

## R E V I E W

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2.1. Philology

of the thesis

A MULTI-PROCESS COGNITIVE MODEL FOR INVESTIGATING TEXT AND DISCOURSE

submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science in the field of 2. Humanities,  
discipline 2.1. Philology (Linguistics of Text and Discourse Analysis – English)

1. Information about the procedure:

By Order RD-/2023 of the Rector of the Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" I have been selected to participate in the academic panel for the defense of the dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Neli Tincheva. Being thus engaged to examine the submitted thesis for the award of the degree "Doctor of Science", I confirm that I have been provided with the documents and materials necessary for such a procedure according to the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules of procedure at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for applying this Act. I also confirm that the materials submitted by the applicant include all the documents required as per the procedure.

I can declare that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tincheva has fulfilled the minimum national requirements in pursuance of Article 2b, para. 2 and 3 of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The verification carried out by the *StrikePlagiarism* anti-plagiarism system unequivocally demonstrates the originality of Dr. Tincheva's research.

## 2. Supporting texts and documentation:

According to the requirements, the candidate has submitted a summary in both Bulgarian and English. The summary in Bulgarian comprises 103 pages and correctly reflects the content of the thesis. The author's formulation of the contributions is also correct and fully corresponds to the dissertation itself. I would suggest that the summary itself could be published in Bulgarian in order to present to the Bulgarian linguistic community the aims, methodology and achievements of the research.

The applicant has also submitted 4 academic publications on the topic of the thesis, each in length (exceeding significantly 36 000 characters) and level of complexity that allows them to be considered as independent studies. All four have been refereed and indexed in SCOPUS. It should also be noted that two of the publications are in percentile 1 journals of the database in question.

Overall, the applicant's articles meet and significantly exceed the quantitative and qualitative requirements of Article 2b of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Article 1a, par. 1 of the Rules of procedure for applying this Act.

## 3. Characteristics and organization of the thesis:

The dissertation submitted for assessment consists of 446 pages encompassing nine chapters. The first chapter is introductory and the last chapter draws the conclusions and comments on the contributions of the thesis. I find it appropriate that Chapters II and III are logically and structurally integrated in Part I, Chapters IV and V in Part II, and Chapters VI, VII and VIII in Part III. I should also note the remarkable number of cited sources included in the last part of the dissertation. In the main text they are used appropriately.

As for the main substantive features of the text, I will first offer a summary and state that I find N. Tincheva's thesis as a thorough, interesting and easy to read work. A distinctive feature of the dissertation is the presence not only of theoretical objectives and contributions, but also of applied ones.

The introductory chapter introduces the research object, defines the objectives and clarifies the methodology. Here, the author makes a convincing case for her choice to focus on addressing issues related to the concepts of 'text' and 'discourse'. Undoubtedly, these concepts are very well known and much discussed in the literature, but, as the candidate demonstrates, they can still constitute a significant object of modern research if the most up-to-date theoretical approaches are used in their analysis.

In this regard, Tincheva chooses to refine her focus on the object of her research by talking about four overlapping spheres of text and discourse analysis - practical analysis of texts and discourses, theoretical elaborations on how these practical analyses should be conducted, theoretical approaches to the understanding of text and discourse, and last but not least the understanding of the concepts of TEXT and DISCOURSE themselves. The author states the aims of her research as relating to all four, but places particular emphasis on the potential contribution of the thesis to the third and fourth areas. In this sense, the object of study can be considered very well refined without compromising its complexity and multilayered nature.

The purpose of the study is also clearly stated in the introduction, which systematizes the main research questions. These are related to the four main aspects of the object of study mentioned above, from which the main hypothesis of the paper ensues.

This basic hypothesis presupposes the existence of a set of cognitive mechanisms which, according to the author, control the mental processing of text, discourse and related theories and concepts. Tincheva discusses this set of cognitive mechanisms as internally coherent and well-coordinated. I support the hypothesis she expresses, which stipulates that the constituent cognitive mechanisms in the cluster (i.e. in the set) function through a common systematicity rather than as separate processes. I also support her critique of modern cognitive research, which has traditionally avoided analyzing the joint operation of more than two such mechanisms - even existing research on metonymy only considers conceptual metaphor in conjunction with conceptual metonymy.

Another hypothesis underlying the paper, which I would highlight, suggests that confirming the existence of a set of cognitive mechanisms could explain both academic and non-academic uses of texts and discourses, and the uses of a wide range of related concepts. Research questions arising from these basic hypotheses have been clearly formulated by Tinceva in the introductory chapter.

