

## **REVIEW**

of the dissertation

**“THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR (A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE BULGARIAN EMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA)”**

in the competition for the award of the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences” in the field of higher education 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian language. Modern Bulgarian language)

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Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Habil Juliana Ivanova Stoyanova

The study of the Bulgarian emigrant communities around the world in relation to the preservation or demise of the Bulgarian cultural and linguistic identity is not just current, but a pressing problem that requires a broad interdisciplinary approach.

Although she chooses the theoretical-methodological framework of sociolinguistics as the basis of the study of the language of one of these emigrant communities, located in the city of Sydney, Australia, associate Professor Katja Issa approaches the topic using her rich professional erudition in several other important fields of humanitarian studies: linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, ethnolinguistics and linguistic studies.

In order for a researcher to be able to qualify in such a vast scientific field, which exceeds the philological profile, long-term serious efforts are needed, which are visible in the author's numerous publications on this topic in the last eight years.

The author's interest in scientific fields, building on her philological education (acquired at SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” in 1998), appeared immediately after her graduation in the specialties of Bulgarian and Arabic philology: between 1995 and 2002, she also graduated in philosophy . Soon after - in 2004, Katya Issa became a doctor of philology with a dissertation on “Associative Bulgarian-Arabic language patterns”.

The professional realization of K. Issa takes place mainly at the University of Architecture, Construction and Geodesy (hereinafter referred to as the abbreviation UASG): teacher of Bulgarian language to foreign students at the Department of Applied Linguistics (from 2004 to 2006), senior lecturer (from 2006 to 2013 ) and associate professor - from 2013 to the present.

In addition, Katya Issa teaches a course on language culture and carries out the language editing of the Yearbook of the UASG, she leads exercises on syntax as a part-time assistant at the Faculty of Slavic Philology of the SU, teaches Bulgarian to foreign citizens, including refugees, at other universities and private schools , translates in both directions between Bulgarian and Arabic, organizes scientific forums, language student practices, etc.

All the mentioned activities undoubtedly contribute to the enrichment of her experience with the linguistic problems of bilingualism in Bulgaria and abroad.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the dissertation of Assoc. Dr. Katya Issa, I would also like to mention her membership in prestigious organizations and administrative structures, as it confirms the worthy place that the author occupies among specialists in the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics : since 1998 - scientific secretary of the International Sociolinguistic Society “Acad. M. Videnov”, from 2009 to 2019 - scientific secretary of the Philological Sciences section of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, from 2013 to 2019 - member of the Academic Council of the UASG, and from 2023 - member of the Association of Teachers of Bulgarian as foreign language.

The dissertation “Bulgarian language south of the equator (a sociolinguistic study of the language of the Bulgarian emigrant community in Sydney, Australia)” in its general structure is in line with both the requirements of the genre and the specifics of the issues being developed.

Състои се от увод, 3 глави, заключение, библиография, приложения, списък с публикациите по темата на дисертацията (цитирани са над 190 източника на български, руски и английски език) и описание на приносите. В тази традиционна структура обаче е внесен специфичен индивидуален подход, тъй като уводът и заключението като обем и начин на изложение също са разгърнати като отделни глави, за което ще стане дума по-нататък в рецензията.

It consists of an introduction, 3 chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, appendices, a list of publications on the topic of the dissertation (over 190 sources in Bulgarian, Russian and English are cited), and a description of the contributions.

The introduction (pp. 5–68) presents precisely and in a clear sequence the purpose, object, topic and tasks of the study, detailing the research methods used in the study itself. So, the introduction also fulfills the function of a theoretical-methodological preliminary, which is usually designated as the first chapter in the dissertation text.

In this dual function, the introduction informs the reader that the conducted research sets a rather ambitious fundamental goal: to propose a methodology for tracking the changes in the native language of Bulgarian emigrants around the world, and the study of the Bulgarian language situation in the city of Sydney is an approbation of this methodology. In this way, the author outlined both the theoretical and the applied aspects of her research.

To achieve the stated goal, Assoc. Prof. Dr. K. Issa uses methodological tools that have become classic in sociolinguistics: a questionnaire filled out by Bulgarian emigrants not only in the city of Sydney, Australia, but also in many other places around the world; interviews with representatives of Bulgarian institutions at home and abroad; field research (so-called included observation) of all speakers of the Bulgarian language in the city of Sydney, to whom the author had access.

