REVIEW

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For: Dissertation for the acquisition of PhD degree in the professional field 2.1. *Philology*, PhD program: *Romance Languages (Syntax and Pragmatics of the Spanish Language)*

Topic: "Strategies for expressing politeness in the contemporary Spanish language"

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Procedure data:

By virtue of order No. 38-245/19.05.2025 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the defense of the above-mentioned dissertation, and by Meeting Minutes No. 1/30.05.2025 of the scientific jury – to present a review.

The materials submitted by the candidate meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the respective Regulations for Implementation of the said Act and the Rules on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University for the acquisition of PhD degree. The abstract reflects faithfully and comprehensively the content of the dissertation. The publications fulfil the national minimum standarts for scientific activity.

Assessment of the dissertation

The dissertation is dedicated to a serious, relevant and continuously intriguing topic and its exploration undoubtedly implied a lot of efforts and extraordinary diligence, all worthy of respect. The conceptual core includes a wide range of cardinal propositions, each

crystalizing gradually, following an authentic logic, providing new depth and different perspective, and awaiting its favourable evolvement. The auspicious start of the project is laid by the statement that "the actual functioning of language is understood as a function of the pragmatic context, as a "text within the text" (p. 4). The personal position in this synthesis, as well as the perusal of the phenomena under consideration, are presented in an engaging and inspiring way.

The text has a well-built structure and comprises an introduction, two parts – theoretical and empirical, each split in three chapters, a conclusion and references (a total of 176 pages).

The introduction provides a concise and clear picture of the work – the general idea and the object of research are highlighted, the main goal and the specific tasks for achieving it are defined, the structure of the presentation is charted, and the methodology and the empirical material are outlined. The excerpted sources include 18 printed publications and 9 television broadcasts (evident from the reference list at the end).

The first part of the main body, as a theoretical basis, is dedicated to the imposed disciplinary and substantive framework. Generally, a division of this kind situates the research in the scientific expanse, fixes the operational concepts and accepted terms, traces the derived sensible criteria and procedures for subsequent analysis, etc. It's quite expected to pay attention to the compulsory herein explanation of *politeness* and *strategy*, so as not to burden the reader with the responsibility of setting up the cornerstones and maintaining the rational thread. It is especially necessary in case of compounding multiple or divergent views, superposing additional or different blends and preparing a cluster description for a complex object. Not accidentally, in conclusion, Zheni Koleva sums up that she will follow a "communicative research method which is multifaceted, dynamic and holistic, oriented towards the building of integral analytical model that comes as close as possible to the specifics of the pragmatic strategies' functioning in the conditions of real communication" (p. 70). Faithful to her intuition while systematizing the facts, indeed, she records genuinely her "journey" in scientific findings – with sincere curiosity about any place of interest, with joy from the discovery and willingness to share what she has come across. The justification of the topic of politeness is faced with extreme responsibility as it leads back into the history of persuasive oratory, ties Rhetoric to Pragmatics, then targets the growth of the eternal themes

in Pragmatics, thus reasserting its place among the related fields of Linguistics, and arguing for the need to conduct a pragmatic analysis. If the focus of the work was the course of Pragmatics' intellectual tradition, before referring to Morris and Wittgenstein, Pragmatism and its precursor, Neopositivism, might have been mentioned, but this, of course, is not among the formulated tasks and has rightly been avoided.

When "grasping" the very scientific problem Zheni Koleva inevitably has immersed herself in the multitude of contemporary directions and schools of thought zooming in politeness, and has surely come across some highly rated and still vital theses, which link the phenomenon to the social norms or to the negotiation in communication (e.g., Fraser and Ide or Kasper and Watts), but she has cleverly preferred the solid ground of conversational maxims, as suggested by the classical models of Leach and Brown and Levinson (p. 5). I fully understand the declared interest in impoliteness (p. 138) as a much deeper niche than the anti-etiquette, which deserves a study of its own. "Negatives" always seem more attractive to the scientist rather than normative events, while the comparisons, if planned, are even more effective. In this regard, Zheni Koleva summarizes that "the pragmatic strategies for politeness/impoliteness are determined by the communicative intentions of the participants in the communication, as well as by the sociopragmatic parameters of the context" (p.149). In the course of the description, their interweaving in both leading and supporting acts, combined according to a typical feature or not, is noted, which strokes an open-ended in my estimation question about the strategic use of language. If every act is potentially strategic and may be characterized as such, if the strategic charge may be distributed throughout the exchange (not only in subsequent turns of one and the same speaker, but in switched turns as well), should it be assumed that strategy is built and realized bilaterally and has the status of a joint, sometimes (mandatory) undertaking, i.e. accountable and requiring recognition and reciprocity? Zheni Koleva repeatedly points out that the goal of politeness strategies is to create positive atmosphere, to ensure harmonious dialogical interaction, etc. Against this backdrop, consonant with the ideal communication conditions, what is the role and the purpose of impoliteness strategies, and under what common denominator would the two opposing cases of strategic language use be brought? To be emphasized, these are my associative queries and personal unknowns, not cues within the text. To her own questions Zheni Koleva has given a due answer.

