STATEMENT OF OPINION
by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zhivko Zhekov
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on dissertation

"THE RELATION BETWEEN ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE DISORDERS IN BILINGUAL STUDENTS"

for the award of PhD in
field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy - scientific specialty "Speech Therapy"

PhD student: Gergana Plamenova Ilieva – Zlatareva
Scientific supervisor: Prof. DSc Tsvetanka Cenova

1. Relevance of the dissertation

Specialists face serious problems related to the growing needs of children and students in the learning process, regarding "The relation between oral and written language disorders in bilingual students". Overcoming them can be possible by creating flexible approaches in the prevention, diagnosis and education of students with bilingualism.

In the learning process, bilingual children encounter the same problems at school as monolingual children. The truth is that mastering two languages with sufficient skill and precision is not as easy as it seems at first glance. This claim is supported by the extensive and multifaceted body of research over the past twenty years on the cognitive processing of the bilingual individual. Despite all the amount of data and results, there is still no single theoretical scenario that explains what happens when processing difficulties arise in the bilingual's mind.

2. General characteristics of the dissertation

In terms of structure, the dissertation meets all the requirements for this type of scientific work. The formulated topic is directed to the research problem. It includes an introduction, three chapters, findings and conclusion, dissertation research contributions, publications, references and appendices.

The dissertation work comprises 166 typewritten pages, which are well balanced - 71 pages represent the theoretical framework of the scientific work, and 85 pages represent the experimental part of the research. The text includes 15 tables, 36 diagrams and appendices in 9 pages.

The bibliography contains 108 titles (67 in Cyrillic, 37 in Latin and 4 internet sites), which cover the period from 1972 to 2023.

3. Content aspects and contributions of the thesis

Acquaintance with the work leaves the impression of a well-conceived and implemented scientific work.

The introduction consists in an introduction to the content of the work. The idea of the study is outlined, where, through the use of a holistic approach, the development of oral and written language in bilinguals of Roma origin and children living abroad is studied. The need for new studies and research in the field of speech therapy related to the mentioned problem is also pointed out.

In the Chapter 1 "Theoretical overview" based on 108 literary sources, the doctoral student has made a targeted theoretical study and has presented information that is significant in terms of volume and content.

The nature of oral and written language is determined; language processes; the ontogeny of oral language acquisition; characteristics of the written language and specific features of writing and reading; oral and written language disorders and specific language disorders; the influence of socio-psychological factors on language development; writing and reading disorders; nature of bilingualism; classifications of bilingualism and its impact on oral and written speech; relationship between specific language disorders, developmental dyslexia and bilingualism.

A positive impression is made by the scientific style of presenting the material and the PhD student's ability to comment on and summarize a large number of literary sources.

There are skills for creative interpretation of the literary material, for the analysis of literature from various scientific fields: speech therapy, special pedagogy, psychology, neuropsychology, didactics, primary school pedagogy, linguistics, medicine, etc. The PhD student copes with a very "tough" matter - with scientific information, which is characterized by a variety of views, raised from different scientific positions. The lack of unity and a holistic approach to disorders of written speech makes it difficult to build an accurate picture of their nature. Nevertheless, the PhD student manages to explore in depth this issue and show that she knows and understands it.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation is devoted to the formulation of the research study. Methodological characteristics are presented here, such as the aim, tasks and hypotheses (total 3), subject and object of the research.

The purpose of the research is: To check and evaluate the state of the oral and written language of bilingual and monolingual students of the 2nd and 3rd grades and to determine whether the difficulties in the oral language (Bulgarian - if any) affect the mastery of writing and reading.

Based on the goal set for the research, tasks are formulated to prove the raised hypotheses.

The subject of the study is the study of oral language deficits.

The object of the study are 78 students from the 2nd and 3rd grades, who are divided into two groups: an experimental group of 48 bilingual students (22 children of Roma origin attending Bulgarian schools and 26 children living abroad (Italy and Germany) who attend Bulgarian Sunday school and a control group of 30 monolingual students attending a general Bulgarian school.

The design of the empirical study is detailed and clearly presented.

