,

we can see only *text* is employed, while in others – only *discourse*. It seems that most numerous are the studies in which *text* and *discourse* are placed along the axis of a dichotomous opposition, on one pole of which there is abstraction, and on the other – speech production. The author of the dissertation is right when she claims that scientific studies of text and discourse still contain a gray area that shows a large, and, at the same time, still insufficiently explored conceptual potential. But I am a little concerned with her modest position, which allows her to withdraw from offering her own definition (albeit only an operational one) of *text* and *discourse*, and which is dominated by her focusing only on the cognitive mechanisms at work in the mental processing of textual and discursive information. It is well-known that the human brain can work with concepts with fuzzy boundaries, but when the dissertation is dedicated to *text* and *discourse*, the reader would expect a more categorical authorial position on this.

Indeed, a kind of a definition does exist in the thesis, but it does not serve so much to offer a definitive description as it does to support the functioning of cognitive worlds and the overlap between such worlds. To be precise I have to admit that at some places in the dissertation I do find certain working definitions of the concepts discussed, e.g. Chapter 8 talks about discourse as social action. In the same chapter, we can also find the concepts of *text type* and *genre* redefined. But I would very much like to see these working definitions collected and systematized in one place, whether it is in the introductory or in the concluding part, because that would greatly contribute to the merits of the work.

When we talk about the main concepts used in the dissertation, we must also add the concept of *model*, which is defined with extreme precision as a multi-process set of simultaneously functioning cognitive mechanisms. The concept's definition also contains an important hypothetical point – the assumption that these cognitive mechanisms function together. I need to explain here that I dwell in more detail on the terminological code of the

study, because, as is well-known, such a code is accepted as a declaration of the researcher's belonging to a school, and the author of this dissertation is, unreservedly, a well-schooled linguist.

I would also like to argue with her about the term *real world*. Despite its key role in the model (according to the author, without the concept of RW, the mechanism of profiling, in its working simultaneously with conceptual metaphors and metonymy, would be difficult to trace) I cannot accept this term as purely cognitive, because it existed in philosophical approaches long before the emergence of cognitivism and it has been used by modern cognitive and other mentalist theories without modifications to its content. In Nelly Tincheva's work, I see a certain aspiration to disjoint this structure and to create an opposition between *reality* and *real world*. *Reality* is understood as objectively existing and of material essence, while the *real world* is taken to be a cognitive product, i.e. it is taken to be *reality*'s reflection. I agree with her statement from Chapter 7 that certain concepts without a referent in a RW (e.g. *Brexit*) can pass unhindered from TW and DW to RW, but I question whether this cognitive phenomenon should be termed *real*? It is as early as Baruch Spinoza's works (in *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, 1661) that we find an interpretation of the concept of the real world (*verum mundi*) as the antithesis of the mentalist one introduced by him and later developed by Jaakko Hintikka (in *Models for Modalities. Selected Essays*, 1978) as the concept of a possible world (in Spinoza *potest mundus*, in Hintikka possible world). It seems to me that just as the author correctly supplements her cognitive instrumentarium with a sociolinguistic one, her work will suffer neither theoretically, nor in its applied aspects, if the possibility for using philosophical concepts of a wider scope is also recognized.

I dare say I find confirmation of this belief of mine in the dissertation itself – in the passages where Tincheva claims that there is no interpretation of RW as an analogous structure of TW and DW in the cognitive literature. I agree with her decision to reconcile

elements from the theories of TW and DW with what she calls RW, but I can hardly accept the very designation of this cognitive product because of its reflective nature. If a certain phenomenon has reflective properties, it can no longer be defined as real, it is precisely this that demarcates the boundary between facts de re and facts de dicto. In a word, I fully accept the logic of the author's reasoning but I doubt the accuracy of the label chosen for the discussed term.

When we discuss the terminological code of such a complex study as Tincheva's, it is not necessary to dwell on all the concepts used in it, especially when they are presented precisely and with extreme clarity. It only remains for me to note that in some places the author resorts to a modern way of terminological treatment of the material - she uses the method of negative definition, which provides us with information not on what a given phenomenon is, but on what it is not, e.g. the concept of *context* is not taken to be synonymous with *discourse*, when the differences between *contextual elements* and a *profiled element* are traced in the analysis.

5. Formulation of the main research hypothesis. The author is extremely accurate here. She focuses her hypothesis on cognitive mechanisms operating in two directions – in the use of concepts related to *text* and *discourse* and in the dynamic mental unfolding of real texts and discourses. This hypothesis suggests posing a number of research questions related to the cognitive mechanisms which control the mental processing of real texts and discourses. These questions are clearly stated by the author and need no repetition here. I would just like to point out that she considers both academic and more general uses, which proves that Nelly Tincheva does not lose sight of the fact that language belongs to absolutely all speakers, even to people of not particularly high intellectual level. This is the only correct view and it allows for adequate observation and description of some types of speech usage which can deviate

from the standard *uzus* and are defined by a number of linguists as "sick" formations, e.g. the famous view of the so-called ill/ sick sentences.