The empirical material thus collected should contain abundant sociolinguistic information about the actual state of contemporary speech norm, specific to the Bulgarian emigrants in this city

south of the equator. The author envisages highlighting the deformations and the algorithm of their changes, which she calls “procedural regularity” in deviations from a codified norm.

When planning the experimental part of her research, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Issa starts from several assumptions (called “deformation hypotheses” in the text), whose confirmation she expects through the linguistic and sociolinguistic analyzes of the rich experimental data from the field study.

The innovative problematic brings to life new, specific scientific concepts, which the author convincingly motivates theoretically. Such is, for example, the introduction of the concept of the “seventh function of language” (according to L. Binet), which K. Issa names “signifying”. According to this function, the Bulgarian language of the emigrants in Sydney “signifies the speaker as Bulgarian”.

The theoretical-methodological framework of the study is well-grounded and supported by the necessary literary sources, which testifies to the wide erudition of the author.

The first chapter (“Bulgarian policy towards our present-day emigrants and the emigrants’ policy towards present-day Bulgaria”, pp. 69-169) covers several interrelated thematic circles, which are successively deployed: about the inevitable globalization of the modern world, about the place of “small languages” in it, one of which is the Bulgarian, about the right political attitude of Australia towards the “Babylonian” clustering of languages in the country and the Bulgarian language as one of these languages, about the policy of the Bulgarian state towards our language at home and outside Bulgaria. Legislative changes related to education in EU and inland, as well as the attitude of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Culture towards Bulgarian schools abroad and their Association were particularly carefully studied and discussed.

The chapter comments also the role of culturally oriented education and, in particular, textbooks in the Bulgarian language, for the preservation of Bulgarian self-awareness among the members of our emigration of recent decades, as well as the insufficient participation of Bulgarian specialists in the study of the Bulgarian language abroad and the possibilities for preserving it over time. To name the hereditary Bulgarian language spoken by the children of Bulgarian families born abroad, Katya Issa introduces and motivates the term “second native language”.

Last (but not least), the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter describes the results of the survey conducted to establish the attitudes of Bulgarians abroad and of the institutions responsible for maintaining the Bulgarian spirit outside our country. The answers to the question “What language do you speak at home?”, which is of crucial importance for preserving Bulgarian self-awareness among our emigrants around the world, are discussed in detail (p. 137).

Here I would like to point out the most characteristic feature of this dissertation: in it, scientific objectivity is left to the abundant facts, while the description and commenting on the facts is subjective and emotionally marked. The discussion about the globalization of Europe (of which Bulgaria is also a part), for example, which is richly documented and supported by numerous quoted sources, is conducted with journalistic pathos; there is no lack of an ironic remarks, stated in the text through a vivid colloquialization of the vocabulary.

Relying on the official documents of the EU to preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity in the European Union is not enough, K. Issa claims, because they are only wishful thinking, and the practice shows “shrinking of Bulgarian studies throughout Europe” (p. 87). The sad trend towards the death of the small languages and cultures in Europe and the short-sighted ignoring of this trend by the Bulgarian institutions makes the author exclaim: “just now, out of ignorance, we declared ourselves dead first; and the cause of death is lack of thought...” (p. 77).

The text of this chapter is filled with sentences that sound like sad-ironic maxims: “Public procurement will not help Bulgarian studies, therefore it must call for help in distress” (p. 89); “As for the linguistic maintenance of our own children here in Bulgaria, the skeptical Bulgarian believes that this is the task of education, of the school, and because he no longer believes in the school, the Bulgarian believes in nothing” (p. 81).

Criticisms of the textbooks intended for Bulgarian schools abroad (pp. 109–120), and especially of the primer and the reading book, are illustrated with numerous examples from practice, which prove “an unacceptable lack of semantic transparency and impossible communicativeness of the texts”.

The author has an answer to the question of what should be done to meet the needs for preserving the Bulgarian language and Bulgarian identity in Australia: to take into account the specifics of the foreign language situation, the level of language proficiency of bilingual pupils, the model of public schools in the country, and only then proceed with adapting the texts in our textbooks.

In the discussion of that topic, irony erupts again in full force: it is time, Katja Issa declares, for inadequate characters such as Simo, Nano and Gruyo, embedded in the reading books for little Bulgarians in the big world, “to finally retire” (p. 83).