I fully welcome the interdisciplinary approach stated on p. 6. It is justified by the inclusion of statements and parameters from Conversation Analysis – nowadays merged in Discourse Analysis, although rooted in a completely different basis. In the same light I regard the mention of the Birmingham School represented by Sinclair and Coulthard (p. 44) and their model, which is tangential to true Conversation Analysis as it refers to the exchange structure in educational environment, within the teaching unit, and in particular, it catches moves in testing students' knowledge, when communication practice is a priori marked and interactants have clear institutional roles. Of particular interest to me was the welcoming of Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and, above all, the flyover between Speech Act Theories and Conversation Analysis, the potential of which I myself have long considered, years ago in my studies on the dialogic unit. Now, under the influence of this research I am rethinking the reasons due to which I refrained from generalizations regarding the types of illocutionary acts in responses, i.e. the second, closing pair part. At that time, I feared that such a perspective would lead to a superficial or fragmentary view of the nature and the tendency of verbal contact. I kept thinking that the reflexive intention alone might be reliable for classifying illocutionary acts, but it has limited possibilities for describing the talk-in-interaction and the dialogical function of verbal contribution, so I was certain that speech acts may be registered but not causally explained. Then I relied on Searle's own scepticism regarding the analysis of conversation as a sequence of speech acts, at least because the felicity conditions of any act do not predetermine a set of response acts nor do they suggest an obligatory format of same. I also trusted Schegloff, according to whom Speech Act Theory cannot penetrate into the essence of interpretation or into the chaining of verbal exchange, namely because it is centered on the meaning of the individual action and cannot exceed its capacity in order to encompass the overall interaction and thereby possibly reveal the situational specifics or the combinatorics of the separate acts in the interaction. However, this is within the power of Conversation Analysis and fits organically into its perimeter, that's why Zheni Koleva has presciently turned to this methodology, uniting it with her starting points. In her enterprising approach the traditional conceptual apparatus of Conversation Analysis is supplemented with the *stimulus – reaction* notion (p. 6), which puts an emphasis on the retrospective interpretation of the preceding turn, yet withdraws the attention from its prospective relevance – both equally essential for the chaining and the structuring of the very interaction of entities holding equal rights of planning and actionability. The incrementation of the

terminology is probably related to the fact that the attention here is focused more on the hearer and his actions, and thus the success of the politeness strategy applied by the speaker is assessed (p. 154). The outset is the observed perlocutionary effect (p. 13), in principle beyond the limits of Speech Act Theories, having in mind the common belief that purposefulness (i.e. point) can only be attributed to illocution and illocutionary force is determined only by the performer of the respective speech act because it corresponds to the speaker's intention in delivering the utterance. Accordingly, its modification (p. 5) does not result in a decrease or increase of a value, but in mitigation or aggravation of an effect, on which Zheni Koleva has taken a competent stance in many places in the text. The recipient ratifies the illocutionary force and the performed act is considered successful if it is merely identified, noncontingent on any specific actions in the extralinguistic world taken by the addressee (still less such a palette could be predicted). The verbal reaction is also an intentional act contributing to the overall interaction outcome, which is a result of an interdependent choice. This, I suppose, encouraged Zheni Koleva to surpass the paradigm of Speech Act Theories and to seek another level of explanation for the expression of politeness. It is estimable that she does not hesitate to extend her observations over longer speech fragments, transcending the established margins of adjacency pairs. A more serious conduct of Conversation Analysis on such a terrain would render prerequisites for conclusions regarding preference structure and preferred/dispreferred seconds, which do not refer to feelings of like or dislike, but to tendencies in social practice and expectations of actors – a basis for choice and, respectively, for interpretation of behavioural models. This is certainly not among the research tasks, but would be productive if involved in a future development of the topic. The choice of empirical evidence extracted from literary works and from the directed dialogue, although at a first glance incompatible with Conversation Analysis, is acceptable for the reason that scientific hypotheses based on data from such sources might be convincing in general, in their own plane, as long as they are lean on a representative linguistic corpus and contain appropriate clarifications regarding extrapolation to spoken discourse, moreover they can always be verified in practice, once they are transferred to the real work with live, spontaneous speech. In the present case, Zheni Koleva has selectively and cleverly adopted the useful for her conception grains from Conversation Analysis – judging by the comment in the conclusion that "the analysis of the politeness strategies exceeds the limits of the dialogic unity, the dynamic choice of adequate means by the communicants and

the turn sequence are studied in a broader context" (p. 152). This remark is relevant because in Conversation Analysis, context is the text itself and nothing more. However, the search in this field has been fruitful – in the forefront two irrefutable conclusions have been brought, namely: that verbal interaction is propicious for the unfolding of adjacency pairs, as established by Schegloff, one of the pioneers in Conversation Analysis (p. 150), and that speech acts are not used isolatedly in dialogue (p. 155), which is also listed as a contribution of the research.

The conclusion presents the accumulated impressions and inferences in a smooth and concentrated form. The bibliography is selected and respectable.

One of the strengths of the monograph is that it triggers reflection not only on the considered multilayered phenomena, but also on the approach to them, enlighted by amazing persistence and audacity, supported by ambitious and tractable solutions and crowned by meaningful inferences. All under the sign of an immense love for Linguistic Pragmatics – the same one that has brought us together, once again inspiring an enriching colloquium. My comments confirm the quality of what has been achieved so far – I share them with the confidence that the constructive, goodwilled discussion promotes the growth and the authority of any scholar, and I'm grateful for the honour of participating in this forum.

Conclusion

The dissertation outranges the expectations towards our excellent career student, who worked under the wise supervision of Prof. Milena Popova, PhD. I support the awarding of PhD degree in professional field 2.1. Philology, PhD program: *Romance Languages (Syntax and Pragmatics of the Spanish Language)* to Zheni Koleva and encourage the esteemed scientific jury to endorse my opinion.

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Sofia, 30.07.2025 Assoc. Prof. Donka Mangacheva, PhD