Due to the complexity of the object of analysis, the methodology and research techniques used also demonstrate a high level of sophistication and specific incrementality. Tinceva brings to our attention a well-balanced hybrid methodology and aptly combines qualifying and quantitative analysis. This choice is motivated by the general method to which she adheres.

By its nature, this method is cognitive, leading us to expect the dissertation's strict adherence to the typical interest in individual cognition alone. However, the author does not restrict herself to this and argues for her preference to view individual consciousness as inextricably linked to sociolinguistic phenomena. As a result, the dissertation makes a compelling case for and contribution to research on the socially manifest interconnectedness of mind, brain, and body, as well as to the very current understanding of what we call "cognitive ecology."

The main aim of Part I of the thesis is the isolation of distinct cognitive mechanisms that operate in the mental processing of information related to text and discourse. This part presents the step-by-step isolation of one mechanism after another, and at each step that demonstrates the presence of a new mechanism, Dr. Tintscheva includes a thorough review of existing research on that cognitive mechanism. In this way, Part I contributes as compactly as possible to fulfilling its stated goals and, in parallel, serves as an overview chapter.

Part I contains two chapters, each focusing on a different object of analysis. Chapter II offers a new look at the multifunctionality typical of political speeches. Chapter III revisits the notion of "text structure" and traces and analyzes the plethora of scholarly perspectives on it. The author defends her decision to explore the concepts of 'political speeches' and 'text structure' precisely by using a historically sustained argument: 'political speeches' and 'text

structure' have been objects of interest since the earliest and - in Tinscheva's words - pre-linguistic analyses of language use.

Chapter II isolates a number of cognitive mechanisms as potential components in a cluster of mechanisms, namely: conceptual metaphorization, cognitive construction of worlds, overlapping worlds, and their dynamic gestalt profiling. Regarding the joint and parallel operation of mechanisms, Tinscheva voices her regret that the specific complexity of human cognition could only be explored through a linear analysis but adds that this linearity would not prevent the relative importance of different cognitive component-mechanisms in different objects of study from being traced.

Once the existence and functioning of the set of cognitive mechanisms present in political speeches have been established in Chapter II, they are tested again in Chapter III, but this time the dissertation moves on to another object of study - Chapter III verifies the presence of these mechanisms in research interpretations concerning text structure. Thus, Chapter III confirms the presence of the mechanisms already included in the list, but also adds to their set by including conceptual metonymy. Within Part I, as research techniques, we find that Chapter II uses data from real linguistic carriers, but also proposes a dataset analysis. Chapter III, on the other hand, only provides us with a dataset analysis. However, the chapters are unified by the essentially quantitative method of analysis on which they both rest.

The analysis presented in Part II stems from her perception that the model proposed in the thesis does not connect to a particular theoretical approach in principle. Part II, therefore, illustrates the possible application of the model to the fields of textual linguistics and discourse analysis. Chapter IV first applies the model to the scholarly field of textual linguistics, and then Chapter V turns to the scholarly field of discourse analysis. Each of the chapters first systematizes the main approaches involved (e.g., Halliday's textual linguistic approach and that of de Beaugrande and Dressler) and then discusses in comparative and contrastive terms the basic concepts and principles on which these approaches rely. Chapters four and five both indicate to which approaches the use of the model proposed in the thesis could contribute.

In my view, what is of most interest in both chapters is the actual application of the multiprocess model to the scientific fields in question (i.e., to textual linguistics and discourse analysis), which I would characterize as meta-analysis. I was interested to learn the author's view on how and why text linguistics and discourse analysis exist in exactly this form. Her analysis of the likely cognitive processes controlling the academic community's representations of scholarship, representations evident in academic texts on text and discourse, rests on an understanding of what academic discourse is that is impressive in its scope and depth.

In Part II, Tinceva also concludes that it is possible to argue that each scholarly theory represents a conceptual metaphonymization of its object of analysis (i.e., TEXT and/or DISCOURSE), and that in the process of metaphonymization, each approach selects a particular aspect or a whole group of elements related to TEXT and DISCOURSE, which in turn is combined with their Gestalt profiling in the process of scholarly inquiry. In addition, the proposed analysis in this Part supports the earlier conclusions of Part I regarding the existence and functioning of the already isolated set of cognitive mechanisms.