The difference between K. Issa's way of scientific writing and our traditional view of it does not correlate with the popular-fundamental divide, since a large part of what she says with journalistic passion does not have a popular character, but on the contrary - in its content, it is an example of a well-argued academic discourse .

What distinguishes the author's scientific prose is the expression of a personal opinion and attitude: she has boldly replaced modest passive and passive-impersonal constructions with a definite “I”, which leads us through the text of the book with unrelenting emotional engagement.

However, the text (between pp. 102 and 106) is a bit heavy with the repeated narrative about Bulgarian schools abroad - both where historically distinct Bulgarian communities live, and in the centers where the new emigration is taking shape.

The second chapter (“The Bulgarian language in Sydney, Australia”, pp. 170-302) introduces the reader to the Bulgarian-Australian cultural ties, considering them both historically (including the Bulgarian political emigrants from the period before 1979) and recently.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. K. Issa examines the types of bilingualism and diglossia of Bulgarians living in Sydney, defines the difference between coordinated and mixed bilingualism, dwells on the use of

both languages by the generation of socially and professionally integrated Bulgarians, identifying it as a “state of social bilingualism - a situation of diglossia” (p. 197), while, for children, code-switching is determined as “stylistic bilingualism”- each of the languages is used properly to the communicative situations (p. 198).

The author provides detailed information about the families (both Bulgarian and bilingual ones), that participated in the included observation; she outlines the role of the Bulgarian grandmothers in preserving the Bulgarian language for the youngest generation (p. 220), explains the method of transcription of the recordings ( p. 217), illustrating it with an example dialogue (pp. 222–242), introduces the term “interlanguage” (or “mixed language”) to define the type and degree of bilingualism in children.

Finally, she dwells on the role of the Bulgarian school in Sydney, evaluating it in relation to the conception expressed by the president of the NSW Community Language Schools Federation (p. 271): in the Bulgarian school, the children are Australians and in order to learn our language, they must teach the same things and at the same pace, be taught the same values as in Australian school if we don't want the kids to ignore us.

The third chapter ("Field study of the language of the Bulgarian community in the foreign-language environment in Sydney, pp. 303-499) is not only the most voluminous, but also the most essential from the point of view of the tasks set in the dissertation. This chapter presents a detailed and in-depth description of the sociolinguistic experiment conducted by the author to study the linguistic situation of the Bulgarian community in Sydney.

K. Issa approves and confirms the adequacy of the model created according to the theoretical-methodological principles of Videnov and Baichev (1999) for the study of the language situation in the city of V. Tarnovo and modified by the author for the needs of her own research.

The experimental material is presented in the form of transcriptions of the so-called "probes" (a term borrowed from Videnov and Baichev 1999): segments of the idiolects of the 80 individuals studied. The cited polylogues (with an impressive number of 25) convey the specific ways of using the language not only by one (as in the "Velikotarnovo language"), but by all participants in the communication. In this way, the deformations as a consequence of the influence of the English language on Bulgarian are clearly highlighted, especially distinct in the speech of young people.

Three generations of people, wittily designated by the abbreviation ABV, were studied: in the first subgroup (the young generation from 5 to 25 years old, represented as A - "alphabets") there were 33 people, of whom 24 attended the Bulgarian school in Sydney; the middle generation, which includes persons between 25 and 65 years of age (with a predominance of those aged 40–45) is denoted by B ("bilinguals"); they number 40 people, but only 20 of them are represented in the probes; the third subgroup, named with the letter B ("adults"), includes only 7 people.

The division of the participants in the experiment between the three described subgroups is based on the most significant sociolinguistic factor - generational. This factor turns out to be decisive for the use or abandonment of the Bulgarian language in the English-speaking environment. The

factors gender (most of the researched were women), education and profession are also taken into account, but do not have a significant impact on the obtained results: the observations show that education, profession and social status are irrelevant for the group of students and to a large extent for the group of adults, and the persons from the middle group are without exception with university education.

The author's responsibility for the exact transcription of the records cited in the "probes" is remarkable: in order to be sure of the interpretation of the English-language segments in the informants' speech, K. Issa asked for the opinion of three Anglicists.

