

## OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Boris Vouchchev, D.Sc.

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on the dissertation for the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor of Philosophy**" in  
the Professional Field 2.1. Philology, doctoral program "General and Comparative  
Linguistics (Hungarian and Bulgarian)"

**Dissertation's author:** EDINA ZSOLCSAK-DIMITROVA, independent PhD student at the  
Department of Classics, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St.  
Kliment Ohridski"

**Dissertation title:** "Typology of Errors in the Hungarian Interlanguage of Bulgarian  
Native Speakers"

### 1. Information about the author and the doctoral dissertation

Edina Zolczak-Dimitrova graduated from the Faculty of Philology at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. She has worked as a lecturer in Hungarian as a foreign language, a tour guide, a volunteer in a non-governmental organization and a lecturer in Hungarian at the University of Shumen "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski", the Balassi Institute, Budapest and the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius". Since 01.12.2016 she has been a lecturer in Hungarian at the Department of Classics, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Edina Zsolcsak-Dimitrova was registered as an independent PhD student by Order № ПД 20-80/14.01.2019 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a term of study from 15.01.2019 to 15.01.2022 Her course of studies was announced complete with the right of dissertation defense by Order № ПД 20-1415/21.09.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

In May 2020, by decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, the title of the dissertation was changed from "Comparative study of the means for expressing spatial relations in Hungarian and Bulgarian" to "Typology of Errors in the Hungarian Interlanguage of Bulgarian Native Speakers".

Judging by the submitted documentation concerning the preliminary approbation of the dissertation and the compliance with the minimum national requirements for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy", all the requirements of the Law on the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions in Bulgaria and the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski were fully met and no procedural violations have been found.

## **2. Information on the dissertation and the first-person narrative summary**

Edina Zsolcsak-Dimitrova's dissertation, entitled "Typology of Errors in the Hungarian Interlanguage of Bulgarian Native Speakers" consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, bibliography and appendices. The main body of the monograph has 177 standard pages, the appendices have 85 standard pages. The bibliography includes 189 titles in Bulgarian, Hungarian and English.

### *- Relevance of the research*

Error analysis fits into the applied linguistics researches, but also into comparative studies, as many of its aspects concern disciplines of a pedagogical nature such as linguopsychology and linguodidactics. Researches in the field of error analysis, especially for languages with a relatively small number of speakers, are always relevant and necessary also in view of foreign language teaching.

### *- Original contribution*

The dissertation fits into the increasing in the last 15-20 years Bulgarian-Hungarian comparative researches, exploiting an unexplored field, such as contrastive error analysis. In this sense, the main contribution of the dissertation is the fact that this is the first study of its kind in the specific field.

### *- Purpose, tasks, subject of the research. Comments on the methodology, preferred by the author*

The main goal of the research is "[...] to analyze and categorize the errors that appear in the interlanguage of Bulgarian-speaking people studying Hungarian, and to present the differences in the problematic areas between Bulgarian and Hungarian, which would help to understand the possible reasons for the admission of these errors" (p. 6). The study is based on a corpus, composed of written and oral texts in Hungarian, produced by Bulgarian native speakers. Six tasks have been formulated, related to the Hungarian-Bulgarian comparative researches, to theoretical and practical topics of contrastive error analysis and to processing and presentation in a systematized form of the students' errors in the (Bulgarian-)Hungarian Interlanguage from the above mentioned corpus. Among the tasks there is also "an attempt to discover the causes of errors, mainly by looking for reasons in the differences in the structure of the native (Bulgarian) and foreign (Hungarian) language" (p. 7).

The main method used in the present work is the contrastive error analysis, developed by Hungarian linguist Laszlo Budai. The choice of a basic theoretical model by a Hungarian author seems logical given the Hungarianistic nature of the dissertation, but I would expect a more in-depth critical analysis of other studies on error analysis of Hungarian interlanguage, which would be useful in a theoretical aspect, but also for the actual analysis.

### *- Presentation of the state of the problem and the scientific literature on the topic*

The dissertation examines theoretical problems in two directions.

The first is a review of theoretical issues related to applied linguistics and error analysis. The choice of a theoretical model, namely contrastive error analysis, is justified by the fact that it combines contrastive analysis and error analysis.

The second direction is related to a review of the history of contrastive linguistic studies in Hungary and a chronological overview of the Bulgarian-Hungarian contrastive studies.

Specifically in the latter area, I would expect a more in-depth and mostly critical review of the Bulgarian-Hungarian contrastive studies, as the typological nature of the error analysis, intended by the author, should have been reflected in this critical review. To the theoretical part of the dissertation I should also add the second chapter, dealing with “the peculiarities of Hungarian (in view of its teaching to Bulgarian native speakers)”. The comparison with Bulgarian, however, is not systematic and in general the chapter is characterized by not very impressive theoretical depth, which is replaced by careful descriptiveness.

