

## WRITTEN STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vladislav Ognianov Milanov - lecturer in contemporary Bulgarian language

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for the doctoral dissertation on the topic: **Linguistic Characteristics of Fake News**

Doctoral student: Ruslana Margova

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ekaterina Tarpomanova

By **Decree No. RD 38 - 198/26.04.2023**, I have been appointed as a member of the academic jury for the procedure of awarding the academic degree of Ruslana Margova. I would like to break the genre of the position and start my presentation with the fact that I am familiar with Ruslana Margova's texts from her application for scientific publications in the journal "Contemporary Linguistics," published by the Faculty of Slavic Philology, where young researchers publish their scientific works, and where the articles of the doctoral student received the highest scores from anonymous reviewers. From the initial texts, I understood that the choice of the topic is shaped by the deep professionalism of the researcher, closely related to the material and her long-term observations on such a complex phenomenon as fake news. Without a doubt, it is impossible to determine their essence and find a solution for their recognition in the continuous and various channels of information flooding society without conducting an in-depth analysis of the linguistic means through which falsification is achieved.

I will start my text with a brief comment on the choice of the topic for the dissertation research. There is no doubt that the topic is dissertation-worthy. I don't like this term, but it is part of the toolkit we must use when evaluating scientific work. I would like to congratulate the supervisor and the doctoral student on the choice of such a comprehensive topic, especially in the vast field where several scientific disciplines constantly seek practical and theoretical solutions for the scientific community in Bulgaria and worldwide to combat fake news for the benefit of society as a whole. Undoubtedly, it is through the analysis of their linguistic characteristics that it is possible to find an approach for their recognition and to typologize markers through which this type of manipulation can be identified and marginalized.

To avoid repeating a generalized overview of the structure, scope, methods, goals, and objectives of the dissertation, which will undoubtedly be thoroughly and comprehensively presented in the reviews, I will allow myself to highlight some of the mandatory requisites of the work: the total volume consists of 221 pages arranged in several major thematic areas. The scientific contributions are clearly and orderly presented, accompanied, where necessary, by references, tables, and graphical illustrations. The used sources, as well as the scientific contributions on the research topic, are properly presented. The structure has been thoroughly thought out and clearly presents the doctoral student's concept on the researched problem. The structuring is based on the main problems and tasks set for achieving the main goal. This statement is fulfilled from the beginning of the text, and each subsequent thematic part confirms it sequentially and purposefully. Perhaps the thematic scope of the research should have been limited because, in my opinion, each of the developed parts can be treated as an independent scientific study. However, the author's experience, built on years of observation, combined with the supervisor's ability to observe and guide the process of text construction, has led to an attempt for a comprehensive description of the linguistic characteristics of fake news, which is based on a broad foundation, intertwining fundamental knowledge from journalism, philosophy, language ontogenesis, medicine, psychology, sociology, grammar, and others. This attempt is successful and will undoubtedly be valuable to specialists from various fields.

The review of scientific literature from various fields demonstrates the precision and convincing organization of the overview, which not only provides bibliographic guidance but also showcases the developed skill typical of every researcher in the field of linguistics. It enables them to systematize previous studies and scientific hypotheses in order to identify significant aspects, examine the phenomenon's wide representation in scientific works, and unfold the controversial discussion points to which the dissertation responds.

The innovative nature of Ruslana Margova's scientific thesis, shaped through an in-depth review of concepts and hypotheses from various sciences, primarily relies on a broad presentation of the phenomenon of *fake news*. This is accomplished by deploying specific terminological apparatus and substantive requisites of the different elements that constitute fake news, transforming them into a powerful tool for manipulation. The concepts explored in sufficient volume and detail include:

- *Disinformation, inaccurate information, and malicious information*
- *Propaganda, manipulation, and information warfare*

- *Hybrid warfare; Active measures, pillars, and narratives; Fake news*
- *Internet and biases; Astroturfing and coordinated inauthentic behavior; Clickbait; Trolls, echo chambers, balloons; The illusion of truth effect; Gaslighting; Post-truth; Media literacy, critical thinking; Deepfake; Debunking; Prebunking, and many others.*

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic in the scientific research, a historical aspect of the phenomenon is also reviewed, outlining its essence. The intersections between several fundamental disciplines are scientifically motivated, introducing not only the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon but also its complexity and contradictions, which result in a series of effects on the consciousness and "informedness" of consumers of fake news. These clarifications are important for the subsequent convincing review of the philosophical aspects, which also serves as an entry point into the substantial linguistic part of the research.

Regarding the linguistic value of the work, several key conclusions can be made categorically:

- The author is well-versed in contemporary theories related to linguistics and computational linguistics. In my opinion, she should confidently outline and emphasize her own understanding, which is well-argued after placing the phenomenon within the context of media discourse.
- By summarizing the ways in which computational linguistics recognizes fake news, a smooth transition is made to the essential analyses for the dissertation, which are based on linguistic characteristics.
- The evidence is presented in-depth and exceptionally well-organized regarding authorial techniques for creating false information. Here, I would direct the researcher's attention to contemplating the identification based on the style of news creation and introducing and contextualizing the concept of an individual style in relation to the topic, as thoroughly analyzed by Prof. Miroslav Yanakiev in his scholarly works, in order to develop a profile of frequently anonymous news authors.
- The scientific approaches to evidentiality in the Bulgarian language are presented in-depth and sufficiently, considering the goals and objectives of the dissertation, encompassing both classical and more recent perspectives on the topic.

➤ The analysis of examples regarding renarration and dubitation is a significant contribution as it expands the corpus of observations on evidentiality in media discourse. I cannot help but express my satisfaction that the analysis seeks specific practical solutions for recognizing and potentially restricting manipulative strategies within fake news.

➤ The problems arising from the headlines of fake news are analyzed, and here again, the author convincingly demonstrates her ability to interpret both journalistic strategies and the linguistic means for achieving them simultaneously.

The bibliography is accurately prepared and fully reflects the state of previous sources on the topic, which is important both for the theoretical framework of the dissertation and for the independently derived contributions that I believe the doctoral candidate can further highlight.

**Recommendations.** If the author wishes to continue her research on fake news, I would recommend exploring the dimensions of the phenomenon in a broader Balkan and Slavic context, attempting to adapt some of the terms with Bulgarian equivalents where possible. Additionally, providing new examples for the needs of Bulgarian electronic corpora would allow for observing the changes in the phenomenon.

In conclusion, I cannot help but express my satisfaction with the academically captivating style in which the text is written. This makes it a readable piece that will be of interest to researchers from various fields, as well as students from fundamental professional disciplines, Bulgarian studies students, and especially journalists, and why not, even high school students. I am deeply convinced that Ruslana Margova's dissertation (after minor corrections and editorial interventions) should be published as a book, and a brief summary translated into English should present her analyses and conclusions to the global scientific community. The research topic explores an interesting and important problem that once again emphasizes the Bulgarian scientific contribution to the analysis of fake news, which gives meaning and contributes to addressing the issues of their identification at a supranational level.

I must note that the author has taken into account many of the recommendations made during the internal discussion of the text, resulting in its refinement and deepening.

The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation.

In conclusion, I strongly **vote in FAVOR of awarding the scientific and educational degree of "Doctor" to Ruslana Margova, as I am convinced of the contribution of her research both in theoretical and practical terms.**

June 18, 2023

Reviewer: .....

Sofia

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vladislav Milanov)