Representativeness of the registered polylogists through included observation is achieved by controlling several variables: the age of the subjects; the place of the conversations, related to the broad context of communication (Bulgarian lessons in Sunday school, family gatherings, public places); the ethnicity, the birthplace of the informants and the time spent in Bulgaria and in Australia, respectively. The relations between the family members, leading sometimes to "generational clashes", are not left out. The main aspects of the described sociolinguistic information K. Issa was able to encode to the replicas of each of the informants, introducing special symbols.

Valuable information is contained in the conclusions made about the deviations from the Bulgarian codified norm caused by the interference with the English language (phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical), as well as in the explanations of the types of deviations - linguistic and sociolinguistic.

The errors made by the children studied in the Bulgarian school, for example, are a function of the place of birth, the time spent in Australia and their age, but not their education, and the deciding factor is whether they lived in Bulgaria.

The records of family gatherings lead to the conclusion that "the native language can be forgotten not only under the influence of other languages, but also due to its encapsulation only at home and the lack of compatriots in the environment with whom to practice it" (p. 408). In the comments of probe 15, in which the most deviations were reported, the author again uses the term 'interlanguage' introduced in the previous chapter.

Numerous examples from the speech of the researched persons illustrate the nature of their interlanguage, especially at the level of word formation: adding suffixes and endings that allow the inclusion of an English word in the class of Bulgarian nouns: library-то, engine-ите; verbs: distract-ват; and even adjectives: най-инпорт-ното (p. 436).

The detailed analyzes and summaries of the empirical material lead to a very alarming conclusion, which states: if the necessary measures are not taken, the Bulgarian language in Sydney is in danger of soon becoming a substratum (used only to name some Bulgarian *realia*) or a superstratum – "overfilled with Anglicisms to the extent that all the people in Sydney understand the emigrant perfectly, while he thinks he is speaking Bulgarian" (pp. 494–495).

The title of the last chapter ("Conclusion", pp. 500–569) misleads that here a brief overview of what has been done in the dissertation will be made and the final conclusions will be presented.

However, only the first three pages have such a character, where the two most important conclusions from the analyzes are highlighted (p. 500): linguistic (“a special intermediate system of our language is established on the territory of the country, which is partially national in relation to Bulgarian and specific in relation to of the new environment”) and sociolinguistic (a common language norm for the Bulgarians living in the city of Sydney was established).

In the remaining 67 pages of this chapter, an extensive and in-depth linguistic and sociolinguistic discussion of the presented empirical material unfolds, and again, the different types of interference in the language of the Bulgarians from Sydney are regarded. However, before proceeding to their description, the author considers the role of interference for the three global sociolinguistic processes: “deflection of the vector of monolingualism” in the oldest generation by inserting single English-language elements (p. 506-507), de-Bulgarianization (abandoning the communication of the native language - p. 507) and de-nativization (the complete replacement of the Bulgarian language with a foreign language - p. 508).

The scientific contributions of the dissertation are precisely highlighted and comprehensively described by the doctoral student. I agree with them and therefore I will not comment on them here.

The 60-page abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation.

There are 30 publications on the subject of the dissertation in prestigious collections published in our country and abroad (in Poland, Romania and Hungary), in scientific journals and in yearbooks of several universities. The impressive number of these publications, as well as their numerous citations, proves the definite presence of Prof. Katya Issa in the scientific field of (socio)linguistics.

What has been said so far gives me reason to summarize: the dissertation “The Bulgarian language south of the equator (a sociolinguistic study of the language of the Bulgarian emigrant community in the city of Sydney, Australia)” is a mature, valuable work that enriches our linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge about the changes in the native Bulgarian language in the environment of the foreign (English) language during several generations living in emigration.

The contributions of the research have both a fundamental and an applied nature. I would like to emphasize the fact that the model for studying the sociolinguistic situation of the Bulgarian language in Sydney, created and tested by the author, can also be applied to all cities in the world where there are Bulgarian emigrant communities, and this means a look into the future .

In conclusion, I would like to state that the study “The Bulgarian language south of the equator (a sociolinguistic study of the language of the Bulgarian emigrant community in Sydney, Australia)” meets all the necessary criteria for a dissertation. What has been said so far gives me reason to vote positively with complete conviction for the awarding of Assoc. Dr. Katya Issa the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences” in the professional direction 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian language. Modern Bulgarian language).

27.08.2023

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