*- Brief description of the analysis and the achieved results. Evaluation of scientific and/or scientific-applied contributions*

The actual error analysis in the Hungarian interlanguage of Bulgarian native speakers studying Hungarian occupies part of the third chapter, having in total 60 standard pages, including the conclusions; I exclude here subchapters 3.1.2 and 3.1.3, because they do not concern error analysis. Typological approach is observed in the analysis at the morphosyntactic level, while the errors at the orthographic and phonological level have no common typological denominator and that is fully acceptable in view of the type of input data, namely errors of different nature, caused by factors, which are difficult to group on any principle.

The part, dedicated to the errors in the triple spatial system in Hungarian is the best structured and contributing, and this analysis, enriched with the steps of the contrastive error analysis, described by Budai (p. 29), could be a model for the rest of the analysis.

Regarding the quality of the research in this central third chapter, I would like to note the following:

1. Although the theoretical model of Buda, adopted by the author, insists that “the error analysis should be differentiated according to the types and variations of the types, expressing the similarities and contrasts of the foreign language with the native language” (p. 27) and that “the first task of CA [contrastive analysis] is the description and comparison of the phenomenon in the native language and in the target language”, the typological features of Bulgarian as the learner’s native language are very poorly represented in the dissertation. In general, although the dissertation is in the scientific specialty “Hungarian and Bulgarian”, it does not demonstrate almost any knowledge of the theoretical problems of Bulgarian, including with a view to the comparison with Hungarian.
2. In many places in the monograph the interpretation of errors is unconvincing, as evidenced by the abundance of markers of epistemic modality such as „maybe“, „probably“, as well as the use of theoretically unsustainable formulations such as „stuck in the memory“.
3. In the dissertation there is a systemic problem with the citation. I noticed an abundance of secondary citations, a fact that reduces the actual volume of

scientific literature used. This is especially evident in places where the position of some authors is presented, but the bibliographic reference is to a completely different author. Also, the citation of a website with linguistic notes (on page 55), as well as the abundant citation in the theoretical parts of traditional grammars of Hungarian does not make a good impression.

4. The analysis of the triple spatial system in Hungarian is not by its nature error analysis and the place of its three distinct parts (2.3, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) is in chapter one, where it would enrich the work with the original author's theoretical development, studying in typological terms the peculiarities of Hungarian and Bulgarian, thus making up for the missing comparative part. In general, subchapters 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 having this volume and this structure, do not fit well in the dissertation.

The first-person narrative summary of the dissertation clearly presents the structure of the monograph. However, the presentation of the central, analytical and potentially contributing chapter, covers less than five pages of the text of the first-person narrative summary.

I would like to note that the formulation of the scientific contributions of the dissertation in some places is unconvincing:

1. The contribution „Analysis of specific language material“ is not a contribution, but a necessity, given the topic of the dissertation.
2. The contribution „The dissertation sets practical-theoretical parameters of learning strategies and processes in the acquisition of the Hungarian by Bulgarian native speakers“ does not follow from the content of the dissertation.
3. The contribution “The expression and use of spatial relations in Hungarian and Bulgarian are summarized in tabular versions” does not follow from the pre-set tasks of the dissertation.

### **3. Characteristics of the PhD candidate’s metalanguage**

There are a number of errors and inaccuracies in the metalanguage of the dissertation, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Numerous spelling mistakes, mainly related to the incorrect use of commas.
2. Numerous morphological and syntactic errors, probably related to the native language transfer from Hungarian to Bulgarian (“изглежда се”, “възможно е, че”, etc.).
3. Use of terms not established in the Bulgarian linguistic literature: “еквиваленция”, “конгруенция”, “синтактичен смес” (for syntactic blends).
4. In some places in the dissertation the PhD candidate makes naive judgments and generally often uses a metalanguage that does not correspond to the level of a theoretical study such as a doctoral dissertation (“we ask the students”, “we just agglutinate the endings” etc.).

#### **4. Evaluation of the publications on the topic of the dissertation**

Edina Zsolcsak-Dimitrova presented a list of six scientific publications, three of which were published in editions, included in the National Reference List of Contemporary Bulgarian Scientific Editions with Scientific Review, maintained by NACID. Of the total number, two publications are directly on the topic of the dissertation, three publications are dedicated to the triple spatial system in Hungarian and one is related to problematic aspects of Hungarian concerning Bulgarian native speakers. Of the printed publications one publication is related directly to the topic of the dissertation.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Based on what was mentioned above and taking into account the merits of the dissertation and mainly the fact that it is the first such extensive study on the errors analysis in the Hungarian interlanguage of Bulgarian native speakers, but also its deficiencies, I reckon that Edina Zsolcsak-Dimitrova's dissertation moderately meets the criteria for successful dissertation, and that Edina Zsolcsak-Dimitrova can be given the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor of Philosophy" in the Professional Area 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty "General and Comparative Linguistics (Hungarian and Bulgarian)".

09.11.2020

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