

Opinion

for the PhD thesis of Dimitriya Angelova Marinkova on:
Typological characteristics of the linguistic situation in the city of Plovdiv,
submitted for the award of the scientific and educational degree „Doctor“
in the professional field
2.1 Philology (Bulgarian Language - Sociolinguistics)

Biographical details of the PhD student:

Dimitriya Marinkova graduated in Bulgarian Philology from Plovdiv University „Paisii Hilendarski“ in 2007 and in 2015 she received a Master's degree in „Current Linguistics“ at the same university.

She has participated in two research projects: „Conditional Inflections (Potentialis and Possibilis) in Modern Bulgarian Language – Meaning, Forms, Uses“, funded by the Ministry of Education, and „Perceptual Linguistics“ (within SUMMIT).

In connection with the requirements of D. Marinkova has submitted 3 published articles on the topic of the PhD thesis and a note for one article in print. Part of the documentation is also the abstract, which faithfully and in a balanced, but summarized way, presents the work.

Dimitriya Marinkova's PhD thesis encompasses 260 standard pages – the text includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and cited literature, using sources in Bulgarian, English and Russian.

The introduction states the subject and the objectives of the research, discusses in detail the methods used, and outlines the structure of the work.

The clear and precise language of the doctoral student is already evident here. Of greater interest, however, is her ambition to combine different approaches to the topic. For me, this remains one of the strengths of her work.

The first chapter of the dissertation is theoretical. It reviews the research on language situations in individual Bulgarian cities and smaller towns, and at the end of this part the conclusions of Bulgarian authors are presented in detail and studies of language situations around the globe are discussed.

The main emphasis I would like to place is on the consistent discussion of the individual criteria for describing language situations, as outlined in the works of V. Vinogradov and N. Mechkovska. I believe that they will find a place in future works of other authors. A suitable approach is to present the main oppositions in tabular form. This is something that can be observed elsewhere in Dimitriya Marinkova's text. The summaries she makes are clear and concise, which is important as they are used as a basis for the work in other parts of the text.

A contribution of this chapter is the discussion of the various dialectal influences on the speech of Plovdiv residents. Their careful study is taken into account in the selection of the social variables studied in the third part of the dissertation. Their analysis turns out to be particularly important as there is no study of urban speech from the perspective of dialectology.

Particularly interesting is the **second chapter** of the paper. It describes the linguistic situation in the city of Plovdiv on the basis of a very rich set of data and sources of different nature. Its main characteristics are outlined as multi-component and multi-lingual, stably non-equilibrium, unipolar, heterogeneous and heteromorphic.

Reading this text is a real pleasure because of the multiple perspectives skilfully combined in the study. Historical and ethnographic research, travellers' recollections, data on the earliest settlements of the city, and statistics from 5 censuses are used.

This part of the work draws on data from different periods, comments on the earliest accounts of particular communities, and indicates the role of particular groups in the development of the city, focusing on the dynamics of the linguistic situation. The decline in linguistic diversity is convincingly outlined, and the contemporary Bulgarian character of Plovdiv is emphasized.

Another interesting point is the mapping of the settlements of the different ethnic groups and the changes in their ratio over the years. The relations between the Bulgarians and the other groups are traced – the periods of isolation, hostility, peaceful coexistence, etc.

A multicultural society emerges before our eyes, in which different traditions mix. The text clearly shows that it is becoming more and more homogeneous over time, but the current trend of the decrease in the percentage of the Bulgarian language compared to the first census in the XXI century is not overlooked. Marinkova explains this data with emigration waves. For me, the question here arose as to what was the reason for the refusal of a significant part of the respondents to define their mother tongue.

An important contribution of the PhD student in this part of the work is the survey conducted on the attitudes of Plovdiv residents regarding the frequency of use of Bulgarian, Armenian, Greek, the language of the Jews, Turkish, Roma, and the assessment of the prestige of the spoken languages. The results of the survey clearly outline the high prestige of the Bulgarian language in the city. Reasonable conclusions are drawn about attitudes towards other community languages, and the influence of general Bulgarian negative stereotypes in the evaluation of some of them is commented on.

The **third chapter of the study** details the views on the sociolinguistic marker of M. Videnov and Labov's sociolinguistic variable. In discussing the differences between the concepts of the two authors, the observations of Cr. Alexova are also examined. In this part of the dissertation, 10 features in the speech of Plovdiv residents are traced through two methods (interview and reading a prepared text) using an open microphone.

Here again, the PhD student achieves interesting results. Convincing are the statistics of a high number of respondents who articulate feminine names ending in a consonant with -тъ instead of -та (even though the vowel is accented). This, it seems to me, is already a trend throughout the Bulgarian linguistic territory. Also to be expected is the dominance of the aorist base of -ах/ъх, incl. the literary -ох, as an Eastern dialect feature.

The first very important and unexpected conclusion for me is the limited reduction of unstressed E in И. According to the statistics of D. Marinkova the literary variant is used by one third (63, 36% to be precise) of the youngest group (15-30 years). The conclusions about the poorer performance of learners are justified here: students and pupils for whom adherence to the norm is not yet as important as for graduates and especially for those who use the language in a work setting.

The observation concerning the noticeably higher number of deviations among the oldest (60-80) is quite logical. Marinkova successfully explains it with their main participation in informal networks, where the prestigious form is irrelevant due to the informal nature of communication.

Another interesting finding is the lack of soft consonants before the front vowels. According to the data, the unvoiced variant (softened consonants) is found only in individual informants. An important conclusion from the empirical study described in this chapter is the high authority of the

literary norm among the educated Plovdiv residents. In contrast to Labov's respondents (who are divided according to their social status) in D. Marinkova's survey, the leading stratification is by age and profession of the respondents, a large part of whom are related to the field of education.

When interpreting some of the results, D. Marinkova points to the need for a larger-scale verification of attitudes. This is another strength of the development - the thesis outlines some unclear areas that require more material to be collected. These are likely to be the subject of further research.

The conclusion reiterates the more important findings of the study and synthesizes them from a new perspective.

The dissertation has important contributions on several levels.

Firstly, in combining theoretical and empirical approaches in the analysis of extremely rich material. Secondly, in the combination of different types of data (retrieved, well understood, and summarized) that illuminate in depth the linguistic situation in Plovdiv from a synchronic and diachronic point of view. Here the linguistic situation in contemporary Plovdiv is not only presented, but its dynamics are outlined. The peaks and troughs in the use of individual community languages are examined from the 1884 census to the first quarter of the 21st century. The doctoral student searches for the reasons for all the changes and proposes convincing hypotheses.

Thirdly, I must highlight the empirical research conducted (survey and interview), its sociolinguistic analysis, and the important and unexpected findings that outline new trends in the speech of Plovdiv residents and can be used as a basis for research on other linguistic situations in Bulgaria.

In view of all the above, **I vote with conviction for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science and Education** to Dimitriya Marinkova in the field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Language – Sociolinguistics).