In Part III, Tinceva emphasizes the importance of the notion of "real world", which represents her authorial interpretation of a kind of cognitive network of mental structures arising from the functioning of the multiprocess cluster discussed in the dissertation. In order to achieve these goals, Tinceva complements and builds on her earlier analysis of concepts discussed in Part I and Part II, namely: the 'discourse world', the 'context', the 'communicative environment', the 'situational context', the 'immediate environment', etc. In parallel, the chapters in Part III build on the findings of Part I, this time focusing not on the oldest but on some of the most contemporary concepts related to language: online communication, virtual reality, performativity of identity, etc. In terms of the research techniques used, Part III offers a convincing analysis of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature. The author demonstrates her skill in handling both datasets from textual data and data derived from experiments with native speakers as respondents.

The conclusion of the thesis comprehensively summarizes the results achieved with respect to the set objectives and provides objectives for further research. It goes without saying that the proposed thesis successfully fulfils the set objectives and convincingly answers the research questions posed at the outset.

#### 4. Contributions of the thesis:

I concur with the contributions listed by the author in the final chapter of the thesis (pp. 380-385). I find the main contribution in the theoretical reconciliation of cognitive research on text and discourse, conceptual metaphor and metonymy, Gestalt psychology, and the theory of textual worlds. A significant achievement of the work in my view is, of course, the multi-process model itself, based on cognitive mechanisms and their constituent cognitive operations.

Another important contribution is the notions put forth and defended in the work that "real world" and "reality" should not be identified, and that each discourse world stands in a metonymic relation with its corresponding real world. I would like to mention here that I have been watching the development of the author's first thesis since the earliest stages of its genesis, when, as compiler and editor of a collection (*Cross-Linguistic Interaction: Translation, Contrastive and Cognitive Studies*), I was introduced to the idea.

I have already mentioned that the dissertation impresses not only with its theoretical contributions, but also with its applied achievements. Chapter seven, for example, presents an intriguing explanation of how a concept without a real referent such as 'Brexit' gradually 'enters' and becomes 'part of reality' (p. 314). Tinceva illustrates how the concept moves from the textual world through the discursive world and enters the overlapping real world, with the process occurring through metonymy of the cognitive structure LIFE IS A JOURNEY. The specific analysis further reveals that BREXIT is most often metaphorised as DIVORCE, NATURAL CATASTROPHE and PART OF A JOURNEY; that in the British media the predominant metaphorical conceptualisations are as JOURNEY, CATASTROPHE and WAR, whereas in the EU media the predominant metaphor is BREXIT as MECHANICAL DISASTER.

A contribution of Chapter Eight is the proposed explanation of how another concept related to text and discourse - Facebook posts - is gradually 'entering' the cognitive 'real world'. I find valid the treatment that such 'movement' through overlapping worlds leads to our notion of discourse as social action. The applied aspect of the chapter, in turn, is related to the analysis of data obtained from native speakers, which shows that the 2020 pandemic has enhanced the socio-political role of Facebook. What is interesting is Tincheva's conclusion that Facebook posts are seen in contemporary Bulgarian society not only as a distinct political genre, but also as an actual political action in real social life.

5. Recommendations and critical remarks:

The dissertation is fundamentally a meta-analysis of highly abstract concepts and theories, and as such it is characterized by a level of generalization that is difficult to find direct empirical support for within the dissertation itself. In this respect, I am of course tempted to assume that, as the author herself notes, the role of the linguist also needs to be respected in the construction of purely theoretical hypotheses and new paradigms, and not only in empirical studies.

However, another criticism from which I would not back down is the absence of an unambiguous definition of what the author means by 'text' and 'discourse'. These concepts are central to the work and are key to deriving the model advocated in the thesis. I therefore consider it appropriate that their definitions are clearly brought out in the final chapter. I particularly strongly recommend that this be done when the full text of the dissertation is eventually published.

6. Conclusion:

My critical remarks and recommendations in no way detract from the undoubtedly tremendous work of the candidate in the treatment of the research material and the results



achieved. Through the text N. Tincheva shows herself to be an erudite linguist who firmly follows the evidence and carefully sifts the literature used.

Finally, I would like to refer to the current Rules of procedure for the acquiring scientific degrees and for occupying academic positions at Sofia University. According to Art. 75. (1) I categorically declare that the work "A multi-process cognitive model for investigating text and discourse" contains theoretical generalizations and solutions to major scientific or scientifically applied problems, which are in line with contemporary achievements and represent a significant and original contribution to science.

I confidently give my positive assessment of the work and propose that the esteemed jury award the degree of Doctor of Science to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Neli Todorova Tincheva-Georgieva.

12.05.2023