6. Research method. The analytical object of the dissertation is complex and by definition two-fold. This leads to the author's constructing a complex methodology, which, if it followed the principles accepted by most cognitivists, should look at language only through the lens of individual knowledge as dominating over the social one and then the analysis of the dynamic nature of language uses would be tied to the dynamics of discourse. But Tincheva is not limited only to this angle of observation. The method she adopts is two-faceted - qualitative and quantitative - and is based both on the understanding of the functioning of the triad mind - brain - body, and on the "rich cognitive ecology in action" (according to the formulation by Raymond Gibbs).

When the method chosen is complex, that must be justified. And here it is justified. A complex object cannot be fully described from the position of a single perspective. I would like to remind you of a thought by Galina Zolotova, expressed at the Congress of Slavists in Ljubljana in 2003: "Complex objects cannot be talked about simply." Not speaking simply does not mean speaking unintelligibly. What I mean here is we need to take into account all the details of a complex phenomenon, and this is precisely what Nelly Tincheva does in her dissertation. The complexity of the object of her research is evident in her reasoning about human cognitive processes, which, she argues, are not self-contained entities amenable to simple insertion into scientific analyzes of physical contexts because contexts do not exist independently of the human mind. The worlds examined by Tincheva are not interpreted as intersections of human knowledge and an objective reality: they are assumed to be localized in the human consciousness and are seen as simulations of situational environments.

Unlike most modern cognitivists, who study language uses only or primarily on the basis of individual knowledge, Nelly Tincheva does not ignore Robert Langacker's statement

about the connection between the dynamic nature of speech production and the dynamics of discourse and social interaction. She skillfully combines cognitive tools with sociolinguistic ones. This helps her approach the concept of *model* as a multi-process set of cognitive mechanisms operating simultaneously, where each mechanism is interpreted as a unification of separate component cognitive operations. The dissertation presents us with a complex but internally consistent method of research, which, if we use Saussure's term, represents a kind of a system of systems.

7. Structuring the study. With regard to the organization of the thesis, I have no objections. I fully accept the logic behind its construction and I find the consistent positioning of the multi-process model of cognitive mechanisms within the framework of the text original and productive as I do the subsequent tracing of the model's operation in multiple domains. This approach gives the author the opportunity to describe a relatively rare process - the reverse transition from TW and DW to RW.

8. Selection of the cognitive mechanisms included in the model. It is indisputable that cognitive mechanisms are numerous and they can hardly be considered exactly calculatable. Nonetheless, a significant number of them have been well described and researchers now have a wide range of choices at their disposal. In that respect, clearly, the rule of thumb is that the object of study can play a considerable role in postulating the method of the study.

Considering this fact, Nelly Tincheva directs her attention to conceptual metaphor, to the construction of worlds, to their overlapping and profiling and to the main postulates of Gestalt psychology. In fact, Gestalt psychology is not the only theoretical basis here, it merges harmoniously with cognitive text linguistics, with the theory of text worlds and with research on conceptual figurativeness (the latter, at some points, stands out as the leading research principle). The inclusion of cognitive mechanisms in the author's model is preceded by their isolation using various techniques, including inductive ones. This point is particularly

important because modern linguistics, which is basically deductive, could not unfold in some "pure form", but it always needs specific reference points, which themselves need to be essentially inductive procedures. The inductive procedures to which Nelly Tincheva directs her attention are presented sequentially one after the other or, when the material allows it, they are united in small groupings. This method of work is convincingly motivated by certain properties of the human brain, which, as the author rightly claims, is unable to encompass simultaneously the large array of cognitive mechanisms that underlie her proposed model. In this she touches on a very important aspect of the theory of introspection related to its – by definition – limited possibilities.

9. Main research questions. The author formulates her research questions extremely strictly, and, due to their exceptionally precise wording, the questions do not require further comments. I will only note that the questions display an internal logical connection and, in their sequential progression, a question seems inevitably generated by the previous one.

In my opinion, the question which is most complex and difficult to answer and to provide an explanation to is the question about the specific trends that emerge in the component cognitive mechanisms' functioning. In this case, the dissertation examines a complex linguistic-mental complex, in which it is on the basis of facts in absentia (facts from the area of coherence) that facts in praesentia (tendencies that by definition lend themselves to observation and calculation) are clarified.

10. Interpretation of conceptualization and categorization processes. It is a well-known fact that the reflection of reality in thinking and in language passes through the filter of the processes of conceptualization and categorization. In scientific descriptions, the two processes are usually presented disjointedly, in a certain sequence, but there is reason to think that they proceed almost in parallel, within a framework of interdependence and complex interaction. There is an echo of such a view in the author's desire to observe the various overlaps, without

the consideration of which the multi-process model proposed by her could not have been built. In connection with this, I find the assumption of the author that conceptual metaphors are rather bound to the process of categorization extremely interesting, and I fully accept her confidence that the cognitive processes of categorization are aimed at situating a given concept within the already internalized conceptual network of the individual.