The methodology includes four samples for oral language research (Listing objects from one semantic field for 1 minute; choosing the correct missing first word (preposition) in a sentence; Completing the missing last word in sentences; selection of synonyms for words spoken by the researcher and four samples for the study of written language (reading picture sentences and reading comprehension; reading and understanding a small text; independent writing of picture sentences; writing text under dictation).

Additional information is also collected from the parents of the children living abroad through an electronic survey, including questions that aim to study the family environment, the quality of communication in Bulgarian, frequency of communication, level of proficiency in the Bulgarian language, how much time the child spends in Bulgaria, what is his/her willingness and motivation to speak Bulgarian.

For the bilingual children of Roma origin, the information is collected by conducting an interview with their teachers.

The results are subject to quantitative and qualitative analysis and statistical processing to prove the significance of the obtained results.

Statistical processing is performed using IBM SPSS Statistics and includes: comparative percentage analysis of results between groups and within groups, descriptive statistics analysis including: mean, median and standard deviation. For greater clarity, the data is presented graphically through histograms and pie charts.

Cronbach's alpha is used to prove the reliability of the samples, Student's t-test, correlation and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to establish the statistical significance of the results and the correlation between them.

In Chapter 3 "Analysis of the collected data" an analysis of the results of the experimental and control groups is made for all indicators. They are illustrated with figures and tables according to the individual scales of the methods used.

In the comparative analysis of the total result of samples 1, 2, 3 and 4 for oral language between EG and CG, the results of bilinguals - 65.83% are lower than those of their monolingual peers - 85.78%. This is definitely a predictable result due to place of residence, cultural and socio-economic factors, kindergarten and school attendance.

The comparative analysis of the total score of the reading and writing tests between EG and CG in terms of written language is also predictable. As can be seen, the results are close to those in oral language - 70.44% for bilinguals and 88.80% for monolinguals, which shows that bilinguals lag behind monolinguals. This result is a consequence of the fact that the children's education is carried out in different languages and the attendance of the Bulgarian Sunday school by the bilingual children is not sufficient to master the language.

In paragraph 3 "Description and systematization of writing errors" in the third chapter, it would be recommendable to describe the types of errors for each child and to make a qualitative and quantitative analysis both within groups and between them, and not only to be listed.

Paragraph 4 "Discussion" is devoted to a detailed comparative analysis of the obtained results and their correlation with other scientific studies regarding oral and written language in bilingual and monolingual children.

It is necessary to reformulate the conclusions drawn and objectively reflect the results obtained from the research.

I partially accept the theoretical and practical contributions formulated in the dissertation work.

Some of the mentioned contributions need a summary and scientific justification as a result of the dissertation research.

The presented publications - a total of 4 in number - are in the context of the dissertation.

The abstract (54 pages) meets the requirements for a summary presentation of the work.

I have the following notes and questions to the PhD student:

1. In my opinion, it is not good to compare two groups of bilinguals who grow and develop in different social and cultural conditions and with a different official language of the environment in which they live and study. It is logical to compare bilinguals in the conditions of a Bulgarian language environment and bilinguals in a foreign language environment, where the Bulgarian language is not official, and to present the data separately.

2. The oral language assessment samples have a grossly insufficient number of stimuli. This definitely does not allow for an objective assessment of the investigated function.

3. Numerous repetitions, spelling and stylistic errors are noted in the text of the dissertation and the abstract.

4. The conclusions should be reformulated and acquire a scientific style of expression, as well as the contributing moments of the conducted research.

5. Nowhere in the text of the dissertation do I find confirmation or rejection of the formulated hypotheses. What is their function?

6. What is the speech therapy aspect in the study and its relation to speech therapy?

CONCLUSION:
In spite of the notes made, the dissertation work of Gergana Plamenova Ilieva - Zlatareva meets the conditions and requirements in terms of its relevance and scientific implementation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" under the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the regulations for its application and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of Sofia University University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Expressing my positive attitude towards the theoretical and diagnostic-applied value of the work and the overall positive assessment of the completed dissertation research, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to give a positive vote and award Gergana Plamenova Ilieva - Zlatareva the educational and scientific degree "DOCTOR" in professional direction 1. 2. Pedagogy - Speech therapy.

Varna
17/04/2024   Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zhivko Zhekov