11. Author's understanding of text structure. Nelly Tincheva's interest in the various overlaps of conceptual structures directs the author's attention to the metonymic transfer of textual functions and to the connection between a world and a textual segment, which can be related to other worlds. The author seeks evidence in a dataset with a view of exploring if any metonymic activation of a whole textual segment can be observed when just one element of the segment is mentioned. The analysis convinces us that whole text structure functions as a category through prototypicality effects.

I particularly appreciate the author's explanation of the sense of movement through the structure of a whole text as based on metaphorical transfer from the cognitive structure of *source-path-goal*. In Nelly Tincheva's reasoning on this issue, I see a new and interesting interpretation which is completely different from my own understanding of the problem. This is a problem with which I have been dealing for a long time in light of the implicit lines piercing a textual formation. I allow myself to think that our views here are in a complementary relationship.

12. Theoretical justification of the multi-process model for the study of text and discourse. The multi-process model proposed in the thesis is intended as potentially applicable in text linguistics and discourse analysis. Nelly Tincheva offers us her understanding of textual linguistics, which includes overlapping and profiling switches between worlds in relation to the text-centric standards of cohesion and coherence, and with the user-centered parameters of intentionality, acceptability, informativity and situationality. Along with reasoning about the

application of the model, the author makes a number of theoretically interesting statements related to the analysis of text and discourse, and logically reaches the conclusion that, in the process of analysis, they can be considered as concentric geometric spaces of increasing scope.

The author's understanding of the multi-process model is not presented only once and only in one chapter of the dissertation. It develops dynamically in the course of the entire text's unfolding, and each successive chapter contains new information about the model's working possibilities. Thus, there emerges the possibility to clarify consistently the theoretical differences between *user-centered textual parameters*, *communicative environment*, *context* and DW. The author discovers more and more new information and new confirmation of the overlapping and profiling of more than one world and of existing variations in the scope of individual worlds.

13. Approbation of the model in the dissertation. Even if the author had limited herself to the theoretical development of the multi-process model, her work would have been assessed as very valuable and useful. Yet to the theoretical importance of the thesis we can add the exploration of specific research objects, which results in a great evidential yield.

The question of real worlds and their relation to socio-political thought is raised and answered by Tincheva through her applying a cognitive-linguistic view of Brexit's conceptualizations as attested by native speakers of English. The analysis shows an interesting trend: during socio-political upheavals, people minimize their use of figurativeness, and their non-literal thinking leads to the employment of basic metaphors of the *life-is-a-journey* type. These cognitive structures are revealed by Tincheva to be present in the various types of worlds, and the transfer between them is confirmed to be carried out metaphonymically.

In the further approbation of the model, what seems to intensify is the author's interest in phenomena that are considered the object of several sciences - sociolinguistics,

psycholinguistics, linguistic pragmatics, stylistics and, of course, cognitive science in all its aspects. What I primarily refer to here is the analysis of Facebook posts, which leads to their understanding as a separate genre and as a social tool used for both virtual activity and for activity beyond virtual borders.

14. Meta-principles for applying the multi-process model in text linguistics and discourse analysis. In this theoretical research area, the author is particularly strong and persuasive. As a great achievement of hers I accept her motivated understanding of any theory as a conceptual metaphorization of its object of analysis. Additionally, Tincheva interprets any theoretical approach as a metonymic product resulting from obligatory choices of certain textual and discursive aspects to study, which also makes them subject to profiling.

An interesting specificity of Tincheva's research is connected with the meta-principles of her thesis - in it, a number of concepts discussed in the opening chapters undergo additional approbation and systematization in the later chapters. As a particularly valuable point in her work, I find the description of the model, which is cleared of unnecessary details, and I also support the author's acknowledgment that not all of the model's applications can be presented in the thesis.

15. Bibliography, publications, author's review. The dissertation includes a rich and well-selected bibliography, which would be a very valuable resource for anyone interested in textual and cognitive linguistics, as well as for those interested in discourse theory, especially in its variant called discourse grammar.

The author has 4 serious publications on the subject of the dissertation, published in prestigious editions and by renowned publishing houses, including John Benjamins.

The author's review adequately reflects the text of the thesis, while at the same time it is distinguished by a great deal of authorial modesty.

CONCLUSION:

Everything discussed so far confirms that the dissertation has a high scientific and applied value. The author demonstrates her ability to analyze critically and objectively the existing approaches and theoretical developments in the field of her interest. She skillfully offers us her step-by-step understanding of the analyzed object and provides solutions to explaining the cognitive mechanisms which control text and discourse use. As a serious researcher, she submits the results of her own analysis to further scrutiny and thus arrives at the theoretical pinnacle of her work: combining the cognitive mechanisms of conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, the overlapping of worlds and their dynamic profiling, which function as united and inter-dependent component cognitive operations.

The dissertation should be published in full.

I am convinced that Assoc. Prof. Nelly Todorova Tincheva, Ph.D. rightfully occupies her place in Bulgarian linguistics and that she fully deserves to be awarded the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences in 2.1. Philology (Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis - English-language).

Date: 20.04.2023.

Signature:



Prof. Dr. Stefana Petrova

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